THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF RAMMOHUN ROY

By

JAMES NATHAN PANKRATZ, B.A., M.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University

September 1975

THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF RAMMOHUN ROY

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  (1975)                    McMASTER UNIVERSITY
(Religious Sciences)                            Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE:        The Religious Thought of Rammohun Roy

AUTHOR:       James Nathan Pankratz, B.A. (McMaster University)

                              M.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Paul Younger

NUMBER OF PAGES:   xi, 264.

## Abstract

This is a study of Rammohun Roy's participation in the development of Hindu religious thought. It is an attempt to understand Hindu religious thought through the writings of Rammohun Roy by examining why so much of what he said, wrote, and did was contentious.

It has been customary, in studies of Rammohun Roy's religious thought, to concentrate on his opposition to the use of images in worship. This emphasis has made it appear that Rammohun Roy's most substantial contribution to the development of Hindu religious thought has been to draw attention to polytheism and image worship, and to make it clear that these do not represent the best expressions of Hindu theology and worship.

That issue forms part of this study, but this study is considerably broader. It discusses Rammohun Roy's theological position both in terms of the polytheism which he opposed and the monotheism which he supported. But it includes more than his theological position. It analyzes the authority upon which he based his theology. That discussion has two dimensions: firstly there is Rammohun Roy's criticism of what he perceived to be the accepted basis of authority, and secondly there is his suggestion for a more adequate basis of authority. This study also analyzes the debates which Rammohun Roy had with some of his contemporaries about the qualifications which were expected of those involved in theological discussion.

This study indicates that Rammohun Roy's religious thought

was contentious in many areas, and that the theological issues were not necessarily the most contentious. In fact, it is misleading to study the debates between Rammohun Roy and his contemporaries in purely theological terms, since that fails to account for the vehemence of some of the opposition which he encountered. The most contentious issues between Rammohun Roy and some of his contemporaries were not definitions of God, but questions about people's capacity to benefit from theological discussions and questions about the qualifications expected of those who engaged in such discussions.

The study suggests that in this situation theological debate was contentious as much because of the context in which it occurred as because of the actual theological positions enunciated in the debate. It suggests that the distinctions between the insider and outsider, initiate and uninitiate, and qualified and unqualified are distinctions of great importance in religious discussion, and that if the implicit boundaries between these categories are dis- regarded, serious disagreement will result. The study concludes that Rammohun Roy challenged the traditional boundaries between these categories, and that this challenge was the most important reason for the opposition to him.

## Acknowledgements

v

into their family life and were the first to show us the hospitality for which India has justly become renowned. They taught us to try to understand the specific incidents of life in India within a large and wholesome context. In many ways I owe my interest and perspective on India to Dr. Younger.

Two Indian scholars were especially helpful in showing me new directions when my own resources and ingenuity seemed to be at an end. Dilip Kumar Biswas proved by his careful scholarship that there is still more to learn about Rammohun Roy, even by those who have already spent many years learning about him. Amitabha Mukherjee gave me a wide range of suggestions for reading and reflection amid a turbulent context.

During much of the time that we were in India my work was made more pleasant and my perceptions were sharpened by two other scholars who became our friends. Carole Farber and Paul Greenough shared many of our moments of insight, hilarity, depression, and reflection, and they are both responsible for making many of the good moments happen.

Two Indian friends opened their unique worlds to me in a very special way. Rabiuddin Ahmed lives a cosmopolitan life and moves from his paternal Bengali village to the University of Milan in Italy with equal ease and fervour, and he showed me how both of those really are part of one world. Madhusudhan Thakhur showed me his village and his friends and taught me how all that it means to be human could be learned there by anyone willing to open himself

vi

to the lives of others.

Soon after we arrived in Calcutta Ramen Majumdar began to
stop by on his way to work to teach us Bengali. He did it because
he wanted us to feel at home in Calcutta. Several months later
Amalendu Chakravarty helped me with some translations of difficult
Bengali materials. During the last several months in India Tridib
Ghose helped me to understand many of the religious texts which I
was studying. His interests are so wide and so lively that I learned
from him everything from where to find used books at good prices, to
the difference between the respect given to a purohit and a pandit.
In Dundas Ontario Dr. Satyendranath Banerjee helped me to translate
and understand one of Rammohun Roy's essays, and in doing so he
proved the truth of the adages about the Bengalis' love for their own
culture. These men were invaluable in allowing me to deal with
Bengali sources with greater ease and accuracy. They also
introduced me to the beauty of Bengali and the culture which it
expresses.

All of this, the friends, the insights, and the gratitude,
I share with my wife Goldie. And now that this work is complete I
share that satisfaction with her. It is hers as well as mine. So
I dedicate it to her. And I thank her for sharing it with me.

A Note on Transliteration and Form

I have made some adaptations of spelling, transliteration, and form which will be evident in what follows, but a brief indication of these adaptations may be helpful here.

Sanskrit words have been transliterated according to customary conventions. In the transliteration of Bengali words, however, I have used some variations. The distinction between ba and va is hardly recognized in Bengali speaking and writing, and I have used either according to which is most common in a particular word in current Bengali usage.

I have chosen not to use diacritical marks in the spelling of personal names of Indians who lived during the last two centuries, even though I have retained these marks for the ancient writers and commentators who are referred to here. I do this largely because many of the names of recent Indians have been somewhat Anglicized in spelling, and it is incongruous to use diacritical marks in such a form. Most of the recent figures whose names are known in their Sanskritized form are well enough known that there will not be any confusion about their identity because of this omission of diacritical marks. I have chosen to consistently Anglicize the spelling of Calcutta in footnotes and bibliograhy, even though some of the Bengali sources have rendered it as Kalikātā. I have also not used

diacritical marks in the names of publishers, since most of these are well-known in an Anglicized form.

When I have referred to Rammohun Roy's writings as individual pamphlets, I have treated them as separate publications and underlined them (e.g. A Defence of Hindoo Theism), but when I have referred to them in their present published form I have treated them as items in a collection (e.g. " A Defence of Hindoo Theism ", Works, Part II, pp. 81-93.).

## Table of Contents

xi

INTRODUCTION

# Introduction

More has been written about Rammohun Roy[1] than about any other Indian who lived during the first half of the nineteenth century. The attention which he has received has prompted some scholars to suggest that it is now time for more research to be done on other Indians who were his contemporaries.[2] There were, for example, other Bengalis who were influential and prominent during and after Rammohun's life. Dwarkanath Tagore,[3] the father of Debendranath and the grandfather of Rabindranath, was a dominant influence in early Indo-British commercial

---

[1]"Rammohun Roy" is the spelling which he used when signing his name in English, and therefore that spelling is used here. The Bengali spelling, if transliterated, is "Rāmmohan Rāy".

In this study he will regularly be referred to as "Rammohun", to conform to the customary Indian use of his name. Some famous Indians have come to be referred to by their family name, while some have come to be referred to by their given name. Rabindranath Tagore, the great Bengali poet of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is commonly known as Tagore, while his father Debendranath Tagore is known as Debendranath. Currently, in Bengal, if one speaks of Roy, this is taken to refer to Manabendra Nath Roy (M.N. Roy), the twentieth century Communist nationalist.

[2]I became acutely aware of this sentiment several weeks after my arrival in India in 1971. An America scholar of the Bengal Renaissance told me quite pointedly that there was far too much already written on Rammohun, and that my time in India would be better spent if I did research on some of the less known Indians of the nineteenth century.

[3]1794-1846. Dwarkanath was wealthy and especially prominent during the years following Rammohun's departure to England (1830-46).

2

relationships, and a patron of numerous causes. Radhakanta Deb[4] used

the prestige of his family to support various educational programmes,

newspapers, and cultural associations. Mritunjay Vidyalankar[5] provided

an indispensable service as an instructor in the College of Fort William

in Calcutta, and later as a pandit attached to the Supreme Court. Yet

these men, and many others like them, have by and large been relegated

to footnotes in the studies of early nineteenth century India, and the

main direction of such studies has been determined by the life and

activities of Rammohun Roy.[6]

---

[4]1784-1867. Radhakanta was a member of the old and wealthy Sobha-
bazar family. He was instrumental in the development of Hindu College,
the Calcutta School Society, the Calcutta School Book Society, and the
Hindu Charitable Institution. His support made possible the publication
of a Bengali encyclopedic dictionary called Sabda-kalpadruma between
1818 and 1851. He was also a founding member of the Dharma Sabha, a
society of Indians which was formed originally (1830) to petition the
British crown for the reinstitution of sati (the concremation of widows).
For information about Radhakanta one must ultimately depend upon Jogesh
Chandra Bagal, Rājā Rādhākānta Deb (4th ed.; Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya
Parishat, 1951). For a brief list of Radhakanta's involvement in various
organizations, see Sushil Kumar De, Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth
Century (2nd ed., Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962), pp. 552-55.

[5]1762-1819. De, pp. 182-203 provides a brief outline of Vidyal-
ankar's life, as well as a description and evaluation of his literary
contribution. Vidyalankar was especially helpful to William Carey, the
British Baptist missionary, during his years of work on Bengali and
Sanskrit literature.

[6]This is noticeably true in the best-known English works on the
nineteenth century in Bengal. Nemai Sadhan Bose, The Indian Awakening
and Bengal (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969) has a chapter on
Rammohun but only scattered references to these men; similarly Amitabha
Mukherjee, Reform and Regeneration in Bengal, 1774-1823 (Calcutta: Rab-
indra Bharati University, 1968) and Bimanbehari Majumdar, History of
Indian Social and Political Ideas (Calcutta: Bookland Private Limited,
1967).
     One exception to this general tendency is Arabinda Poddar,

Although it is unfortunate that other figures have been neglected because of the attention given to Rammohun, it is understandable. Most of the other figures who were prominent in early nineteenth century India are noteworthy because of their accomplishments in one or two areas of life. Dwarkanath became involved in many cultural activities, but he remained essentially an entrepeneur; Radhakanta was fundamentally a cultured patron; Mritunjay was basically a scholar. But Rammohun's activities covered a wide range, and in many of these he was the most active, the most prominent participant. He was one of the first Indians to set up his own press and publish both occasional pamphlets and books as well as regular newspapers.[7] He was the first, and always the most prominent, Indian to become involved in the campaign for the abolition

---

6 continued _Renaissance in Bengal: Quests and Confrontations, 1800-1860_ (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970) who has a short chapter (pp. 75-83) on Radhakanta Deb. But even in his study Radhakanta is studied in the light of Rammohun.

[7]Rammohun's press was known as the Unitarian Press, established in 1823. He started the press, at least partially, as a means of insuring that his opinions on Christian theological questions and his defence of Vedānta would be published. Until this time he had been debating these kinds of issues in pamphlets published by the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta, but in 1823 the Press refused to print his pamphlets, and to insure publication he purchased and set up his own press. See Sophia Dobson Collet, _The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy_ (3rd ed., Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1962), p. 157.

Rammohun's newspapers were not published at his own press, in fact, both of his newspapers were begun before he even had his own press. His Bengali newspaper, the _Sambād Kaumudī_, was first published on December 4, 1821. It was not the first Bengali weekly to be published, nor was it the first to be published by a Bengali. See Collet, pp. 167-171, 204-5. Rammohun's Persian newspaper, the _Mirat-ul-Akhbar_, was published from 1822-1823, and he closed it in protest against the Government Press Regulations of 1823. See, Collet, pp. 167, 171-74, 182-83.

of the practice of _satī_ (the concremation of widows).[8] He was, in the early years of the nineteenth century, the most articulate Indian to protest against British administrative injustices.[9] He was one of the most active Indians of his time in promoting a broadly based educational system which would incorporate aspects of both Indian and European knowledge.[10] He was the leader in the translation and distribution of traditional religious texts, the focus of numerous religious controversies, and a spokesman for the defence of Indian religion against the attacks of

---

[8] He published pamphlets against this practice from 1818-1832 in both Bengali and English. During the last years of his life he was in England, and while there he argued frequently and consistently in defence of the abolition of _satī_ as had been legislated in 1829. See Collet, pp. 251-266, 346, 537.

[9] Rammohun's most famous protest was against the Press Ordinance issued on March 14, 1823. The Ordinance demanded that all newspapers and periodicals required a licence from the Governor-General in Council. In practice this amounted to censorship, and Rammohun closed the _Mirat-ul-Akhbar_ in protest. He also prepared a memorial for presentation to the government, and that memorial has become something of a classic in Indian nationalist writing. It is reprinted in Collet, pp. 423-54.

Rammohun also protested the Jury Act which became effective in 1827, because this act distinguished between the justice appropriate for Christians and non-Christians. He submitted a written protest in 1828. See Collet, pp. 266-69.

[10] For a brief account of this, see Collet, pp. 183-93. In recent years there has been some controversy about the exact role of Rammohun in the establishment of Hindu College, one of the major educational institutions begun in the early nineteenth century in Calcutta. This specific discussion has implications for the broader evaluation of Rammohun's place in the renaissance of the nineteenth century. Those issues are not relevant to this discussion, but they may be found concisely stated in Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, _On Rammohun Roy_ (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1972). The discussion of Rammohun's role in the establishment of Hindu College is on pp. 20-39.

For an earlier defence of his involvement with the Hindu College, see Prabhatchandra Gangopadhyay, _Rāmmohana Prasanga_ (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1947), pp. 2, 63.

the missionaries.[11]  During the last years of his life in England he

represented Indian interests before the Select Committee of the House

of Commons which was considering the renewal of the Charter of the East

India Company.[12]

In view of this wide range of activities, it is not surprising

that much of what has been written about Rammohun has been laudatory.

As if his contributions were not enough to guarantee him a place of

honour in the history of India, he has sometimes been credited with

activities in which he had little or no part; in other instances his

role has been inordinately magnified while that of his collaborators

has been unjustly diminished.  In recent years this tendency has been

noted by some scholars, and they have attempted to clarify the histori-

cal record.[13]  Unfortunately, some of their efforts have been attacked

---

[11]Most accounts of his life focus on these publications and con-
troversies.  A list of the publications of Rammohun is included in
Collet, pp. 525-41.  Short summaries and evaluations of his writings may
be found in De, pp. 515-25, 528-34, 543-45.  Even a cursory reading of a
list of Rammohun's publications will demonstrate that many of his writ-
ings were translations of traditional religious texts, and that many
other of his writings were polemics against Hindu and Christian opponents.
Mukherjee, pp. 125-202 provides a lengthy discussion of this material.

[12]For details on these activities, see Collet, pp. 302-55,
especially pp. 316-22, 335-41, 346-47, 351-55.

[13]Majumdar's book On Rammohun Roy is the best example of this.
When he presented the lectures upon which the book is based, there was
a very lively discussion.  He made it clear that what he was trying to
do was to clarify the record, not to criticize Rammohun.  He said that
as an historian he opposed the tendency to credit Rammohun with certain
accomplishments simply because Rammohun was the kind of person who might
have been involved in such activities.  His analysis of Rammohun's
association with Hindu College is such an issue.
What Majumdar protests against in his book is illustrated well

by those who regard such efforts as attempts to denigrate the contri-
butions of Rammohun to Indian life.[14]

The exaggeration of Rammohun's contributions has had three
results for the study of modern Indian history. In the first place, it
has resulted in the characterization of the eighteenth century in India
as a "dark age". Many scholars, when writing about eighteenth century
India, and Bengal in particular, have begun their accounts with a dismal
portrait of religious and social life. Benoy Gopal Ray, for example,
writes as follows:

> Eighteenth century saw Bengal in a decadent stage. The whole
> country was steeped in superstitious adherence to dead religious
> forms and debasing practices of idolatry . . . Brahmin priests
> made their living on the ignorance of the masses. . . . Social
> vices such as the Suttee, throwing of children into the Ganges
> /and/ female infanticide were given religious sanction and the
> ignorant masses were driven to believe and practise them . . .

---

[13] continued in the preliminary issue of the Bi-centenary Number
of The Indian Messanger. There, in a summary of an earlier article by
Ramananda Chatterjee, Rammohun is credited with favouring the remarriage
of child-widows, favouring inter-caste marriage, and opposing child-
marriage. Yet even from that article it is clear that his favour toward
the remarriage of child widows is drawn from a rumour which spread while
he was in England, his approval of inter-caste marriage is based upon
some remarks he made to defend himself against the charge of having an
unacceptable mistress, and his opposition to child marriage is based
upon nothing more than the assumption that a man of his chivalry would
have seen the evil effects of this practice on women. See the summary
based on Ramananda Chatterjee, "Rammohun Roy as a Social Worker", The
Indian Messanger, LXXXX (May 21, 1972), 57-58.

[14] Most of these attacks took place at seminars on Rammohun which
were held throughout India during 1972, the official bi-centenary of his
birth, and in newspapers. See for example the following "Letters to the
Editor": Dilip Kumar Biswas, "Letters to the Editor", The Statesman
(February 17, 1972); Nirmal Mukherjee, "Letters to the Editor", The
Statesman, (February 24, 1972); Sudhansumohan Banerjee, "Letters to the
Editor", The Statesman, (November 13, 1972).

The corruption and degeneracy of the priesthood reached its peak.[15]

One of the most dramatic statements of this opinion occurs in the opening

paragraph of Saumyendranath Tagore's Raja Rammohun Roy:

> It was indeed the darkest period in modern Indian history.
> Old society and polity had crumbled and the ruins of an old
> social order lay scattered on all sides. As yet there was
> no force which could clear the debris and there was no
> attempt made to rebuild on the ancient foundations. Dead tradi-
> tions, fossilised customs and irrational bigotry had choked the
> life-stream of the nation. Knowledge had been lost. It was a
> period of unrelenting darkness.[16]

Nemai Sadhan Bose says that "the eighteenth century, particularly the

later half of it, was one of the darkest ages in the long and eventful

history of India."[17] These dreary characterizations are not without

some foundation, for the political and economic life of India was cer-

tainly in a transitional stage during the eighteenth century. The later

Moghul emperors no longer had the power or ability to rule the territory

which was nominally still under their control, and the British had yet

to consolidate their newly acquired power and territory into anything

---

[15]Benoy Gopal Ray, Religious Movements in Modern Bengal (Santini-ketan: Visva-Bharati, 1965), p. 1.

[16]Saumyendranath Tagore, Raja Rammohun Roy (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1966), p. 7. Such accounts are especially common among writers who are members of the Brahmo Samaj, since they, understandably, regard the beginning of their movement as the beginning of Indian spiritual and cultural regeneration. See, for example, the standard history of the first eighty years of the Brahmo Samaj, Sivanath Sastri, History of the Brahmo Samaj (Calcutta: R. Chatterji, 1911), pp. 1-5.

[17]Bose, p. 1.

remotely resembling later British India.[18]

Still, in terms of the interests of this study, the eighteenth century was not as dark an age as the confused political and economic conditions might suggest. Social and cultural life did not disintegrate. Religious ideas and practices were not moribund. In fact, as some recent studies of this period have demonstrated, many of the themes which emerged as central in the writings of Rammohun were present in the eighteenth century.[19] Those themes became more widely known and more influential during the nineteenth century because of changes[20] in the social structure and in the forms of communication which resulted from the establishment of British suzerainty, but they were nonetheless present during the eighteenth century.

---

[18]Kalikinkar Datta, _Survey of India's Social Life and Economic Condition in the Eighteenth Century (1707-1813)_ (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961), p. v.

[19]Datta, pp. 1-10 makes this point convincingly when describing trends in religious thought. Mukherjee, pp. 125-131, makes the same point when evaluating the religious thought of Rammohun. He points out, for example, that during the eighteenth century there were religious movements which opposed polytheism, the use of images, and even the observance of caste regulations. Mukherjee makes the same point in his article "The Religious Ferment in Bengal" in _Renascent Bengal_, The Asiatic Society Seminar Series - I (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1972), pp. 40-41.

[20]The changes referred to here are the effects of European contact, the presence of missionaries, the introduction of printing presses and vernacular newspapers, the growth of an urban class whose wealth and interests were identified largely with European concerns, and the rediscovery by both Europeans and Indians of the classical cultural heritage of India. Two interesting sources dealing with some aspects of this issue are Pradip Sinha, _Nineteenth Century Bengal: Aspects of Social History_ (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1965) and David Kopf, _British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance_ (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969).

The exaggeration of the decadence of the eighteenth century has a certain dramatic value, for it makes the emergence of Rammohun even more startling than it really is. But such exaggeration has no heuristic value. It tends, rather, to camouflage the real and significant patterns of thought which were continuing to develop even during this period of political and economic instability.

The second result of exaggerating Rammohun's contribution to modern India is the portrait of Rammohun which emerges. In many of the studies of this period of history Rammohun is described as a ray of light emerging suddenly from the "midst of the darkness."[21] He is regarded as the harbinger of a new age, a rebel who refused to be bound by the constraints of the old age, and who, in breaking with the limitations of the past, encountered opposition on every side when he tried to usher in the new age. The implications of this portrait are that Rammohun was a reformer who broke from his past, and who, in leading the way into the new age, became a threat to the majority of his contemporaries who were still participating in and defending the old age.

Most of this study will be directed to clarifying this particular point, and in anticipation of later discussions we will suggest certain

---

[21]This particular phrase is used by Bose, p. 27. Similar phrases are especially common in The Students' Rammohun Centenary Volume (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar & Sons Ltd., /1934/). Rabindranath Tagore writes that ". . . almost all the lights of its [India's] life had become dimmed . . ." p. 2, and that Rammohun ". . . was the herald of India . . ." p. 3. In the same volume, P.G. Bridge, in his article, "The Dynamic in the Social Reform Movement Initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Ray", writes metaphorically about the time before Rammohun as a time in which the sun of righteousness was clouded and obscured pp. 48-50. Jawaharlal Nehru refers to Rammohun as a rebel pp. 81-82.

general problems of this portrait here. The dangers of exaggerating the uniqueness of Rammohun's thought and life are evident in many of the studies of his life. These studies generally focus on his opposition to sati and image worship, the two most contentious issues in which he was involved. But his debates on these questions are generally discussed only in terms of his immediate opponents, rather than in terms of the various continuing discussions of these issues within the tradition. We are led to believe that there were really only two alternatives on these questions within the tradition: Rammohun's 'liberal' or 'progressive' stance, or his opponents' 'conservative' or 'reactionary' stance. It is often suggested explicitly or implicitly that Rammohun's position was 'unorthodox' and that his opponents' position was 'orthodox'.

The dangers of such categorization should be apparent, but unfortunately these categories all too often provide a convenient shorthand which can be used to dramatize the issues. A more cautious and careful analysis of the issues reveals that much of what Rammohun said on religious questions had been said before him by people who have never been regarded as unorthodox. It is also clear from Rammohun's writings that he took great pains to base his writings upon the most highly regarded and universally accepted religious writings of his tradition, and that he disclaimed even the relatively modest title of "Reformer".[22]

---

[22]In Rammohun Roy, "A Defence of Hindoo Theism" (1817) in Kalidas Nag and Debajyoti Burman, The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy, Part II (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1946), p. 84. Rammohun writes, "In none of my writings, nor in any verbal discussion, have I ever pretended

We shall see, after closer analysis, whether his use of traditional religious writings and concepts was consistent with the central themes in the sources upon which he based his arguments; but it is imperative that such an analysis should not be dependent upon the dichotomous framework which we have just described.

The third result of exaggerating Rammohun's contribution to modern Indian life has been a caricature of his opponents. We have already suggested above that his opponents are often regarded as "orthodox", "reactionary", or "conservative". Since most recent historical writing and thinking regards these categories as pejorative the portrait which has emerged has been highly unfair to his opponents. It is quite clear from Rammohun's writings, from the writings of various people who disagreed with him, and from contemporary records, that his opponents were not a unified group. In fact the only thing which many of them had in common was the fact that at some point in their lives they opposed Rammohun on a particular issue. The issues ranged from the nature of Brahman to the propriety of having Muslim associates. The style of opposition ranged from careful, lengthy theological pamphlets to short, angry letters to Calcutta newspapers.

Not only is it impossible to label all of Rammohun's opponents with a common term, it is also impossible to apply such a general term to particular opponents. Those who disapproved of his Muslim friends might have been atheists, while those who disapproved of his

---

22 continued to reform or to discover the doctrines of the unity of God, nor have I ever assumed the title of reformer or discoverer..." (Hereinafter referred to as Works.)

interpretation of Brahman might have favoured European education and the abolition of sati. Radhakanta Deb, for instance, has usually been characterized as the leader of the "orthodox" or "conservative" faction in Calcutta, primarily because he opposed Rammohun's campaign against sati. But it is well known that Radhakanta took considerable pains to insure that the women of his household received good education, and he was prominent in many of the early educational institutions and programmes in Calcutta.[23]  On the other hand,  Dwarkanath Tagore is usually associated with Rammohun's religious and social campaigns because of his friendship with Rammohun, and therefore he is regarded as 'liberal'. But Dwarkanath,  by his son's account, continued to hold Durga Puja[24] in his home throughout the years of his association with the Brahmo Samaj, and he discouraged his son's keen spiritual quest after Rammohun's departure from Calcutta.. Thus the term 'liberal', when used to describe Dwarkanath,  does not necessarily characterize all aspects of his life, nor does it mean that he was 'liberal' in all matters in which Rammohun was 'liberal'. Similarly, Radhakanta was not 'conservative' in all aspects of his life, nor was he opposed to all the issues which Rammohun

---

[23]See especially Bagal, Rājā Rādhākānta Deb, pp. 50-51 and Jogesh Chandra Bagal, Unabingsha Satabdir Bangla (Calcutta: Ranjan Publishing House, 1942), particularly the chapter "Radhakanta Deb", pp. 45-86.

[24]Amitaba Mukhopadhyay, Unish Sataker Samāj O Samskriti (Calcutta: General Printers and Publishers, Private, Ltd., 1971), p. 108. The same information is contained in a letter to the Samāchār Darpan, October 22, 1831.  This letter is reprinted in Brajendranath Banyopadhyay, ed., Sangbād Patre Sekāler Kathā 1830-1840, Vol. II (2nd ed., Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1950), p. 482.

favoured.  Even though this study will deal only minimally with Rammo-hun's contemporaries, it should be clear that this study does not accept the frequent and unduly polarized portraits of them as being a suitable basis for understanding them.

Most of what has been written about Rammohun, his contemporaries, and this period of history, has been written as part of the history of India's movement toward political independence.  In such discussions Rammohun is usually the first person to be considered.  He set a num-ber of significant precedents in his life and writings which became premises of the later nationalist movement, and for that role he is often referred to as the Father of Modern India.

The political precedent which he set was to argue for changes on the basis of English law rather than in defiance of it.  As British commercial, administrative, and judicial institutions expanded their control in India, Rammohun seemed to grasp the underlying principles of these institutions rather quickly.  He argued that the institutions and laws should operate as fairly in India as they did in Britain.[25] If the Indians were to be British subjects, and he regarded it as use-ful for them to be such, then they should be subject to the same laws and entitled to the same privileges which would be applied to British subjects in England.  This argument had the very powerful effect of undermining the colonial status of India, for it assumed that the Indians could be partners rather than merely subjects of the British.

---

[25]This was particularly so in the case of the Press Ordinance of 1823 and the Jury Act of 1827.  For references to these, see above, note 9.

Subsequent Indian spokesmen and leaders of the independence movement used this kind of argument most effectively, appealing to the premises of British law to protest against the passage and application of particular laws which they regarded as unjust.

The social precedent which Rammohun set was equally important, even though it proceeded along quite different lines. The first modern campaign for social reform in India which involved substantial Indian support was the campaign against sati.[26] In the minds of many Indians Rammohun is remembered primarily for his role in this campaign.[27] He is most often spoken of as a social reformer, even though the campaign against sati was really the only campaign of social reform which he became involved in. Other Indians in later years became involved in far more campaigns for social reform, and yet many of them are less well known than Rammohun.[28] One of the reasons for Rammohun's continuing

---

[26]The British had instituted other social reforms and had made other social practices illegal. For a summary of this issue, see R.C. Majumdar, ed., British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance, Vol. I, Part II The History and Culture of the Indian People (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), pp. 267-276.

[27]This became clear to me in numerous conversations in India. It is also evident in the popular play (yātrā) Rājā Rāmmohan written by Samindra Mohan Chattopadhyay and performed by Tarun Opera. The film Rājā Rāmmohan is based upon the play, and reflects the same emphasis on his role in the abolition of sati. (The play was published in Calcutta by Mondal and Sons in 1968.)

In August 1971, at an exhibition in Jamshedpur, a steel city in Bihar, there was a sculpture of Rammohun, and he was depicted trying to prevent a woman from being immolated on the funeral pyre of her husband.

[28]For example, the great social reformer, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891). A summary of his activities may be found in Bimanbehari Majumdar, History of Indian Social and Political Ideas, pp. 150-160.

reputation as a social reformer is that in this campaign he established a precedent for legitimating social reform. He argued that social change and reform were not alien to his tradition, and that the principles for such reform were to be found within the tradition. When he argued that sati should be discontinued, he based his argument upon numerous passages in the Dharmasāstra literature which indicated that sati was at best an optional and second-rate choice for a widow. He hoped to convince his countrymen that sati should be voluntarily discontinued, and when legislation to ban the practice was passed, he indicated that he would have preferred to see the practice discontinued through voluntary action rather than through legislation.[29] Through this campaign he set the precedent of advocating social reform on the basis of the tradition, free from the embarrassment and tension involved in social reform which was imposed upon the culture by an alien imperial power.[30]

Many of his other activities set precedents which became models of Indian abilities and self-reliance. He was the first Indian to publish vernacular translations of Sruti texts,[31] and among the first Indians to publish a vernacular newspaper. He was among the earliest

---

[29] Collet, pp. 257-258.

[30] Actually he was only partly successful, since much of the social reform of the nineteenth century did occur through legislation. His arguments for social reform stood, but his preferred method, voluntary change, was generally unsuccessful.

[31] He was aware that he was breaking new ground by doing this. He remarks on this at Works, Part II, p. 85.

supporters of European education, but also among the first to advocate a judicious blending of European and Indian education rather than a rejection of Indian education. He was the first Indian to systematically respond to European attacks on Hindu religion, and he was also the first to systematically criticize Christian doctrines.

And yet although Rammohun became a model upon which many later political, social, and religious reformers and activists based their activites, many of his contemporaries and many Indians in subsequent years criticized him and opposed him vigorously. His detractors have called him everything from a Christian to an atheist (pāṣaṇḍa).[32] While his admirers have credited him with reviving true Hindu religion, his detractors have accused him of attempting to destroy not only Hindu religion, but all religion. In the face of Rammohun's wide-ranging contributions to Indian life, why is there such criticism?

This study is essentially an attempt to answer this question. There are at least two possible different directions to take in answering this question. One procedure would be to analyze the writings of Rammohun to come to a fuller understanding of exactly what he thought. On the basis of such an analysis, we could suggest where Rammohun's thought coincided with or deviated from acceptable boundaries of traditional Hindu thought. Another procedure would be to focus on Rammohun's contemporaries, particularly those who disagreed with

---

[32] In Sanskrit the term pāṣaṇḍa refers to what we would call a heretic, or, as Monier-Williams puts it in his Sanskrit-English Dictionary, to one who falsely assumes the character of a Hindu. It is a term which is often interchanged with nastik, a word which more accurately means one who does not believe, an atheist.

him, to see on what issues they disagreed with him. Our procedure

will utilize both of these approaches. We shall identify the central

issues of disagreement between Rammohun and his contemporaries, and

shall then attempt to systematically outline Rammohun's approach to

these issues. What we are most interested in is Rammohun's under-

standing of these issues. The controversies themselves will serve

basically as the material for our analysis, but we are not concerned

with trying to resolve the controversies. With this intention in

mind, there are several generalizations which can be made to help us

isolate our areas of concern more precisely.

In the first place, it is clear that those who have criticized

Rammohun have rarely done so because of his political, administrative,

or legal opinions. During the intense nationalism of the independence

movement there were some suggestions that Rammohun had welcomed British

hegemony with too much enthusiasm and too much naivete.[33] He was not

---

[33]This issue arose again during 1972 and was debated in the news-
papers of Calcutta. The most frequent criticism of Rammohun was that he
had approved of the British occupation of India, and had even suggested
that it would be in the best interests of Indians to be ruled by the
British until they learned some of the lessons of European civilization.
See, for example, "Letters to the Editor" in The Statesman on February
24, 1972 (written by S. Mojumdar), on March 3, 1972 (written by Arun
Kumar Ray Chauduri), and on April 12, 1972 (written by Arun Kumar Ray
Chauduri).

The defence of Rammohun in these exchanges in the newspapers
was on much the same basis as it was during the nationalist struggle.
For example, Sunil Kumar Roy, "Letters to the Editor", The Statesman,
(April 6, 1972), argued that Rammohun's position was tactically advis-
able, and that Rammohun wanted Indians to develop enough competence
through their exposure to the British so that when they threw off
British rule they would be capable of managing their own affairs.

farsighted enough, it was maintained, to see that foreign domination
was in itself an impediment to cultural development, and that the civ-
ilizing influence which he hoped British rule would have was only a
veneer to mask the grotesque exploitation which was taking place.
But this criticism of Rammohun's political acumen has not been syste-
matically maintained. Instead, many writers have pointed out that it
is unreasonable to expect him to have had the political consciousness
of the 1920's in the circumstances of the 1820's. Generally it is
recognized that his political opinions and tactics provided a sound
basis for later Indians to build upon in their struggle for political
independence.[34]

The second generalization which can be made here is that the
criticism of Rammohun was not basically directed against his support
of social reform. This generalization must be qualified by one
exception. During his lifetime his opposition to _satī_ was severely
criticized by some of his contemporaries, and some of them joined
to form the Dharma Sabha to rally support for the practice of _satī_
and to act as an agency for the defence of Hindu life against the
intrusions of European patterns of thought and society.[35] Members

---

[34]A good statement of this position is Bimanbehari Majumdar,
History of Indian Social and Political Opinions, pp. 22-49.

[35]Contemporary accounts of the establishment of this society
are reprinted in Jatindra Kumar Majumdar, Raja Rammohun Roy and Pro-
gressive Movements in India: A Selection from Records (1775-1845)
(Calcutta: Art Press, 1941), No. 87, pp. 163-165; No. 99, pp. 174-
177. (This collection of contemporary material will hereinafter be
referred to as Records.)

of this society and those sympathetic to the intentions of the society
repeatedly attacked Rammohun's support of the anti-satī movement,
accusing him of undermining the foundations of Hindu family life. But
since Rammohun was really only involved in this particular social
reform, the attacks on him occurred only when the satī issue was in
the centre of public attention. Subsequent generations of Indians
have been nearly unanimous in their praise of Rammohun for his criti-
cism of satī. In the later years of the nineteenth century and
throughout the twentieth century the memory of satī was an embarrass-
ment to Indians who were arguing that British standards of civiliza-
tion were no improvement over what was available within the Indian
tradition, and who insisted that the British assumption that the
Indians needed mentors for an extended period before they would have
the cultural maturity to rule themselves, was simply wrong. It then
became a matter of pride to point to Rammohun as a major figure in
the campaign against satī, and yet one who based his stance on the
tradition itself rather than upon European standards of justice or
humanity.

The third very general statement which is fundamentally assumed
in this study is that most of the disagreements which Rammohun had with
his contemporaries concerned religious questions. In many cases the
controversies which seemed superficially to deal with satī, actually
concerned the religious presuppositions which lay behind the legitima-
tion of that practice. In other instances of course, the debates and
writings of Rammohun concerned matters which are recognizably religious:
the nature of God, the nature of language about God, the utility and

meaning of physical images in the worship of God, etc.  These were the issues which caused debate during Rammohun's life, and these have continued to be the issues on which scholars have disagreed in their studies of Rammohun.  The premise of this study is that we can best understand the criticism of Rammohun by his contemporaries and by later scholars if we focus our attention on the religious issues which he raised in his public debates and writings.

In one sense there is nothing novel about this approach.  Most accounts of Rammohun, even those which state that he was essentially a social humanitarian rather than a religious man,[36] ultimately deal more comprehensively with his religious thought than with any other aspect of his life.  This seems to be acknowledged as the most critical area in understanding both Rammohun and those who responded to him.

But although Rammohun's religious thought has been central in the discussions of Rammohun, the way in which it has been treated has been rather peculiar.  Most accounts are little more than descriptions

---

[36]One of the earliest and most famous statements about Rammohun is that of Kissory Chand Mitra, who referred to Rammohun as a "religious Benthamite" in an article "Rammohun Roy", Calcutta Review, IV (July-December, 1845), p. 388.  By this Mitra seemed to mean that religion was to be judged, according to Rammohun, on the basis of whether it helped to make human life happier.  Mukherjee, pp. 140-141 cites other similar evaluations of Rammohun by his contemporaries, and agrees that Rammohun's religious concerns were means of achieving social reform.  He disagrees with Collet, who regards Rammohun as above all else a religious man.
    This different personal judgment should not obscure the fact that all those who have studied Rammohun's life, recognize the need to understand his religious writings as forming the very centre of his work. Mukherjee, in his various publications, always gives most of his attention to Rammohun's religious publications.  His evaluation of the nature of Rammohun's character does not seem intended as an indictment; simply as an observation.

of his debates and writings, listed and summarized in chronological order.[37] There has been very little analysis of the contents of this material, and there has been no attempt to determine to what extent Rammohun's arguments are well grounded in the tradition which he claims as their basis. There has been no analysis which would demonstrate whether his opponents were right when they claimed that Rammohun was threatening the foundations of their tradition when he published the texts and commentaries which formed a substantial part of his publications. There has been no attempt to identify the predominant themes of Rammohun's works. What has been peculiar about the treatment of Rammohun's religious writings by scholars, is that while the debates, their historical context, and their general contents have become well known, any systematic analysis of these materials remains to be done.[38]

---

[37]Even Mukherjee's discussion, although it is full of useful comments about Rammohun's work, is essentially a chronological summary of what Rammohun wrote and the context in which he wrote it. Mukherjee's more recent Bengali work (cited earlier as Mukhopadhyay, Unish Sataker Samāj O Samskriti) represents a more thematic approach, and presents a stimulating analysis of Rammohun as a religious man. See pp. 93-115.
    Sastri, History of the Brahmo Samaj, chapter I, describes Rammohun's life chronologically, and although he evaluates Rammohun's successes and failures, he does not systematically analyze Rammohun's religious thought.
    Other accounts of Rammohun's life, although well written and useful, are written in much the same way. For example Bose, pp. 27-55; Ray, pp. 1-10; and Tagore, passim.

[38]A significant exception to this general trend is the continuing work of Dilip Dumar Biswas, who has, for the last few years, been working on a series of lengthy articles about Rammohun's relationship to various aspects of the Hindu religious tradition. These articles will trace the influence of the tradition in Rammohun's writings, and will analyze the relationship of Rammohun to these various elements of the tradition. See his "Rāmmohan Rāyer Dharmamot O Tantraśāstra", Visva-Bharati Patrika, XVI (1959-61), pp. 225-248.

This lacuna is partially explained by the intention of most of the studies of Rammohun. Usually a study of his thought occupies one of the early chapters of a book about the development of modern India, or one of the early chapters in a book on the Bengal Renaissance. In this context all of his contributions in various fields are briefly summarized, and none of them are satisfactorily analyzed. Often this lack of analysis is perplexing. Most accounts of Rammohun's religious thought, for example, conclude with some account of the formation of the Brahmo Samaj, but rarely is there any attempt to relate the Brahmo Samaj to other Hindu religious institutions, and nearly never do we find a careful attempt to account for the failure of the Brahmo Samaj to attract a more broadly based following. Most historians who have dealt with Rammohun's life have been so interested in documenting the development of Indian independence that they have paid little attention to the ideas and institutions which were not germane to that political development.

This study is not an examination of the growth of the Indian independence movement, nor is it a survey of the Bengal Renaissance. It is a study of the religious thought of Rammohun in terms of the debates and controversies which he was involved in during his lifetime. The thesis looks back rather than forward from his lifetime; that is, this study attempts to determine the basis for the positions taken by Rammohun and his opponents rather than the results of the ensuing debates. We are interested in the content of the positions advocated by Rammohun as well as in the context within which his writings and debates took place. It is not enough for us to note that Rammohun held

a certain position and that his opponents held another. Clearly if the debates involve two theologians who are simply disagreeing with each other we have a different framework for the debate than we would have if one of the theologians was not only disagreeing with his opponent, but also accusing him of arguing in terms which were unacceptable in the tradition. The first kind of disagreement involves questions of importance, but is carried on in terms which both sides acknowledge to be within the framework of the tradition: the second kind of disagreement involves, in addition to the specific argument over some theological point, a controversy over the acceptable structures of discussion in the tradition. The intention of this study is to raise and deal with both these questions.

There are, however, some issues which have been raised in other discussions, which have dominated this subject for so long that we cannot neglect them, if only to state why they will not be the focus of our attention here. The first issue is Rammohun's relationship to Christianity. During his own lifetime there were those, both among his admirers and detractors, who considered him a Christian. For his European friends this was obviously a compliment; his Hindu contemporaries regarded it as an indictment. Rammohun's relationship to Christianity became an issue because of his association with Christians as well as because of his writings.

Rammohun's earliest association with Europeans seems to have begun with his employment with the East India Company under John Digby in 1805.[39] Through this association he learned to speak, read and write

---

[39]There is some uncertainty about this date. See Collet,

English, and he began to read European religion, philosophy, newspapers, etc. There was nothing unusual about this relationship, for many other Indians also found service in the East India Company and learned English and European culture in this way. What was unusual was that Rammohun used this opportunity to continue what he called his "long and uninterrupted researches into religious truth",[40] by studying Christianity rather extensively. Soon after he permanently settled in Calcutta in 1815 he made the acquaintance of the Baptist missionaries in Serampore.

The earliest missionary accounts of him are interesting. In the _Periodical Account_ for the year 1816, the Serampore missionaries mention Rammohun and his activities, particularly his publication of philosophical works which, they say, ". . . he hopes may be useful in leading his countrymen to renounce idolatry."[41] Then, along with other pieces of information, they note:

> Europeans breakfast at his house, at a separate table, in the English fashion . . . He is at present a simple theist, admires Jesus Christ, but knows not his _need_ of the atonement. He has not renounced his caste, and this enables him to visit the richest families of Hindoos. He is said to be very moral; but is pronounced to be a most wicked man by the strict Hindoos.[42]

It is probable that one of the reasons why Rammohun was considered "a

---

39 continued pp. 23-25. There is also the possibility that Rammohun worked for the East India Company in Benaras in 1803. See Collet, p. 412.

[40] Collet, p. 71. This is quoted from a letter which Rammohun wrote to John Digby in 1816 or 1817.

[41] Collet, p. 113.

[42] Collet, pp. 113-114.

most wicked man" by the "strict Hindoos" was because of his close asso-
ciation with Europeans in general and with the missionaries in partic-
ular. He was certainly conscious of the fact that having Europeans
dining in his house was potentially scandalous, and there are accounts
of how he went to great lengths to protect himself from any accusation
that he had eaten with foreigners.[43]

But it was more than just his social relationships with Europeans,
and Christian missionaries which made some of his contemporaries suspect
that he had become a Christian. From 1820 until about 1822 Rammohun
assisted two of the Serampore missionaries, Rev. William Adam and Rev.
William Yates, with a new translation of the New Testament into Bengali..
Even though this collaboration ended within a year with the withdrawal
of Mr. Yates from the project because of theological disagreements with
Rammohun and Mr. Adam, Rammohun continued to work on this project with
Mr. Adam; who, despite his separation from the Baptist missionaries,
continued to be identified as a missionary, although now a Unitarian.[44]

In 1820 Rammohun published a selection of passages from the
Gospels under the title The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and
Happiness. This collection of passages did not include historical
passages, nor did it include accounts of miracles, since, as Rammohun

---

[43]Collet, p. 125 gives a particularly interesting account written
by Rammohun's friend William Adam. According to Adam, Rammohun came to
his house one day and asked for some refreshment. But Rammohun also
asked ". . . that before it was brought and he partook of it, my ser-
vants should be sent away, since if they had seen him eat under my roof
they would have bruited abroad that he had lost caste."

[44]Collet, pp. 121-124.

put it, these kinds of passages were open to doubts and disputes.

> On the contrary, moral doctrines, tending evidently to the
> maintenance of the peace and harmony of mankind at large,
> are beyond the reach of metaphysical perversion, and intelli-
> gible alike to the learned and to the unlearned.[45]

The purpose of this publication he said, was to ". . . . elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of God . . . and . . . to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to themselves, and to society. . . ."[46]

Rammohun's high hopes for this publication were not realized. To his surprise the missionaries criticized him severely for his efforts. His response to their criticism and the continuing debate between Rammohun and the missionaries took him far into Christian theology. The debate was carried on publicly for four years, and even though Rammohun was clearly opposed to the missionary position, his interest and involvement in Christian theological debate identified him with Christianity in the minds of many Hindus. Certainly they showed little interest in the Precepts. The only positive responses to the publication of the Precepts came in a few editorial notices in some of the English Indian newspapers, and these were written by Europeans.[47]

Rammohun was also identified as a Christian because of his

---

[45] Works, Part V, p. 4.

[46] Ibid.

[47] See, for example, the notice in the Madras Government Gazette, (April 6, 1820), reprinted in Records, p. 29, and the letter, with accompanying editorial comment, in the Calcutta Journal, (August 2, 1821), reprinted in Records, pp. 31-32.

participation in Christian worship. In 1823 there is record of Rammohun as a "member" of the Presbyterian congregation of St. Andrew's Church in Calcutta.[48] In 1821 he helped to found the Calcutta Unitarian Association,[49] and when that organization found a meeting place in early 1822 Rammohun was one of the most important supporters. He continued to be an active member of that Association until he founded the Brahmo Samaj in 1828.

All of these things, his Christian friends, his obvious interest in Christian theology, and his participation in Christian worship, convinced many Europeans that he was practically or actually a Christian. The example of William Adam is illustrative. Adam was asked by a friend whether Rammohun professed Christianity, and his reply, in 1826 was that

> . . . he is both a Christian and a Hindu- Christian with the
> Christians and a Hindu with the Hindus. . . although he may
> safely relinquish idolatry, he cannot safely profess Christ-
> ianity. The profession would involve loss of caste, loss of
> property, loss of influence, loss of everything but a name;
> and while he employs caste, property, influence, everything
> to promote, not the nominal profession merely, but the en-
> lightened belief and salutary influences of Christianity,
> his claim to be a practical although not a nominal Christian
> would seem to be undoubted.[50]

---

[48] Collet, p. 150.

[49] Collet, p. 131.

[50] Cited in Collet, p. 210. In a subsequent letter Adam replies to the same friend, Dr. Tuckerman, who had asked whether Rammohun was a Unitarian or simply a Theist. He points out that Rammohun had bequeathed all his property to the Unitarian mission, and that Rammohun "leaves it to yourself to judge whether he would have been likely to do so if he did not sincerely embrace the Christian religion and ardently desire to

He seemed, at that point, to think that Rammohun was only withholding a declaration of his Christianity because doing so was the most judicious way to achieve his objectives; but clearly Adam considered Rammohun a Christian. His disillusionment was great then, when in 1828 Rammohun began the Brahmo Samaj. Then he commented:

> Rammohun Roy, I am persuaded, supports this institution, not because he believes in the divine authority of the Ved, but solely as an instrument for overthrowing idolatry. To be candid, however, I must add that the conviction has lately gained ground in my mind that he employs Unitarian Christianity in the same way, as an instrument for spreading pure and just notions of God, without believing in the divine authority of the Gospel.[51]

The bitterness shows through the disappointment.

But while his Christian friends were disappointed when they realized that he was still a Hindu, many of his Hindu contemporaries were scandalized by his close relationship with Europeans in general, and Christians in particular. We shall take up some of the specific concerns of Rammohun's Hindu contemporaries in this regard later in this study, but for the present we shall simply note that there were accusations that Rammohun had broken caste by eating with foreigners, and there were also accusations that Rammohun had engaged in foreign

---

[50] continued extend its blessings to his countrymen." Collet, p. 212.

A writer to the Calcutta Journal, who signed himself simply as "A Christian", wrote: "Ram Mohun Roy is a very remarkable person; he has been led by reading and thinking to quit Hindooism in his search after Truth, and to embrace Christianity according to the Unitarian scheme." Records, No. 19, p. 31.

[51] Collet, p. 227.

(bijātiya) religious practices, thereby rejecting his own religion.[52]

Most of the Hindus of Rammohun's day were uninterested in or uninformed

of the details of his theological controversies with the missionaries,

and so they were unaware of the fact that Rammohun, far from being a

Christian, was actually in disagreement with the Christians on funda-

mental issues. What they saw, and what seemed more important to them,

was that he worshipped with Christians, had Christians in his home for

meals, and published books about Christian theology. They were unaware

of or unimpressed by the fact that he hedged his "membership" in the

congregation of St. Andrew's by saying that he did not concur "in every

article of the Westminster Confession of Faith",[53] that he disagreed

with basic Christian doctrines in his publications, and that he was

careful to have his European guests eat at a separate table when they

dined with him. The extent of his associations with Christians, not

the subtle nuances which he gave these associations, led many of his

contemporaries to suspect him of being a Christian.

Scholars since his time have been aware that Rammohun was not a

---

[52]See the charges in Gaurikanta Bhattacharya, Jñānānjan (2nd
ed.; Calcutta: no pub., 1838), especially pp. 139-184 which deal with
accusations against Rammohun's social life and arguments to show that
those who live such lives come under the severe judgment of Scripture.
    Rammohun replied to similar charges in "Cāri Prasner Uttar"
("Answers to Four Questions"), reprinted in Rāmmohan Granthābali, ed.
Brajendranath Bandyodadhyay and Sajanikanta Das. Part VI (Calcutta:
Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1946), pp. 7-20. Hereinafter referred to as
Granthabali.
    The charges to which Rammohun was replying appeared first in a
letter to the Samāchār Darpan on April 6, 1822. It is reprinted in
Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, ed., Sangbād Pātre Sekāler Kathā Vol. I,
1818-1830 (2nd ed.; Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1949), pp. 326-
328.

[53]Collet, p. 150.

Christian, and yet this issue has continued to be debated. The reason
for the continued interest in this question is Rammohun's theological
position rather than his personal associations. His emphasis on mono-
theism and his attack on the use of images in worship is regarded by
some scholars as inconsistent with Hinduism and dependent upon Christ-
ianity. We shall address this issue in our discussion of theism, but
for the present will merely note that Rammohun argued persuasively
that a monotheistic position could be maintained on the basis of those
Hindu religious and philosophical texts which were generally regarded
as the centre of the tradition. In making that argument he never
used Christian materials in any way.

There are other areas of Rammohun's relationship with Christian-
ity which are interesting, but we shall not be entering into them in
this study. Our focus is upon the religious controversies which caused
Rammohun's Hindu contemporaries to criticize him. Although they criti-
cized him for his involvement with Christians, they never criticized
him for his theological positions in his debates with Christians. As
we have already suggested, this may be because they were uninterested
in these debates, or because they were uninformed of the issues involv-
ed. In any case, these particular debates form a whole separate sphere
of activity in Rammohun's life, one which is interesting in itself,
but one which is not necessarily related to the debates which Rammohun
had with his Hindu contemporaries.

A parallel issue in Rammohun's life is his relationship to Mus-
lims and Islam. This appears also to have been a contentious matter
during his lifetime, although the issue was not as complex as was his

relationship to Christians. Some Hindus objected to Rammohun's numerous Muslim friends,[54] as well as to his Muslim habits of dress. His prefer- ence for Muslim clothing was so pronounced that he even insisted upon it as the proper dress for men to wear at the meetings of the Brahmo Samaj. When Dwarkanath Tagore once wore a dhoti and chadar to the Brahmo Samaj, Rammohun asked someone to reprove him and remind him that the proper dress was a choga.[55] Yet criticism of Rammohun's preference for Muslim styles of dress seems surprising when one realizes that Muslim styles were still the dominant styles for many of the local officials; perhaps Rammohun's preference for Muslim styles was so noticeable that it became a cause of irritation.

There seems to have been no objection, however, to his Muslim education and his use of Persian and Arabic in his writing. Such an education was not uncommon for upper-class Indians in his day, and the fact that he could publish a Persian newspaper[56] profitably proves that there was a group of some size to read it. There was also no comment about his use of Muslim poets and theologians in his first publication, Tuhfatul Muhwahhiddin. In fact, there are no recorded objections to this work at all.

Scholars have argued that Rammohun's positions on Hindu

---

[54]See, G.S. Raychaudury, Rājā Rāmmohan Rāy: Jiban Chariter Nutan Khasra. (Calcutta: the author, n.d.), p. 40.

[55]Collet, p. 230.

[56]The paper was the Mirat-ul-Akhbar, which he began in 1822 and discontinued in 1823. He stopped publishing the paper in protest against the Government Press Regulations. Collet, pp. 172-175, 182-183.

theological questions were greatly influenced by his early training in

Muslim theology, philosophy, and literature. Kazi Abdul Odud, for

example, stated that two central elements in Rammohun's thinking, ration-

alism and liberal humanism, were nurtured in him by the Arabic and

Persian literature which he was familiar with.[57] Although such influen-

ces are undoubtedly present in Rammohun, it seems incorrect to put too

much emphasis upon his dependence on Muslim sources. It seems likely

that his strict monotheism was informed by these sources, but it should

be noted that in his controversies with both Christians and Hindus

Rammohun did not quote Muslim sources. It may be that he refrained

from doing so because he thought that to do so would be strategically

unwise, but it also seems likely that he was serious when he argued

that a defence of monotheism could be found within each of these tradi-

tions. If his defence of monotheism was dependent on Islam, it was

dependent on Islam in a general way. Neither the framework nor the con-

tent of his arguments about Hindu theology is based on Islam.

We would argue then, that although Rammohun's knowledge of Islam

and Christianity must have informed his arguments about religious

questions with those within his own Hindu tradition, the arguments which

---

[57]Kazi Abdul Odud, *Bangalar Jāgaron* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati
Granthalaya, 1956), pp. 3-4.
For some provocative comments about the importance of rationalism
in the *Tuhfat*, see Iqbal Singh, *Rammohun Roy* (Bombay: Asia Publishing
House, 1958), pp. 69-82. Singh regards the *Tuhfat* as a significant work
because of the methods of reasoning which it uses, methods which Rammo-
hun used throughout his life. As Singh puts it, the result of using
these methods "is to shift the emphasis from mystery and metaphysics
to ethics and philanthropy." p. 78.

he advanced in these debates were not dependent upon either Islam or

Christianity. Furthermore, those who argued with him recognized that

his arguments came from within the tradition, and never accused him of

importing arguments from other traditions. When he was accused of

being influenced too much by other religions or cultures, the accusa-

tions referred to his lifestyle and his friendships, not his theology.[58]

For that reason, discussion of Christian or Muslim theology will not be

included in this study.

Our interest in this study is in Rammohun as a Hindu discussing

religious questions with his Hindu contemporaries. As we have already

said, the most significant criticisms which his contemporaries made of

him were directed to his religious writings and to his religious life-

style. For that reason these matters will be the focus of our attention.

Although we will be attempting to determine why Rammohun's religious

thought was so contentious, it should be clear that Rammohun's thought

rather than his opponents' objections is the centre of our study. The

contentiousness of the issues helped to focus Rammohun's discussions,

---

[58]There are some interesting comments about Rammohun's Muslim
lifestyle in Sivanath Sastri, "Rammohun Roy: The Story of his Life", in
Amal Home, ed., Rammohun Roy: The Man and His Work, Centenary Publicity
Booklet No. 1 (Calcutta: Rammohun Centenary Committee, 1933), pp. 10,
23. In notes by the editor there are comments about Rammohun's style of
dress, his preferences in food, and his friendships with Muslims. On
p. 23, note 44, the editor quotes the following comments about Rammohun
from a letter written by Sir Edward Hyde-East, Chief Justice of the
Supreme Court, Calcutta, during Rammohun's early years in Calcutta:
"They particularly disliked (and this I believe is at the bottom of the
resentment) his associating himself so much as he does with Mussalmans,
not with this or that Mussalman as a personal friend, but being continu-
ally surrounded by them, and suspected to partake of meals with them."

and as a result we can be more certain exactly what his position was on many issues than we might have been if his views had gone unchallenged.

These challenges by Rammohun's contemporaries will, by and large, provide the context for this study, just as they very often provided the impetus for his writings. But the content of our discussions will be determined by what Rammohun said in response to these challenges and by the questions which he himself asked. Therefore, while the questions of Rammohun's contemporaries provided the framework within which much of his writing took place, and while we are interested here in understanding why Rammohun's religious thought and life was so contentious, the material upon which we base this study is primarily the writings of Rammohun.

When we analyze these writings we note that several themes emerge very frequently as the centre of discussion. The first of these is the question of authority. Rammohun frequently criticized the basis by which his opponents supported their arguments; his opponents often charged him with undermining the authority upon which religious life was founded. Since this issue is fundamental for any religious discussion we shall take it up first. The second issue is Rammohun's concept of God. While he attacked many of the current conceptions of God, his own theology was often criticized by his contemporaries. Many of his debates and translations deal with this question at length. Finally, we shall consider the implications of these first two questions for religious life. Much of the acrimony directed to Rammohun was expressed as dissatisfaction with his lifestyle; and Rammohun's defence

on this issue gives us a general picture of what he regarded as an appropriate lifestyle for a religious man.

In each of these three general areas of discussion we shall do more than simply describe Rammohun's response to these challenges. We shall also examine Rammohun's answers to see if they satisfactorily answer the questions or if they leave some issues unresolved. In doing so we are attempting to ask the questions which his opponents might have asked if they had had the opportunity to do so. Because the debates between Rammohun and his opponents have been preserved largely from his perspective, we generally have the questions which were put to him and his answers to them; but we have little or no indication of how satisfied Rammohun's opponents were with his answers. We do not know if they would have liked to follow particular parts of the discussion further. In the debates as we have them Rammohun simply replies to several questions which have been submitted to him. Consequently Rammohun's opponents often appear more foolish or at least less knowledgeable theologically than they may have been. Had the debates come to us through their hands, we might well have additional criticisms of Rammohun's positions. Since the debates come to us through Rammohun's hands, we have his answers and only brief sketches of the original questions. It will be our task to ask further questions if it seems likely that we will understand him better as a result of doing so.

# I. AUTHORITY

# 1. Introduction

In this part of our study we shall examine the various kinds of authority (pramāṇa) upon which Rammohun based his theological discussions. Rammohun dealt with four different kinds of authority in his writings. The first was reason (hetu)[1] or common sense (sādhāraṇa jñāna);[2] the

---

[1]This term is not as commonly used as many others in Indian discussions of logic and philosophy, so some explanation of its use is relevant here. In the first place, we use it because Rammohun commonly used it. In his "Bhumika" (Introduction) to the Bengali translation of the Iśā Upaniṣad, for example, he discusses the question of reason quite extensively. The term he uses is 'hetu'. See, for example, Granthabali, Part I, pp. 202-203. In Bengali, hetu means cause or reason. Thus, one might say "kon hetute" (by reason of).

In Buddhist and Jain philosophy the term 'hetu' is a "middle term", that is, a causal link to a statement made after an observation. Thus, according to an example cited by Surendranath Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), Vol. I, p. 185, after announcing that a hill is on fire, one adds the hetu, "because of smoke".

Dasgupta points out that in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika hetu has a similar meaning. As he puts it, hetu is "the reason which establishes the conclusion on the strength of the similarity of the case in hand with known examples or negative instances." (p. 296) Thus hetu is related to inference (anumāna), the linking of two things.

This meaning of hetu is particularly appropriate for Rammohun's argument that God's existence can be seen in Nature, since we know that such an effect (Nature) must have a cause capable of producing it.

[2]It could be said that for Rammohun hetu represents the process which he referred to as reason, while sādhāraṇa jñāna (common sense) represents the capacity which he spoke of.

There seems to be no doubt that Rammohun was aware of many of the technical epistemological issues in Indian philosophy, but generally he chose to write in non-technical language. For that reason he often refers to the power of reason as common sense. One of the explanations for his use of such language was his thesis that such a reasoning capacity was common rather than unusual. Since it was common, the majority of mankind was capable of apprehending the basic facts about the existence and nature of God.

second was scripture (śāstra); the third was custom (ācāra); and the

fourth was personal authority (śiṣṭācāra, sadācāra). Our purpose here

is to describe how he understood each of these four kinds of authority

and how he understood the relationship between the four. We shall

analyze his debates with his contemporaries to see whether his attitude

toward authority may have constituted part of the basis for their dis-

agreements with him.

It has become customary to use the word 'pramāṇa', which we are

using as the Bengali/Sanskrit equivalent of authority, in a specialized

epistemological sense to refer to the standards by which knowledge may

be obtained and validated. In that sense the word is well known and

has a substantial literature, both primary and secondary, expounding

the ways in which the term may be understood.[3]

---

[3]It would be possible to cite numerous instances of such uses,
but a few selected references from a variety of sources should be suffi-
cient. M. Hiriyanna, Outlines of Indian Philosophy (London: George
Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1932), p. 177 refers to pramāṇa as "the essential
means of arriving at valid knowledge or pramā." In broadly sketching
the basic pramāṇa he lists three: perception (pratyakṣa), inference
(anumāna), and verbal testimony (śabda). In his discussion of the three
he admits that the third, verbal testimony, may not be accepted by
Westerners as readily as the first two, since it extends the concept of
pramāṇa considerably more than most western uses would. He notes that
including verbal testimony as a pramāṇa suggests that "the contributions
of history to philosophy should not be ignored." (p. 179) It will be
clear in our discussion that our use of pramāṇa is even broader than
Hiriyanna's extension of the concept, and that while we group the var-
ious cognitive aspects (e.g. perception, inference) under one category
(reason), we expand the category of verbal testimony to include three
categories: scripture, custom, and personal authority.

Surendranath Dasgupta, in discussing Pātañjali's Sāṃkhya, refers
to pramāṇa as "valid cognitive states such as are generated by percep-
tion, inference, and scriptural testimony." (pp. 268-269) In speaking
about Nyāya he refers to pramāṇa as "means of cognition" (p. 277), later
as "means of right knowledge" (p. 294), and later, in a detailed

We use the term 'pramāṇa' in a more general sense. We are not speaking here simply about standards of correct knowledge, but more broadly about authoritative sources of knowledge and judgment. In this latter sense one could say "vedāḥ pramāṇam" (the Veda is authority). This is the broad sense of the term which we mean to suggest in this study.[4]

---

3 continued analysis of pramāṇa, he speaks of it as the "origin of knowledge" (pp. 330-355).

In Dasgupta's discussion of the Śaṅkara Vedānta position, he defines pramāṇa as "the means that leads to right knowledge." (p. 470) In a short summary of this position he discusses the topic under the title "Vedānta Theory of Perception and Inference" (pp. 470-474).

Another good discussion of pramāṇa may be found in Karl H. Potter, Presuppositions of India's Philosophies (Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India, 1965), pp. 56-92. In his chapter, "Good Reasons in Philosophical Discussions", Potter refers to pramāṇa as "means of correct knowledge", and describes pramāṇa in its epistemological sense. From that point of view his discussion is useful, particularly his distinction between concepts such as tarka (which he calls the "negative side of argumentation" p. 57) and anumāna (which he says has a "positive use in establishing propositions" p. 57).

[4]This meaning is true to the general sense in which Rammohun used the term 'pramāṇa' and the term 'authority'. When he published a work in both Bengali and English, he did not simply make a literal translation from one to the other. Therefore we cannot find a single Bengali word to correspond with the English word "authority'. He stated the issues in different ways in each language. Our choice of the term 'pramāṇa' is determined partially by the common Bengali use of pramāṇik to indicate something which is to be believed, and which should be accepted as authoritative. Instances of Rammohun's use of pramāṇa in the sense we have described may be found in Granthabali, Part I, p. 203 and Part II, p. 76.

For a similar use see, for example, Satischandra Chatterjee and Dhirendramohan Datta, An Introduction to Indian Philosophy (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1968), p. 214. There prāmāṇya is translated as authority in a discussion of the authority of scripture.

Pandurang Vaman Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, Vol. III (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1946), pp. 825-827 says that when the Āpastamba-Dharmasūtra, the Gautama-Dharmasūtra, and the Vasiṣṭha-Dharmasūtra refer to the basis for dharma, they refer to the source (mūla) as the pramāṇa.

## 2. Reason

If Rammohun's first pamphlet, Tuhfatul-Muwahhiddin,[1] had been his only work to survive, he would be remembered, if at all, as a skeptic; for in that pamphlet he severely criticized all scriptures and religious leaders. He concluded his introduction to that work by saying that ". . . falsehood is common to all religions without distinction."[2] He then proceeded to spell out exactly how false religions were, and how this falsehood was perpetuated by self-interested religious leaders. He argued that religious leaders benefited from the fragmentation of religious groups, and so they emphasized the importance of the particular aspects by which religions were differentiated from each other, and relegated the importance of those universal characteristics which united all religions. They did this, he said, by stressing matters of "habit" rather than "those intrinsic qualities which are the results of the cravings of nature."[3] By emphasizing the unique matters

---

[1]Rajah Rammohun Roy; Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin, or A Gift to Deists, trans. Moulavi Obaidullah el Obaide (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1949). This was originally published by Rammohun in either 1803 or 1804. The text was in Persian, the introduction was in Arabic. This is the only extant work of Rammohun's in Persian. For information about other possible works in Persian, see Collet, pp. 525-526. This work is not included in any of the standard collections of his works.

[2]Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin, Introductory page, n.p.

[3]Tuhfatul, p. 1.

of "habit" in which they were expert, the religious leaders of each religion made themselves indispensable.

One of the major methods used by religious leaders to maintain the emphasis on matters of "habit" rather than matters of "nature", was by denigrating reason. As Rammohun put it,

> When enquiries are made about the mysteries of these things which are so wonderful that reason hesitates to believe in their truth, the leaders of religion, sometimes explain for the satisfaction of their followers, that in affairs of religion and faith, reason and its arguments have nothing to do; and that the affairs of religion depend upon faith and Divine Help.[4]

And when they were not pronouncing the irrelevance of reason, they were emphasizing the importance of custom. They argued

> , . . that we should follow the ceremonies and creeds which were adopted by our forefathers, without any enquiry into the truth or falsehood of them, and /that/ to hate those ceremonies and creeds, or deviate from them, . . . is in fact a contempt and insult of our forefathers.[5]

For Rammohun this situation was intolerable, for it merely served the self-interest of religious leaders. His proposed solution was to accept reason as the criterion by which religious statements and practices should be judged. He acknowledged that this would reduce religious beliefs to a bare minimum and would eradicate most religious practices, but he regarded this as the only result consistent with reason, and therefore the only universally applicable solution.

By the end of his life his position had changed somewhat. He

---

[4] Tuhfatul, p. 11.

[5] Tuhfatul, pp. 21-22.

still regarded reason as a fundamental criterion by which religious beliefs and practices must be judged, and he continued to be a relentless critic of religious leaders and traditional customs. But there was evidence of a significant change in attitude. As one of his closest companions observed,

> As he advanced in age, he became more strongly impressed
> with the importance of religion to the welfare of society,
> and the pernicious effects of skepticism. In his younger
> years, his mind had been deeply struck with the evils of
> believing too much, and against that he had directed all
> his energies; but in his later days he began to feel that
> there was much, if not greater, danger in the tendency to
> believe too little.[6]

With this change in attitude came a change in the role which he attributed to reason. He no longer regarded it as the only criterion by which beliefs and practices could be judged. Now he saw it working in partnership with scripture. These two became the two central standards by which all thinking and living should be judged.

It would be fair to say that this change in Rammohun marked his change from a rationalist skeptic to a theologian. It would be interesting to be able to document the process by which he changed, but unfortunately, because of the way in which he published his works, such documentation is impossible. The _Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin_, his skeptical pamphlet, was published in 1803 or 1804, and when his next work was published in 1815 his attitude had already changed. Significantly, of his first dozen Bengali publications between 1815 and 1819, eight were translations of Hindu _sastras_, three were debates with men who disagreed with

---

[6]Collet, p. 371.

his introductory comments to these translations, and one was an attempt
to prove that satī was not advocated by the śāstras. Of his nine
English publications during those same years, five were translations
of Hindu śāstras, two were attacks on satī, and two were debates in
which he tried to defend theism on the basis of the śāstras.[7] So
although the change from skeptic to theologian may have been gradual
in Rammohun's life, it is very abrupt in the extant corpus of his
writings. Essentially all of his religious works, except for the Tuh-
fatul Muwahhiddin, are theological in character.

But despite this significant change in character between the
Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin and his later writings, it is important to under-
stand his attitude toward reason in the Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin as part of
his general attitude toward reason in all his work, since some of the
continuities are relevant. Rammohun began the Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin by
saying that the two essential elements of religion were a belief in a
soul, and a belief in an afterlife during which the soul was rewarded
or punished according to the deeds done in this world.[8] He acknowledged
that the truth of these two beliefs could not be demonstrated, but yet
he argued that it was reasonable to accept and perpetuate them. It
was reasonable, he said, because such beliefs helped to restrain
people from committing illegal and immoral acts. Thus religion, in its
essence, had the functional utility of maintaining the order and unity

---

[7] For a complete list of Rammohun's publications, see Collet,
pp. 523-541.

[8] Tuhfatul, p. 5.

of society. It was reasonable for people to recognize this function
and to help maintain religion.

Unfortunately, said Rammohun, these two indispensable and useful
beliefs which formed the basis of religion, had become lost in the
"hundreds of useless hardships and privations regarding eating and
drinking, purity and impurity, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness"[9]
which had come to be regarded as integral to religious life. Religion,
which should serve to unify society and to ameliorate the conditions
of society, had become a cause of "trouble and bewilderment"[10] to
people. It imposed burdens when it should help to lift them; it caused
divisions when it should help to reduce them.

Any reasonable person would be able to see that most of the
teachings of religious leaders were really excrescences which had
nothing to do with the essential and rational bases upon which religion
was founded, and he would question the doctrines and social regulations
which had become such an integral part of religion. But he would soon
find, said Rammohun, that one thing which religious leaders would not
tolerate was rational criticism. They insisted that the credibility
of their doctrines and the utility of their social regulations were not.
the only grounds on which their religion was established. In fact,
they generally argued that the highest truths in religion either contra-
dicted our sense of reason, or were beyond our capacities of reason.

---

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

But when the critical power of reason served their purpose, they used it gladly. The adherents of one religion would mock the claims of others, and would delight in showing how unreasonable others were. They disclaimed the sensational miraculous accounts of other religions, they presented elaborate theological refutations of the doctrines of other religions, and they pointed out the inadequacies of the social systems sanctioned by other religions. Each group pronounced judgment on the adherents of other groups and on those who belonged to no specific religious group.[11]

They did all this without apparently recognizing the inconsistency of their position. For while the adherents of one religion disclaimed the miracles of other groups and mocked the gullibility of those who believed them, they advanced their own accounts of miracles performed by the power of their god and their leaders; while they demanded consistency and credibility in the theology of their opponents, they argued that their own theological position should be accepted on other grounds; while they criticized the social implications of other religions, they were unwilling to acknowledge the social injustices which their own religion fostered; and while they pronounced doom on those who rejected their special teachings, they refused to admit that everyone, regardless of religion, enjoyed the goodness and suffered from the discomfort of life equally.[12]

---

[11]Tuhfatul, pp. 11-12, 16-17.

[12]Tuhfatul, pp. 6-7.

One of the only issues on which all religions agreed, said Rammohun, was in their attack on reason. They each tried to establish their claims on grounds which were outside the scrutiny of reason. In many instances, in fact, they argued that the truth or falsity of their claims was not of primary importance, since the dangers involved in not believing were/greater than the dangers involved in believing what was ultimately demonstrated to be false.[13] This attitude was inculcated from childhood, until the suspicion of reason was so strong that people quite naturally began to feel guilty whenever they questioned or doubted some unreasonable teaching.[14]

Reason, however, was not the enemy of religion. In fact, said Rammohun, reason was an indispensable aid to religion. It was evident through reason alone that the world was governed by a Supreme Being.[15] It was evident through the use of reason that the social life of man needed to be regulated by mutual love and affection.[16] These reasonable

---

[13]Tuhfatul, pp. 20-21. The argument which Rammohun opposes here is precisely the one which in the West has been identified as "Pascal's wager". Rammohun puts it as follows: "Each of them says that his religion which gives information about future reward or punishment after death, is either true or false. In the second case, i.e., if it be false and there be no future reward or punishment, there is no harm in believing it to be true; while in the first case, i.e., its being true, there is a great danger for the unbelievers." Rammohun argues that it is repugnant to believe in what seems unfounded merely because of fear, and he also says that any kind of bigotry can be justified the same way.

[14]Tuhfatul, p. 2.

[15]Tuhfatul, pp. 6-7, 11, 17.

[16]Tuhfatul, p. 23.

propositions were part of all religions, and doctrines and practices which were consistent with these propositions could be supported by reason. But when doctrines demanded too much credulity, and when religious practices fostered divisiveness and rancor, then it was the task of reason to criticize these doctrines and practices. Although such a position was not in itself anti-religious, Rammohun agreed that it was opposed to many of the beliefs and practices of established religions.

In this attack on established religions in the Tuhfatul-Muwahhiddin, Rammohun made some very broad, sweeping generalizations with few specific references to particular phenomena in individual religions. In later writings his criticisms became more specific, and he confined his attacks to particular aspects of either Hindu or Christian beliefs and practices. While in this early work he seemed interested in dismantling religion and reducing it to its simplest and most utilitarian core, in later writings he seemed more interested in purifying existing traditions by ridding them of their most objectionable and unreasonable aspects. But although he seemed more sympathetic to religious traditions in his later works, his high regard for the standards of reason and his rigorous application of these standards did not change substantially. He continued to insist that religious beliefs should be universally valid and free of contradiction, and that religious practices should foster unity and affection.

Rammohun's criticism of religious practices will concern us in greater detail later in this study, so for the present we shall look more closely at his discussions of religious beliefs. As we have just

noted, he demanded that religious beliefs should be universally valid and free of contradiction. In his application of these criteria to the beliefs and theological systems current in his time, he incurred the opposition of the defenders of the religions which he criticized.

In applying the principle of universality to religious beliefs, Rammohun came into sharp disagreement with two defenders of Vaiṣṇavism. One of them, Gosvami,[17] debated various aspects of Vaiṣṇava theology with Rammohun in 1818. In the course of that debate Gosvami suggested that Kṛṣṇa was the embodiment (akara) of Brahman, but that the reason non-Vaiṣṇavas did not understand and accept him as such was because he was not visible to them. He was visible only to his devotees. Rammohun replied that this amounted to a plea for special perception for Vaiṣṇavas, and on these grounds alone it was unreasonable and unacceptable. All embodiments, he said, were perceptible through the senses (Indrīya), since they were composed of the five elements (pañcabhūta). This was the way in which all perceptions were known, and there was nothing mysterious, nothing private about this. Anyone whose sense organs were functioning properly could perceive what the next person perceived. Therefore if Kṛṣṇa had appeared and continued to appear as an embodiment of Brahman, he should appear to all men and not to just

---

[17] This debate is published in Granthabali, Part II, pp. 41-64. All that is known about Gosvami is that he was a Vaiṣṇava holding opinions which corresponded generally with Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. This means that he regarded Kṛṣṇa as the supreme god, he regarded the Bhāgavata Purāṇa as the most important scripture, and he regarded Caitanya as the human embodiment of Kṛṣṇa's love.

a select group.

The danger of this Vaisnava position, Rammohun pointed out, was that in making a claim for special perception they were opening the way for others to make similar equally unverifiable claims. How would Vaisnavas judge these claims? What, for example, would they say to someone who said that through special perception they had seen a hare's horn (sasringa) or a flower growing in the sky (ākaśakusum)?[18] If standards of perception were different for various individuals and groups because of their special devotion to a god or for any other reason, it would be impossible to authenticate or disprove the various claims one encountered. In religious discussion it would be impossible to distinguish between genuine and spurious statements.

In another debate with a Vaisnava, Rammohun made the same point from another perspective. Utsabananda,[19] Rammohun's Vaisnava opponent, had made a series of theological statements and had asked several questions, to which Rammohun replied in 1816-1817 in three pamphlets. Among Utsabananda's statements was one which suggested that Visnu was

---

[18]The two examples used by Rammohun are favorites in Indian logic. Potter, p. 66, discusses these "unexampled classes" and the lack of distinction between them and "untenable classes" (e.g. son of a barren woman) in Indian philosophy.

[19]The debate with Utsabananda consisted of three separate pamphlets published in 1816 and 1817. They have been reprinted in Granth-abali, Part II, pp. 1-40. This particular issue arises on p. 29.
Utsabananda seems to have been a Vaisnava with views similar to Gosvami, but aside from his debate with Rammohun nothing is known about his understanding of Bengal Vaisnavism. Rammohun succeeded in convincing Utsabananda with his arguments, and in 1828 when the Brahmo Samaj began, Utsabananda joined it and served as reader and expounder of the Upanisads. See Collet, pp. 226, 526.

always the supreme god in the śāstras, and that when another god was given the highest rank it was to be understood that although another name was being used, the reference was really to Viṣṇu. So any reference to the exaltation of a deity referred to Viṣṇu, regardless of the name of deity which was used. Rammohun replied to this by saying that this was clearly unreasonable. By using such an argument the Vaiṣṇavas could insist that when Śiva or Gaṇeśa were being praised the praise was really intended for Viṣṇu. But, asked Rammohun, what was to prevent the Śaivites from using the same form of argument to prove that Śiva was the intended object of praise directed to Viṣṇu? By the same logic the followers of Kālī, Gaṇeśa, and other gods and goddesses could prove the superiority of their deities.

It was clear, said Rammohun, that when reason was disregarded and when private standards of perception and meaning were substituted for the universal standards of reason, there could only be confusion and disagreement. Without the universal standards provided by reason, religious discussions would flounder in ambiguity.

The second standard which religious beliefs should meet was non-contradiction. Rammohun discussed this primarily in terms of the inter-pretation of śāstras. He noted, in his introduction to the Translation of the Cena Upanishad, that the Vedas appeared to teach both that God was "the sole ruler of the universe",[20] and that there were many gods and goddesses. This, he said, was a clear contradiction, and unless

---

[20]Works, Part II, p. 14.

there was some acceptable explanation to reconcile

> . . . those passages which are seemingly at variance with
> each other, as those that declare the unity of the invisible
> Supreme Being, with others which describe a plurality of
> independent visible gods, the whole work must, I am afraid,
> not only be <u>stripped of its authority</u>, but be looked upon
> as <u>altogether unintelligible</u>.[21]

Similarly, when the Veda appeared to teach both that God had form and that God was formless, some explanation which resolved the contradiction had to be found to maintain the credibility of the Veda.[22]

So according to Rammohun, both the intelligibility and the authority of even the Veda would be in question if irreconcilable contradictions were found in the text. It was not sufficient to defend the Veda by saying that the matter was a mystery or that it was beyond human comprehension.[23] Our reason could perceive contradictions, and it

---

[21] <u>Ibid</u>. My emphasis.

[22] <u>Ibid</u>.

[23] In a parallel argument with Christians some years later, Rammohun objected to their use of a similar appeal to mystery in defence of the Trinity. The editor of the <u>Friend of India</u>, Joshua Marshman, had said that one should not reject the doctrine of the Trinity just because it was incomprehensible. After all, he argued, there were many aspects of the world around us which we could not understand, and yet we did not doubt that the processes of nature existed. Similarly we should accept the reality of the Trinity even though we could not comprehend it.
Rammohun, in disagreeing with Marshman, said that the missionary's analogy was incorrect, since the Trinity did not exist around men in the same sense that trees and flowers did, but existed "only in the imagination of the missionaries." (<u>Works</u>, Part II, p. 161) He said that acknowledging the imperfection of our knowledge (as in understanding the way in which nature works) was not the same as admitting that our knowledge was basically faulty (being asked to believe that three beings were one being, even though our reason told us that three were not the same as one). No appeal to mystery was sufficient to resolve

demanded the resolution of contradictions.  The śāstras recognized this,
said Rammohun, and provided explanations for these apparent contradic-
tions.

Both of the contradictions cited above were explained by the
śāstras in many places.  The commentator Vyasa, for example, explained
that God was really a formless unity, but that descriptions of gods
and goddesses with forms had been included in the Vedas "for the sake
of those whose limited understandings rendered them incapable of com-
prehending and adoring the invisible Supreme Being."[24]  The śāstras
and the great commentators recognized the need for consistent, non-
contradictory explanations.  There was nothing to be feared in our
attempt to explain contradictions, for genuine religious teachings
would be free of them.  Those teachings which contained irreconcilable
contradictions were not authoritative.

While Rammohun maintained his confidence in human reason through-
out his writings, he also continued to be aware of the limits of reason.
He said that although he was sure that a person could come to an under-
standing of the existence of God by examining the world of nature, he
felt that reason could go no further.  It was reasonable, he said, to
look at the world and say that it must have a Creator and Governor; but

---

23 continued contradictions.
This debate with Christians is part of "The Brahmunical Magazine,
or The Missionary and the Brahmun", Works, Part II, pp. 135-189.

24 Works, Part II, p. 14.

on the basis of reason alone it was impossible to determine the specific

characteristics of this Being. It was once suggested to him that such a

Being must have some material properties, since the world which this

Being governed was a material world. But Rammohun disagreed, saying,

> A belief in God is by no means connected with a belief
> in his being united to matter: for those that have faith
> in the existence of the Almighty, and are endued with
> common sense, scruple not to confess their ignorance as
> to his nature, or mode of existence, in regard to the
> point of his relation to matter, or to the properties of
> matter. How, therefore, can a belief in God's being
> united to matter, be inferred as a necessary consequence
> of a belief in his existence?[25]

Rammohun felt that many of the beliefs about God's character and his

actions on earth were either contrary to reason or beyond the corrobora-

tion of reason, and yet he regretted that it was these beliefs which

were the basis for disagreement between religions.

Despite this, Rammohun did not argue that man was without any

knowledge of God's character. Some information about God's character

was revealed through the sastras. This was information which could not

have been discovered by reason, but it was information which was subject

to the scrutiny of reason, and it, like any knowledge, should be free of

contradiction and should be universally valid. Reason could not discover

this information. But reason could make men aware of the existence of a

Supreme Being: reason could make men aware that such a Being was beyond

the powers of comprehension: reason could also make sense of any revela-

tion about such a Supreme Being, and could reject apparent revelation

---

[25] Works, Part II, p. 107.

which was contradictory and not universal.

Reason, according to Rammohun, was not the only means by which things might come to be known, but it was the final authority when it came to making sense of what was known. There were undoubtedly matters beyond the capacity of human reason,[26] but that was no cause to reject reason. All matters within the bounds of human reason were subject to the standards of universality and non-contradiction.

Whereas in his earliest publication, the Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin, Rammohun seemed to regard reason as both the source of all knowledge and the standard by which all knowledge was to be judged, in all his later writings he articulated a position which held reason and revelation together. Revelation through the sāstras provided information which reason could not have discovered; information, for example, about God's nature. But he continued to believe that the existence of God could be learned from both reason and sāstra. It was possible, he said, to "read the existence of the Almighty Being in his works of Nature",[27] but, he added, the "rational worship of the God of Nature"[28] was "enjoined by

---

[26] Works, Part II, pp. 60, 109. In these passages he distinguishes between things which our senses cannot perceive but which our reasoning helps us to understand (e.g. the gravitational attraction between sun and moon), things which we cannot even anticipate because our knowledge has not extended that far, but which we will be able to understand once we are exposed to them, and things which are simply not questions of reason.

[27] Works, Part II, p. 87.

[28] Works, Part II, p. 46.

the Vedas and confirmed by the dictates of common sense."[29]   Reason

still had the capacity to discover the existence of God through the

observation of the universe, but now it did not do so as an independent

authority; it corroborated the śāstras.

---

[29]Ibid.

## 3. Scripture

In most of Rammohun's writings the two most important bases of authority were reason and scripture (śāstra).[1] The authority of śāstra is widely acknowledged in Hindu religious discussion, and śāstra is generally included in the category of śabda (verbal testimony), the third of the three broad categories of pramāṇa most widely accepted in Hindu philosophy.[2] Thus Rammohun's respect for and use of the śāstras is wholly within the traditions of Hindu theology. In this brief discussion our purpose will be to examine his use of śāstra in some detail, to determine which of the various strands of śāstra he regarded as normative, and how he felt śāstra should be used as a basis for religious discussions.

Rammohun said very little about scriptures in the Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin, but what he did say was very cynical. He noted that in his own tradition the Brahmins kept themselves rich and powerful by perpetuating certain ceremonies at which their presence was necessary, and that they justified the expense of these ceremonies by quoting from śāstras which detailed how the ceremonies were to be performed. In Islam,

---

[1] In what follows we shall use 'scripture' when we are referring to Rammohun's attitude toward scripture in general, and 'śāstra' when we are describing Rammohun's discussions of Hindu scriptures in particular.

[2] Above, chapter 1, p.39, note 3.

57

he said, war, murder, and plunder were justified by appeals to scrip-
ture. He had no doubt that sensible people would recognize that such
scriptures were not the orders of a generous and merciful Creator,
but the fabrications of those self-interested leaders who stood to gain
most from their implementation. When the scriptures were not actually
fabrications, they were so severely distorted through misinterpreta-
tions that their original intentions were completely obliterated.
Rammohun's view in the Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin was that scripture was
appealed to by religious leaders merely to legitimate their self-
interest.[3]

In his later writings Rammohun's attitude was quite different.
He repeatedly demonstrated his high regard for scripture by publishing
translations or editions of various scriptures at his own expense. In
1815 he published the Vedānta-grantha, a Bengali commentary on the
Brahma Sūtras, and in the same year he published a summary of this
larger work called Vedāntasāra. From 1816-1819 he published Bengali
translations of five Upaniṣads, and English translations of four of
these, as well as an English translation of selected Vedantic passages
under the title Abridgment of the Vedant or Resolution of all the Veds.
He also published both Bengali and English commentaries on the Gāyatrī
in later years. In 1820 he even published a selection of New Testament
passages in English, Bengali, and Sanskrit, under the English title

---

[3]Tuhfatul, pp. 18-20.

_The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness._[4]

Not only did he demonstrate a change in attitude toward scrip-
tures by his extensive publications, but he also explicitly stressed the
role of scriptures in theological discussions. In _A Second Defence of
the Monotheistical System of the Vedas_ he criticized his opponent for
not citing scriptural proof for his arguments, and he noted that "The
validity of theological controversy chiefly depends upon Scriptural
authority. . ."[5] Later in the same discussion he reacted against a
charge that he was an infidel, declaring that such a charge was incred-
ible, since he never "advanced on religious controversy any argument
which was not founded upon the authorities of the Vedas and their
celebrated commentators."[6]

As it is evident that Rammohun had great respect for scriptures
and regarded them as critical in theological discussions, so it is also
apparent that he distinguished between more and less authoritative
scriptures. Within the Hindu tradition he said that the _śāstras_ them-
selves recognized such a distinction. Quoting from _Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad_
I.i.4-5 he said, "Sastras are of two sorts, superior and inferior; of
those the superior are those by which the Eternal God is approached."[7]

---

[4]This is his only known publication of a scripture which was
not part of the Hindu tradition.

[5]_Works_, Part II, p. 107.

[6]_Works_, Part II, p. 113.

[7]_Works_, Part III, pp. 111-12. The Sanskrit which Rammohun

Those "superior śastras" were those which he called "doctrinal scrip-

tures", as distinct from the Purāṇas and moral tales.

For him the most important of the "superior śastras" were the

Upaniṣads and the Brahma Sūtra, which he referred to as the Vedas and

Vedanta.[8] His high regard for these śastras is evident in the first

place by the fact that he published selections from this body of mater-

ial rather than from any other.  It is also clear from the numerous

quotations from these sources which he used in all of his theological

debates.  As we have already noted, he emphasized that he never

advanced a theological argument which was not based upon the Veda.  In

fact he explicitly argued that the Veda was the standard by which the

Purāṇas and other śastras should be judged.  As he put it, "A commonly

received rule for ascertaining the authority of any book is this, that

whatever book opposes the Veda, is destitute of authority."[9]

When other śastras seemed to differ with the Veda and Vedanta, some

explanation for this difference had to be found, otherwise their

authority would be undermined.  The explanation might be found in the

---

7 continued translates as "Sastras are of two sorts. . ." is dve
.vidye veditavye, which would be more literally translated as "two kinds
of knowledge to be acquired".  Rammohun's substitution of "śastra" for
"knowledge" is, I think, acceptable, especially in terms of the enumera-
tion of the various kinds of śastras in Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad I.i.5.

[8]In summarizing Rammohun's discussions we shall use Veda and
Vedanta as he did.  When we use Vedanta to refer to the system of philo-
sophy we shall use the term with diacritical marks as follows:  Vedānta.

[9]Works, Part II, p. 154.

context of the passage, or it might be that the passage was intended

for those who were ignorant and therefore unable to grasp the truth

unless it was presented in some modified form.  But whatever the

explanation, it was essential to reconcile these passages with the

meaning of the Vedas.

When Rammohun spoke of the Vedas and Vedanta, he was speaking

about śāstras which had the same meaning, although a slightly different

form.  The Vedas, he said

> . . . are extremely voluminous, and being written in the
> most elevated and metaphorical style, are, as may be
> supposed, in many passages seemingly confused and contra-
> dictory.  Upwards of two thousands years ago, the great
> Vyasa, reflecting on the perpetual difficulty arising
> from these sources, composed with great discrimination
> a complete and compendious abstract of the whole, and
> also reconciled those texts which appeared to stand at
> variance.  The work he termed The Vedanta, which,
> compounded of two Sanskrit words, signifies The Resolu-
> tion of all the Vedas.  It has continued to be most
> highly revered by all Hindoos, and in place of the
> more diffuse arguments of the Vedas, is always referred
> to as equal authority.[10]

The Vedas were the origin  of all Hindu literature, "coeval with the

existence of the world,"[11] inspired and created by God.[12]

---

[10] Works, Part II, p. 59.

[11] Works, Part II, p. 114.  It seems that here he uses Veda more
broadly than he usually does, for it is customary in the tradition to
refer to the Vedas as the basis of all other literature, but the Vedas
in such usage refer to more than just the Upaniṣads.

[12] Works, Part II, p. 64.  Although there are differences of
opinion within Indian philosophy as to whether the Vedas are eternal or
whether they are created, Rammohun's position on this question was never
the cause of any debate.  He seems here to be accepting Sankara's posi-
tion, which was that the Vedas are reformed or recreated at the begin-
ning of every kalpa (era).

The śāstra which was next in authority after the Vedas and Vedanta was the Gītā. There is a tradition that Rammohun published a Bengali verse translation of the Gītā prior to 1829, but such a translation has never been located.[13] Its existence would obviously be evidence of his sense of the importance of the Gītā. But even without it there is ample evidence of his high opinion for this śāstra. In his writings he referred to it as "the essence of all the Smritis, Puranas, and Itihasas,"[14] and as "the essence of all Sastras."[15] It is interesting to note that while he used the Gītā only occasionally in his theological debates, he used it far more frequently in his discussions of social questions.[16]

The next large groups of śāstras which Rammohun used frequently were the Purāṇas and Tantras. His attitude toward them was considerably more critical than it was toward the Vedas, Vedanta, and Gītā, but this should not be taken to suggest that he denied their authority. He often disagreed with the ways in which these texts were interpreted,

[13]Collet, pp. 99-100, 531.

[14]Works, Part III, p. 93.

[15]Works, Part III, p. 105.

[16]He certainly had enough material in the Upaniṣads to substantiate his arguments, so the Gītā would have been only an additional source for passages which were not as unequivocal as those from the Upaniṣads. He would have had trouble with the emphasis upon Kṛṣṇa as a personal god, since he seemed to dislike Kṛṣṇa and the descriptions of Kṛṣṇa's exploits. What he seemed to find most compatible in the Gītā was the emphasis upon the universality of the way to God.

but he made it quite clear that his disagreement was with the inter-

pretations of the texts, not with the role of the texts within the

tradition. During one of his debates about satī he acknowledged that

all the śāstras which advocated satī were "indeed sacred law,"[17] and

in another discussion[18] about the exploits of the gods he acknowledged

that the śāstras which contained such accounts were authoritative.

His objection was to the way in which people interpreted such accounts.

The śāstras which advocated satī, for example, admitted that it was

not the best choice for a widow to make, and yet Hindus ignored these

parts of the śāstras and emphasized only the portion which recommended

satī. Similarly the accounts of the gods were not intended to be

normative for human society, but were merely intended to capture the

imagination of those too degraded to be attracted to God in any other

way. The Purāṇas and Tantras were intended primarily for those

unable to understand the difficult Vedas and Vedanta, but despite

their outward differences from the more philosophical śāstras, the

Purāṇas and Tantras ultimately declared that God was "one and above the

apprehension of the external and internal senses;"[19] and so they were

in agreement with the Vedas and Vedanta.

The final body of sastric literature which Rammohun frequently

quoted from and whose authority he acknowledged was the commentary.

---

[17]Works, Part II, p. 90.

[18]Works, Part II, p. 91-3.

[19]Works, Part II, p. 41.

literature. The role of commentaries, according to Rammohun, was to clarify the complex metaphors and enigmatic aphorisms of the Vedas and Vedanta. People often were confused by the language of the Vedas and Vedanta, because the language seemed to be contradictory. The commentaries explained these apparent contradictions in language which was clear and consistent.[20]

The very presence of commentaries helped to indicate the authority of the śāstras with which they were associated. Rammohun pointed out that it was an established rule in theological debate that "those Puranas and Tantras which have commentaries, and those parts which have been quoted by the acknowledged expounders, are received for evidence; otherwise a sentence quoted on the mere

---

[20]Rammohun discusses this issue with Kavitakar at Granthabali, Part II, p. 67. Kavitakar had attempted to defend turning people from the Vedas to the Purānas on the grounds that the Vedas were too full of contradictions which would confuse them. Rammohun replied that the Vedas did not contain contradictions, and that the problematic passages were all adequately explained in various commentaries.

Kavitakar's identity is unknown. His name actually means simply "one who writes poetry", and reflects the style in which he addressed these questions to Rammohun. This appears to be Rammohun's nickname for him. The debate between these two took place in 1820, and took place entirely in writing. If Rammohun knew who was submitting these 'poetic' questions to him he never indicated it in the debate.

It is difficult to place Kavitakar theologically on the basis of his questions. He does not seem to be a Vaiṣṇava, for he does not appeal to the special status of Krṣna or the Bhāgavata Purāṇa as did Rammohun's two Vaiṣṇava opponents. He does favour a greater emphasis upon works (karma) than either Rammohun or even Rammohun's Vaiṣṇava opponents did, but that in itself does not place him clearly into any religious or philosophical school.

The debate with Kavitakar may be found at Granthabali, Part II, pp. 67-93.

authority of the Puranas and Tantras is not considered evidence."[21] The

reason for this distinction between śāstras of the same kind was to

distinguish between generally accepted or ancient authority, and local

or recently established authority.  As he put it,

> Those numerous Puranas and Tantras which have no commen-
> tary and are not quoted by any established expounder may
> probably be of recent composition.  Some Puranas and
> Tantras are received in one province, the natives of
> other provinces consider them spurious; or rather, what
> some people in a province acknowledge, others considering
> it to be only recent, do not receive; therefore those
> Puranas and Tantras only which have been commented upon
> or quoted by respectable authors are to be regarded.[22]

Commentaries not only had an authority of their own, they also served

to indicate the authority of the śāstras to which they were attached.

Among commentaries the most authoritative was Manu, for he was,

said Rammohun, "better acquainted than any other lawgiver with the

spirit of the Veda."[23]  Manu was "the best of all the commentators of

the Vedas,"[24] "the first and best of Hindoo lawgivers."[25]  The laws

given by other commentators or lawgivers had to be rejected if they

conflicted with Manu, even if a majority opposed Manu.  In one of his

debates about satī Rammohun noted that his opponent had argued that

---

[21]Works, Part II, p. 154.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Works, Part II, p. 93.

[24]Works, Part II, p. 104.

[25]Works, Part II, p. 87.

Manu's authority should be set aside in a particular case because the opinion of several other lawmakers (Angira, Viṣṇu, and Hārīta) was uniformly against him.[26] Rammohun argued that Manu's authority was paramount even when other commentators unanimously disagreed with him.[27]

Rammohun quoted Manu's authority predominantly, although not exclusively, in discussions of social practices. In matters of religious and philosophical interpretation he quoted most often from Śaṅkara, whom he regarded as the most important and most consistent interpreter of the Vedas in these matters. He called him Bhagabān ācārya[28] or the "most celebrated Sankaracharya",[29] and listed him with the Vedas, Vedanta, and Manu as the most important authorities on not only religious and philosophical questions, but on social issues as well. All his translations of the Upaniṣads, as well as his summary of the Brahma Sūtra, were based upon the editions and commentaries of Śaṅkara.

It should be clear that Rammohun's evaluation of the authority of various śāstras, although it would not necessarily be universally accepted among Hindus, would certainly be widely accepted. His position does not seem to be one which should generate any controversy. And yet it did. He found himself in disagreement with some of his contemporaries

---

[26] This discussion is in Works, Part III, pp. 108-11.

[27] Works, Part III, p. 91.

[28] For example, at Granthabali, Part II, p. 78.

[29] Works, Part II, p. 87.

over the question of how the authority of _śāstras_ should best be used in religious discussions.

In his debates with Vaiṣṇavas he disagreed particularly with their interpretation of the role of sectarian _śāstras_. Their general argument was that the Purāṇas had been written because the Vedas and even the commentaries on the Vedas were too difficult to understand. The Purāṇas expressed the essence of Vedic teachings in a form which was easier for most people to understand. Therefore people should read the Purāṇas rather than the Vedas and their commentary, confident that they were getting the essence of the Vedas.[30]

Rammohun accepted one of the aspects of this argument, namely, the suggestion that the Vedas and the Purāṇas were essentially in agreement.[31] But he said that he disagreed with the implication that the Vedas and Purāṇas were of equal authority because of this essential agreement. The Purāṇas, he said, had authority insofar as they agreed with the Vedas; that is, their authority was derivative. Furthermore, he added, the very intention of the Purāṇas and Tantras was proof that their content and authority were derivative. They were intended for women, Śūdras, and fallen Brahmins, those who were incapable of understanding the Vedas and to whom the Vedas were forbidden.[32] They were sacred _śāstras_, but they were of inferior quality and authority,

---

[30] _Granthabali_, Part II, p. 46.

[31] _Granthabali_, Part II, pp. 46-7.

[32] Ibid.

intended for those groups of people who were also inferior.

Rammohun also objected to the Vaiṣṇava claim that their Purāṇas, and especially the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, were more authoritative than the Purāṇas of other groups. Utsabananda,[33] in his debate with Rammohun, had suggested that Vaiṣṇavas needed to read only the Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas, and especially the Bhāgavata, since it was the essence of the Vedas Brahma Sūtras, and Mahābhārata. Other śāstras were either too difficult or too confusing. Rammohun objected that such a position fostered factionalism and ignored the essential unity of all śāstras. It also tended to exalt the Bhāgavata Purāṇa above the Vedas as the basis for theological discussions, and that tendency, he argued, was clearly contrary to the order of authority recognized in the śāstras themselves.

Another area of disagreement between Rammohun and some of his contemporaries concerned the utility and propriety of making the Vedas and Vedanta widely available to people in vernacular translations. Rammohun felt that in doing so he was allowing people to base their

---

[33]Granthabali, Part II, p. 28. Utsabananda recommended reading only Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas because he felt that this would encourage greater devotion to Viṣṇu. He said that the Vedas were too difficult, and the non-Vaiṣṇava Upaniṣads and Purāṇas were liable to divert people from devotion to Viṣṇu. Rammohun replied that whether the god in a text was called Viṣṇu or Śiva or any other name, the purpose of the reference was to point to the Supreme Being (Brahman). It was not the purpose of the śāstras to make any particular god the ultimate object of devotion.

Gosvami went even further in his debate with Rammohun. He said that Śaivite Purāṇas had been created with the deliberate intention of confusing people. Rammohun replied that such a position did little to advance the respect of people for the śāstras, since by undermining one group of śāstras it cast doubt on others as well. For the details of this discussion see Granthabali, Part II, pp. 54-6.

judgments in religious and social matters upon the best authority, but one of his opponents argued that in fact Rammohun was undermining the authority of the śāstras.[34] People were liable to get bad translations, he said, and there would be controversies about the proper translation of words and passages. In such controversies the only recourse was to go back to the śāstras in their Sanskrit originals to see what the meaning really was. This only demonstrated the futility of translations. Unfortunately there would be those who would lose confidence in the śāstras because of such controversies. Rammohun acknowledged that such controversies might arise, but he said that good translations would soon be established by the acceptance which they found among those who knew the original text, and those who did not know Sanskrit could then have confidence in those translations. The risks that some might lose their confidence in the śāstras because of such controversies were not as great as the benefits to be achieved from having the most authoritative śāstras available for people to base their beliefs and actions upon.

In summary, we see that Rammohun, after his initial contention that scriptures were used only to legitimate the self-interest of religious leaders, regarded scripture as the fundamental basis for religious discussion. He regarded the Upaniṣads and Brahma Sūtra as the most authoritative śāstras, and ascribed somewhat less authority to the Gītā, and even less to the Purāṇas and Tantras. These latter śāstras

---

[34] Works, Part II, pp. 85-6.

were authoritative insofar as they agreed with the Vedas and were supported by commentaries. Among the many commentaries, <u>Manu</u> and Śaṅkara were the two which he quoted from most frequently, and they were the two which he regarded as most authoritative. In all his discussions of scriptures he opposed all efforts to establish the supreme authority of any sectarian scripture, and he encouraged all attempts to make scriptures as widely available as possible.

There is one other issue related to the authority of scripture which Rammohun discussed, and that is the relationship between reason and scripture. Our discussion of his understanding of the role of commentaries has already suggested his position. We noted that one of the functions which he ascribed to commentaries was the resolution and explanation of apparent contradictions in the śāstras, and this suggests that he did not believe that there actually were contradictions in the śāstras. He acknowledged that if it could be demonstrated that the śāstras contained contradictions, their authority would be undermined.[35] It was for that reason that he entered the very long and complex debates in the <u>Brahmunical Magazine</u>[36] with the opponent who

---

[35]<u>Works</u>, Part II, p. 143.

[36]This particular discussion fills the first two numbers of the <u>Brahmunical Magazine</u> (1821), reprinted at <u>Works</u>, Part II, pp. 141-58. The questions which Rammohun answered had been posed in the <u>Samāchār Darpan</u>, the Bengali paper published by the Baptist missionaries at Serampore.
The questions which Rammohun responded to were as follows:
1. How could God, who was the only eternal and real Being, have a capacity (<u>maya</u>) which created a false and unreal world? Did this not suggest that God and <u>maya</u> were equally eternal and equally supreme?

thought he had detected contradictions in the s̄astras. For Rammohun

it was imperative to prove that the s̄astras were free of contradiction.

But he did not simply regard reason as a threat to scripture

which had to be satisfied by its own standards to maintain the integrity

and authority of scripture. He also regarded reason as an important

tool by which scripture could be defended and explained. Scripture was

not locked into a continuous battle against reason, trying to vindicate

itself against the criticisms of reason. Scripture was actually clari-

fied by the use of reason. Rammohun accepted the well established

principle that "A Vedic utterance cannot be purposeless",[37] and yet he

recognized that many passages from the s̄astras were enigmatic at best

and meaningless at worst. It was here that reason came to the aid of

scripture. Reason could resolve apparent contradictions, unravel

---

36 continued
2. If the soul was identical with God, how could it be punished for mis-
deeds?
3. How could God be regarded as perfect when various systems of philoso-
phy taught such doctrines as that God was the result of sacrificial rites,
or that there were many gods with different forms and names?

[37]Potter, p. 85 refers to the Vedāntasiddhāntamuktāvalī of
Prakāsānanda when speaking of this principle. There are two major impli-
cations of this principle. Firstly, any theory or explanation must
account for statements in s̄astras, for those statements are 'given' just
as sense experience is 'given'. Secondly, a theory of explanation which
renders some parts of s̄astra meaningless in an attempt to explain others,
cannot be accepted. One of the ways in which this implication has been
used in Indian philosophy, is to argue that the nirguṇa Brahman descrip-
tion must take precedence over the saguṇa description, since to reverse
the precedence makes the nirguṇa description meaningless.

mysterious aphorisms, and restate clumsy arguments. It was the function of commentaries to demonstrate that what seemed to be contradictions were in fact different statements of the same thing, even if demonstrating this involved appealing to secondary meanings of words and concepts. Commentaries expanded the concise _sūtras_ and explained their implications. Commentaries also reordered complex arguments into more obviously consistent ones.

Rammohun was confident both in the standards of reason and in the adequacy of scripture. It was only right that reason should scrutinize scriptures rigorously, and it was only natural that scripture would withstand this scrutiny and benefit from it. Their authority was complementary.

## 4. Custom

Rammohun acknowledged that everyone lived in a context in which certain customs (ācāra)[1] were taken for granted. These customs created a milieu in which certain practices and beliefs seemed natural and reasonable. He once sarcastically remarked that although he could not agree with the Christian concept of the triune unitary God, he could understand that, for Christians, who had imbided-this notion "with their mother's milk", the concept was probably no more unreasonable than "the idea of animation of the stony goodess 'Kali' is to an idolatrous Hindo, by whom it has, in like manner, been acquired in his infancy."[2] Customs were not just habitual practices, but also patterns of thought which had become established through long usage.

Although he recognized a certain inevitability and utility in customs, in most of his writings he was very critical of the influence which custom had in people's lives. In the Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin he said that most people were incapable of distinguishing between matters of essential human nature and matters of habit, because they had become convinced that the way in which they thought and lived was the

---

[1] The spelling and the meaning are the same in both Sanskrit and Bengali. The word means "usage, practice, custom, rites, rule of conduct". A related word which often is used in Rammohun's Bengali writings is 'desācāra', the customs or practices of a particular place or country.

[2] Works, Part II, p. 180.

73

natural and right way to do so. This left them incapable of distinguishing between matters which were essential to religion and matters which were excrescences. "These persons", said Rammohun,

> do not make any distinction between the beliefs which are
> the results of a special training and habit and an absolute
> belief in the existence of the Source of Creation which is
> an indispensable characteristic in mankind, so that they,
> through the influence of habit and custom and blindness into
> the enquiry into the sequence between cause and effect,
> believe the bathing in a river and worshipping a tree or
> being a monk and purchasing forgiveness of their crime from
> the high priests, etc., (according to the peculiarities of
> different religions) to be the cause of salvation and puri-
> fication from sins of a whole life.[3]

People became so habituated to assuming certain doctrines to be true,

that they became unable to renounce their childhood faith even though

most of its doctrines were obviously "nonsensical and absurd".[4]

It was this tendency to accept the unreasonable in the name of

custom or established practice which Rammohun regarded as the most per-

nicious effect of custom. In his debates about sati he emphasized this

point again and again, arguing that no number of precedents could con-

vert an unreasonable doctrine into a reasonable one, or an immoral act

into a moral one.

> Female murder. . . cannot be reckoned among pious acts by
> alleging the custom of a country in their behalf; by such
> customs rather the country in which they exist is itself
> condemned . . . It is of no consequence to affirm that
> this is customary in any particular country - if it were
> universally practiced, the murders would still be criminal.[5]

---

[3] Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin, p. 8.

[4] Works, Part III, p. 118.

[5] Works, Part III, p. 118.

If custom was permitted to be the final authority in matters of belief and practice, it would be impossible to change unreasonable beliefs and immoral practices. To justify such beliefs or practices it would merely be necessary to prove that they had been accepted by someone previously.

Precisely the same kind of criticism of custom could be made from the perspective of the authority of the śāstras. Rammohun's major basis for his attack on the practice of satī was śāstra. He tried, by quoting from a great variety of texts, to prove that satī had never been prescribed as a necessary course of action, had occasionally been tolerated as a possible course of action, but had never been sanctioned in the brutal manner in which it was practiced. Current practice could not be regarded as authoritative in cases where it clearly opposed the explicit or implicit teachings of the śāstras. "The customs of a country or of a race", he said,

> may be followed in matters where no particular rules are prescribed in the Sastras; but the wilful murder of widows, prohibited by all Sastras, is not to be justified by the practice of a few. . . 'In those matters in which neither the Vedas nor lawgivers give either direct sanction or prohibition, the customs of a country or of a race may be observed.'[6]

---

[6] Ibid. This is taken from Rammohun's A Second Conference Between an Advocate for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows Alive (1820), which is reprinted at Works, Part III, pp. 99-127. In most of this work Rammohun tries to show that satī was never prescribed as the only course of action for a widow, but was always recognized as a possible but inferior course of action.

When the authority of reason and *śāstra* was disregarded and the authority of custom became paramount, the problems became insuperable.

> If you insist that the practice of a country or of a race, though directly contrary to the directions of the Sastras, is still proper to be observed, and to be reckoned among lawful acts, I reply, that in Sivakanchi and Vishnukanchi, it is the custom of the people of all classes of one of those places, whether learned or ignorant, mutually, to revile the god peculiarly worshipped by the people of the other — those of Vishnukanchi despising Siva, and of Sivak- anchi in the same manner holding Vishnu in contempt. Are the inhabitants of those places, whose custom it is thus to revile Siva and Vishnu not guilty of sin? For each of those tribes may assert, in their own defence, that it is the practice of their country and race to revile the god of the other. But no learned Hindu will pretend to say, that this excuse saves them from sin. The Rajputs also, in the neighbourhood of the Doab, are accustomed to destroy their infant daughters; they also must not be considered guilty of the crime of child-murder, as they act according to the custom of their country and race. There are many instances of the same kind. No Pandits, then, would consider a heinous crime, directly contrary to the Sastras, as righteous, by whatever length of practice it may appear to be sanctioned.[7]

What Rammohun was pointing to was the necessity of having some standards of authority in matters of both belief and practice which were universal enough to apply to situations such as the ones which he was describing here.

These standards, he repeatedly pointed out, were provided by reason and scripture. He stated this most explicitly in his discussion of the basis of idolatry in the "Preface" to the Translation of the Ishopanishad.

'Let the authors of the Vedas, Puranas, and Tantras,' it

---

[7] Works, Part III, p. 119.

is said, 'assert what they may in favour of devotion to the
Supreme Being, but idol worship has been practiced for so
many centuries that custom renders it proper to continue that
worship.' It is however evident to every one possessed of
common sense, that custom or fashion is quite different from
divine faith; the latter proceeding from spiritual authori-
ties and correct reasoning, and the other being merely the
fruit of vulgar caprice.[8]

In the "Preface" to the Translation of the Kuth-Opunishud he said that

the "advocates of idolatry and their misguided followers" were   those

"over whose opinions prejudice and obstinacy prevail more than good

sense and judgment",[9] who preferred "custom and fashion to the author-

ities of their scriptures."[10]  As these passages indicate, he regularly

depicted the authority of custom standing opposed to the authority of

reason and scripture.  There is no doubt that he regarded the authority

of custom as inferior to that of reason and scripture.

One way in which Rammohun tried to undermine the authority of

custom was by arguing that custom was not really a very firm basis of

authority since it changed so frequently.  In his debate against sati

he at one point argued that the practice of tying women to the funeral

pile was not only morally reprehensible, but also a recent innovation

practiced only in Bengal.[11]  Thus it did not have the support of the

tradition which was claimed for it.  Many other customs were practiced

---

[8]Works, Part III, p. 118.

[9]Works, Part II, p. 43.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Works, Part III, p. 95.

only locally, were gradually changed, were suddenly introduced, or were

suddenly disregarded. He pointed out that the coming of the Europeans

had caused a whole new series of customs to develop, some of which were

in direct contradiction to customs which had been prevalent earlier.[12]

Custom was simply not a firm enough basis upon which to rest a great

deal of authority.

But although custom should not be regarded as an important form

of authority, it did have a validity and utility which Rammohun recog-

nized. He suggested that the purpose of customs was to maintain order

in society. Therefore, unless a person was in a situation of stress

which made adherence to custom impossible, it was best to accept those

customs which were not contrary to reason and scripture. His reasoning

was very utilitarian:

> Suppose each person should, in non-conformity with pre-
> scribed form, regulate his conduct according to his own
> desires, a speedy end must ensue to established societies;
> for to the self-willed, food, whether fit to be eaten or
> not, conduct proper or improper, desires lawful or un-
> lawful, all are the same; he is guided by no rule: to
> him an action performed according to the will is faultless:
> but the will of all is not alike; consequently in the
> fulfilment of our desires, where numerous opinions are

---

[12]Works, Part II, p. 48. Four of the significant changes which
he referred to were: 1) the change from the "ancient modes of the per-
formance of ceremonial rites of religion" to the modes prescribed by
Raghunandan; a change which took place in Bengal during the eighteenth
century; 2) recent changes in caste regulations with regard to marriages
between sub-castes; 3) giving Europeans instruction in the śāstras;
4) feeding Europeans in the presence of household gods. Rammohun said
that all of these changes had occurred within the previous hundred years,
and many of the changes were noticeable within one person's lifetime.
In fact, he said that there were significant changes in custom every
twenty years.

mutually opposed, a quarrel is the most likely consequence;
and the probable result of repeated quarrels is the destruc-
tion of human beings.[13]

While Rammohun acknowledged that customs were useful guides for
human behaviour, he insisted that adherence to customs was not a nec-
essary condition for knowledge of God. It was proper to follow those
customs which were consistent with the śāstras while "acquiring knowledge
respecting God",[14] but acquiring such knowledge was by no means dependent
upon the observation of those customs. "It is optional", said Rammohun,

> to those who have faith in God alone, to observe and attend
> to the rules and rites prescribed by the Veda applicable to
> the different classes of Hindoos, and to their different
> religious orders respectively. But in case of the true
> believers neglecting those rites they are not liable to any
> blame whatever; as the Vedanta says 'Before acquiring the
> true knowledge of God, it is proper for man to attend to
> the laws and rules laid down by the Veda for different classes,
> according to their different professions; because the Veda
> declares the performance of these rules to be the cause of
> the mind's purification, and its faith in God, and compares
> it with a saddle-horse, which helps a man to arrive at the
> wished-for goal'. And the Vedanta also says, that 'Man may
> acquire the true knowledge of God even without observing
> the rules and rites prescribed by the Veda for each class
> of Hindoos, as it is found in the Veda that many persons who
> had neglected the performance of the Brahmanical rites and
> ceremonies owing to their perpetual attention to the adoration
> of the Supreme Being, acquired the true knowledge respecting
> the Deity.'[15]

---

[13] Works, Part II, p. 131.

[14] Works, Part II, p. 123.

[15] Works, Part II, p. 71. Rammohun is summarizing the Vedāntin
position in Śaṅkara's commentary at Brahma Sūtra III.iv.36-9. The dis-
cussion in that section is about those who are "outside orders" but who
nevertheless attain knowledge of God.

He acknowledged that the Vedas preferred adherence to rather than re-
jection of custom,[16] but he emphasized that the Vedic position was
intended to signify that customs had a secondary importance. Customs
could be useful and helpful, even in the quest for "knowledge respect-
ing God", but they were useful and helpful only if they furthered that
quest. They were not authoritative in themselves, but were always
subject to the authority of reason and scripture.

The dependence of custom upon the authority of reason and
scripture was particularly evident when there were disagreements about
the appropriateness of particular customs. Kavitakar[17] criticized
Rammohun for a series of social misdemeanors ranging from Rammohun's
eating habits to his preference for Muslim clothing. Rammohun replied
that Kavitakar wore stitched clothes which were also Muslim in origin,
and he probably ate food which was unacceptable to members of at least
some group in society. Disputes of this sort, said Rammohun, with
accusations being flung each way, could be interminable if there were
not some standards which transcended particular customs which could be
used to make judgments. Custom could only be authoritative among those
who accepted it within a particular social context, but reason and
scripture were authoritative universally. They could be used to deter-
mine whether particular customs were authoritative because they were

---

[16]Works, Part II, pp. 71-2.

[17]Granthabali, Part II, pp. 75-6.

helpful in worshipping God and fostering brotherhood among men, or
whether they were not authoritative because they hindered these two
goals.

## 5. Personal Authority

Rammohun was more critical of personal authority than of any other form of authority. His position did not change substantially from his earliest to his latest writings. He regarded most religious leaders as self-interested and self-serving, and frequently suggested that many of the blemishes which flawed the character of various religious traditions, were generated and perpetuated by religious leaders to maintain and consolidate their own positions.

His earliest attack on religious leaders was in the Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin. His criticisms there, like other criticisms in that book, were directed against religious leaders in general, not just against Hindu religious authorities. He suggested that religious leaders "invented" teachings which made it possible for them to gain control over the masses of people. As he put it,

> . . . most of the leaders of different religions, for the sake of perpetuating their names and gaining honour, having invented several dogmas of faith, have declared them in the form of truth by pretending some supernatural acts or by the force of their tongue, or some other measure suitable to the circumstances of their contemporaries, and thereby have made a multitude of people adhere to them so that those poor people, having lost sight of conscience, bind themselves to submit to their leaders. . .[1]

Rammohun was not suggesting that religion itself was a

---

[1]Tuhfatul, p. 1.

fabrication.[2] He believed that there was a natural religious impulse in man, but that this really involved two very simple and basic elements: the recognition of the existence of a Supreme Being and the living of a moral life. The religious leaders, he argued, had diverted attention from these basic elements because there was little or no gain for them in such simple, pure religion. Instead, the religious leaders had emphasized detailed and difficult dogmas, intricate and complex rituals, and numerous prohibitions in matters of eating and social relationships. In doing so they destroyed the natural, simple unity of man's religion, and created the impression that the various forms of religious expression were in fact significantly different.

Once the religious leaders had convinced the people that the various forms of religious expression were really different religions, they had consolidated their own position. They were indispensable, for only they could explain the dogmas, only they could perform the rituals, and only they were aware of all the details of social behaviour which must be followed in such everyday matters as eating and drinking. They were also indispensable in defending their particular religion. They articulated complex defences of their beliefs, and suggested convincing criticisms of the beliefs of other religions; they invented miracles more fantastic than the miracles of other religions; they kept their followers from participating in the rituals of other groups, and refused to allow outsiders to participate in their own religious ceremonies;

---

[2]The following discussion is a summary of what Rammohun says about this issue in the Tuhfatul.

they ordered food prohibitions so that their followers would be kept from close association with outsiders and forced into close association with members of their own religious group. In some cases, said Rammohun, they invented scriptures to substantiate their positions, and in other instances they inserted scriptures supporting their position into well established scriptures. They did all of this to make their own position more secure, to make themselves more indispensable; yet while they did these things they constantly assured their followers that all of this was being done for their benefit.

The two areas of religious life in which the religious leaders had made themselves most indispensable, were religious rituals and image worship.[3] Rammohun stated that the religious leaders emphasized these areas of religious life and neglected other more important areas because they had most to gain through rituals and image worship. To do so, he said, they had to neglect large portions of the Vedas which dealt with scientific matters such as medicine, morality, and natural philosophy, and emphasize those more limited parts which dealt with "rites and festivals". They did this, he said, because these sections of the Vedas could be used as the "source of their worldly advantage."[4] Consequently they opposed all attempts which people might make to worship God through forms other than ritual and image worship. By

---

[3] Works, Part II, pp. 44, 88. It should be noted that while we use "image worship", Rammohun, in these passages and most others, used "idol worship".

[4] Works, Part II, p. 88.

doing so they kept people at an unsatisfactory level of understanding and worship.

One of the methods by which they kept people involved in ritual and image worship rather than in more elevated forms of worship, was by keeping the scriptures from them. This was particularly so in India, because there the śāstras were "concealed within the dark curtain of the Sanskrit language"[5] and therefore inaccessible to most Hindus. The religious leaders opposed any efforts to translate the śāstras as a means of permitting people to read for themselves what the śāstras said about God and about worship. Rammohun experienced such opposition himself because of his translation and distribution of śāstras. Kavitakar,[6] in his debate with Rammohun, said that the evils and famines of the times in which they lived were the consequence of Rammohun's publications. He suggested that it was against the will of God, and certainly against the best interests of religion and mankind, for the śāstras to be made generally available in the language of the people. Rammohun's reply, predictably enough, was that it was only through making people aware of the highest truths about God in the śāstras that the world could become free of many of the difficulties which troubled it. In fact, he said, if enough people became familiar with the śāstras there would be a significant increase in the number of people worshipping the Highest God (parameśvara), and there would

---

[5] Works, Part II, p. 59.

[6] Granthabali, Part II, pp. 71-72.

be a general improvement in the moral condition of the world. Unfortunately, said Rammohun, this was unlikely to happen, since the religious leaders not only kept the śāstras from people by retaining the Sanskrit language, but also would not allow those who knew Sanskrit, but who were not among the accepted group of religious leaders, to interpret the śāstras for themselves. They insisted that only they, the religious leaders, knew the true meaning of the śāstras, and that all others should come to them for the correct interpretation of the meaning of the śāstras. By using their personal authority to keep people away from the only good source of detailed knowledge about the character of God, the religious leaders were able to continue to emphasize those aspects of religion which provided them with the most personal benefit.

The religious leaders were able to maintain their authority by appealing to ancient authorities[7] or by saying that they were speaking on behalf of God.[8] The first claim, said Rammohun, could usually be easily disproved by one who knew the ancient authorities. The difficulty, of course, was that the ancient authorities were usually recorded in Sanskrit, and that made them inaccessible to most people. The second claim could really not be disproved, although it could be shown that this claim of direct revelation from God involved great difficulties. Any person could claim God's authority for any statement,

[7] Tuhfatul, pp. 13-14, Works, Part II, p. 59.

[8] Tuhfatul, p. 22.

even if the statement went against all reason and scripture. If all such statements were to be accepted, there would be no possible way in which confident decisions could be made about God and the religious life. So there had to be some other basis for the authority of religious leaders.

The true basis for personal authority, according to Rammohun, was not position, or birth, or personal claims to revelation. In fact, when authority was based on such factors, ". . . acquisition of knowledge, and the practice of morality, in that country, must rapidly decline."[9]

> Respectability and want of respectability, depend upon the
> acts of men. If people of this province, who have been
> constantly guilty of the wilful murder of women by tying
> them to the pile in which they are burnt, are to be reck-
> oned amongst the respectable, then why should not the
> inhabitants of mountains and forests be also reckoned
> good, who perpetuate murder for the sake of their liveli-
> hood or to propitiate their cruel deities?[10]

People who sanctioned such acts could not be regarded as good men, and should not be regarded as legitimate religious authorities.

The true basis for personal authority was good action and knowledge. In his debates about satī Rammohun consistently argued that those who defended such an inhumane practice could not credibly be regarded as the judges and examples of virtue which one should follow. Similarly, in a discussion of the Vedic basis for monotheism, Rammohun emphasized

---

[9] Works, Part II, p. 114.

[10] Works, Part III, p. 159.

that the śāstras taught that true authority was based on knowledge.

> According to the authority of Manu (text 155, chap. 2nd.),
> respect and distinction are due to a Brahman, merely in
> proportion to his knowledge; but on the contrary amongst
> modern Hindoos, honour is paid exclusively to certain families
> of Brahmans such as the Kulins, &c, however void of knowledge
> and principle they may be.[11]

For those who wanted or needed help in their search for a fuller

understanding of God, there was much to be gained by finding a religious

authority who was willing and able to be of assistance. Rammohun recog-

nized this in his writings as well as in his personal life. One of his

longest friendships was with Hariharananda Tirthaswami, a Tantric

mendicant who often stayed with Rammohun for extended periods of time,

and who may even have initiated Rammohun into some form of Tantric

practice. A friend of Rammohun's wrote that Rammohun received Harihar-

ananda" with great honour in recognition of his learning and liberality

of spirit".[12] In his writings Rammohun pointed out that the śāstras

gave advice to those looking for a person who could help them to remove

their errors of understanding and point them to a fuller knowledge of

God.

---

[11] Works, Part II, p. 114. The passage which Rammohun refers to
is: "The seniority of Brahmanas is from (sacred) knowledge, that of
Kshatriyas from valour, that of Vaisyas from wealth in grain (and other
goods), but that of Sudras alone from age." G. Bühler, trans., The
Laws of Manu, The Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XXV (Delhi: Motilal
Banarsidass, 1964. Originally published by Oxford University Press,
1886), p. 58, II. 155.

[12] Collet, pp. 68-69.

. . . the Sastra enjoins that such a spiritual teacher
must be chosen as is acquainted with what he teaches, but
in choosing any other sort of spiritual teacher no spiritual
benefit is obtained for the purpose of divine knowledge.
"He, taking in his hand the sacrificial wood, must approach
to a teacher who is well read in the Vedas and devoted to
the faith of Brahman". . . The definition of a spiritual
teacher:  "He is subdued in the members of his body and
affections of his mind. . ."[13]

So Rammohun's attack on religious authorities, consistent and

sustained as it was, should not be understood as an attack on the con-

cept of personal authority, but as an attack on most religious leaders.

He felt that most religious leaders had authority which was based on

their family and their position, and he regarded this as an insufficient

basis.  True personal authority should be based on knowledge and a vir-

tuous life.  Those who had the characteristics of genuine religious

teachers were to be respected and followed, for they could help to

remove errors and lead to a true understanding of God.  In essence

then, Rammohun opposed the established religious authorities who bene-

fited from the perpetuation of religious practices which seemed to

lead people away from rather than closer to a true knowledge of God.

But Rammohun had a high regard for those, regardless of family or posi-

tion, who proved by their virtuous lives and their knowledge of God

that they were the kind of genuine authorities which the sāstras

praised.

---

[13] _Works_, Part II, p. 156.

## 6.  Evaluation

Rammohun never presented a single, systematic description of his understanding of authority; consequently the description of his understanding presented here is a composite one.  Rammohun's understanding is implicit rather than explicit in his writings.  And yet, even though he never systematically argued for the understanding of authority presented here, such an understanding is very evident in his writings.

It should be clear from the preceding discussion that reason and śāstra were the most important forms of authority for Rammohun, and that custom and personal authority were less important.  In the Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin, his earliest publication, he was unwilling to accept any form of authority other than reason, and when he applied the standards of reason to scriptures, customs, and religious leaders, the result was a general and often harsh indictment.  In most of his later writings he was only slightly less confident about the capacity of reason, and he continued to judge both thought and action by the standards of reason.  But in these later writings his confidence in reason was complemented by his confidence in śāstra.  He regarded śāstra as the central source of knowledge about the character of God and as the indispensable basis for theological discussion.  He continued, in these later writings, to be critical of the authority of custom, although he tempered his criticism by acknowledging the social necessity and utility of custom.  Similarly, in his discussion of personal authority, he balanced his earlier,

overwhelmingly negative position, with some recognition of the value of
a genuine religious teacher or leader who was aware of the needs of his
followers and deeply aware of the true character of God.

The contemporaries with whom he debated did not represent a
single attitude toward authority and it is therefore impossible to
quickly identify a unified position to which he was opposed.  The
Vaiṣṇavas argued for special perception and for a special place of
authority for the Bhāgavata Purāṇa; some argued that custom should be
the major form of authority because it represented the ways of the fore-
fathers; others insisted that religious leaders were the basis of
authority because of their special position in society.  In these var-
ious positions, however, Rammohun perceived two general patterns of
thought, and it was to these patterns of thought that he objected.

The first pattern of thought could be called sectarian.  Those
who took a sectarian position, and the Vaiṣṇavas were the major pro-
ponents of this position, argued that a particular set of perceptions,
texts, or people should not be subject to the usual standards of
judgment which might be applied to other perceptions, texts, or people.[1]
The Vaiṣṇavas with whom Rammohun debated said essentially that their
texts, their ideas about God, and their most respected religious
leaders, could not be judged in the same way that, for example, Saivite
texts, perceptions, and leaders could be judged.  This sectarian position
conflicted directly with Rammohun's insistence that all positions must be

---

[1]See above, ch. 2, pp. 49-51.

judged by standards which were universal. Rammohun's dismissal of
Christian miracles was on these grounds.[2] He said that he did not
doubt the fact that miracles might occur, but he preferred to ignore
such stories, since each tradition had its full share of them and yet
each tradition was skeptical of the miracles recorded in other tradi-
tions. He seemed to take the position that although it was diplomatic
to accept the miracle accounts in each tradition, it was foolish to
try to defend theological positions by bolstering them with accounts
of miracles. Any belief in miracles demanded a suspension of reason,
and if one was prepared to do this for one set of miracles, one should
do it for all miracles. By insisting on this procedure Rammohun in
effect challenged the very basis of sectarian claims, which was the
unique authenticity of a particular set of events, texts, perceptions,
or people.

It was because Rammohun was so fundamentally opposed to sectarian
claims that he put so much emphasis on the authority of reason. He
believed that the standards of reason were universal and that they
provided an adequate framework within which to view all traditions.
He believed that men were essentially the same and that the differences
between men were matters of accident and custom. When the importance
of those matters of accident and custom was elevated, the result was
an emphasis on special claims which were not based on universal
authority.

---

[2]_Works_, Part V, pp. 4, 64.

The second pattern of thought which Rammohun objected to was
the tendency to legitimate claims on the basis of the status quo.
Rammohun did not agree that customs should be followed simply because
they had been followed for many years or because they were the ways of
the forefathers.  He pointed out that it was possible that one's pre-
decessors might have set harmful or evil precedents.  If there was no
authority by which such customs could be judged, mankind would be left
in the impossible position of having to follow any precedent, no matter
how dangerous.  Clearly people did not do this, but made judgments about
which customs would likely be beneficial and which would be harmful.
Rammohun argued that the standards by which such judgments could best be
made were provided by reason and śāstras.  Appealing to custom itself,
that is, appealing to the status quo, was of little use in making deci-
sions of this kind.  Similarly, an appeal to the status quo was of
very little help in making decisions about religious leaders.  Their
claim to authority should be based upon more than the mere fact that
they held positions of authority.  Their actions and words should be
judged by reason and śāstra.

Although Rammohun did not systematically discuss the question of
authority with his opponents, it is evident that many of the specific
instances of disagreement were based on more fundamental disagreements
about standards of authority.  His opponents' positions are impossible
to reconstruct, although we can suggest, as we have already done, how
Rammohun understood those positions.  What we do know with certainty is
that those who debated with Rammohun considered him a threat to the
tradition.  Some of the reasons for their mistrust become evident when

we examine some of the texts which speak about the sources of authority in the tradition.

The usual discussions of this question are found in the Dharma-sūtra and Dharmaśāstra literature.[3] The discussions in that literature focus on how dharma can be known. Occasionally these sources describe the basis for dharma very precisely, as the following passages indicate:

> The Veda is the source (mūla) of dharma and also the tradition (or smritis) and practice of those who know the Veda.[4]
>
> . . . the authority (for finding out the dharmas) are the con-ventions of those who know the dharma and the Vedas.[5]

---

[3] The secondary sources which deal with this theme are numerous, even though most of these discussions are brief and nearly identical. They all depend for their basis on a few texts in the Dharmasūtra liter-ature, most of which are cited below. Some of the most important of these secondary sources are the following: Pandurang Vaman Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, Vol. I, Pt. 1 (2nd ed.; Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1968), pp. 6-11; U.N. Ghoshal, A History of Indian Political Ideas (rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 44-45; J.R. Gharpure, Teachings of Dharmaśāstra (Lucknow: Lucknow University Press, 1956), pp. 15-34; Rajendra Chandra Hazra, "The Sources of Dharma", Our Heritage, Bulletin of the Department of Postgraduate Training and Research, Sanskrit College, Calcutta, II No. 4 (1955), 65-88. A very useful and non-technical discussion of the sources of dharma is in S. Radhakrishnan, Religion and Society (2nd ed.; London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1956), pp. 108-113.

[4] Gautama Dharmasūtra I.1-2. in The Sacred Laws of the Aryas. trans. G. Bühler, The Sacred Books of the East, Vol. II (1879 rpt; New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965). Quoted according to the translation by Kane, Vol. III, p. 825.

[5] Apastamba Dharmasūtra I.1.1.2. This is also in The Sacred Laws of the Aryas, where the translation is given as "The authority (for these duties) is the agreement of those who know the law, (and the author-ities for the latter are) the Vedas alone." The translation used here in the text is based on Kane, Vol. III, p. 825.

The Śruti, the Smriti, the conduct of good men, what appears pleasant to one's own self, and the desire which springs from a good resolution, are said to be the roots of Dharma.[6]

The whole Veda is the (first) source of the sacred law, next the tradition and the virtuous conduct of those who know the (Veda further), also the customs of holy men, and (finally) self-satisfaction.[7]

The Veda, the sacred tradition, the customs of virtuous men, and one's own pleasure, they declare to be visibly the four-fold means of defining the sacred law.[8]

According to these passages the four bases for dharma which are generally agreed upon are revealed scripture (śruti), tradition (smṛti), the customs of virtuous men (śiṣṭācāra), and individual interest (priyamātmanah).[9]

If we compare Rammohun's standards of authority to these bases of dharma we note some significant similarities and differences. The first source of dharma which all the texts agree upon is revealed

---

[6] Yājñavalkya Smriti I.7. This is based on the translation by Śriśa Chandra Vidyarnava The Sacred Books of the Hindus Vol. XXI (Allahabad: The Panini Office, 1918).

[7] Manu II.6.

[8] Manu II.12.

[9] The compound 'priyamātmanah' is found at Yājñavalkya I.7. It could also be translated as 'self-satisfaction'. The word that is used for this at Manu II.6 is 'ātmanastuṣṭih', which also means self-satisfaction or contentment of one's self. Radhakrishnan, pp. 108-110 translates ātmanastuṣṭih as "good conscience", and suggests that this implies the well trained conscience of the disciplined person. In his discussion he emphasizes the "sound reasoning" which is implied in this concept. I think he makes too much of the reasonableness of the concept. It seems to me that the concept suggests self-interest more than it suggests rational deliberation.

scripture (śruti), which is usually spoken of as the Veda. We noted

earlier that although Rammohun was initially suspicious of all scrip-

ture, because he regarded it as a useful tool in the hands of self-

interested religious leaders, in all his later writings he had a very

high regard for scripture. He translated and distributed some of the

Upaniṣads and a summary of the Brahma Sūtra, and he insisted that dis-

cussions of theology and of the good life be based upon the most

respected śāstras. The texts which he translated and those which he

most often quoted from were the śruti texts. So in this he was in

agreement with the discussions of authority found in the Dharmaśāstra

literature.

The second basis for authority, according to the Dharmaśāstra

literature, is smṛti, the continuing tradition. Rammohun accepted the

authority of the smṛti śāstras and quoted from them frequently. He

insisted that these śāstras were best understood in terms of the central

teachings of śruti and he argued that a careful study of smṛti and śruti

would show that these two kinds of literature were in fact in agreement.

But smṛti refers to more than just the smṛti śāstras. It refers

also to the tradition as it is continued in the lives of those who know

it.[10]   In that sense smṛti includes custom, the living and uncodified

tradition. Here we note that Rammohun was hesitant to ascribe very much

authority to custom, even though he understood the utility and necessity

of custom. He felt that custom was too changing and fragile a basis for

---

[10] See Gautama Dharmasūtra I.1-2.

authority, and that custom should be subject to the criticism of śāstra and reason. He wanted a firmer, more permanent basis of authority than custom could provide. It was for the same reason that he was reluctant to place too much trust in many of the regional and recent Purāṇas and Tantras. He felt that they would demonstrate their authority by their ability to endure, by their gradual and general acceptance, and by the fact that commentaries would be written about them. Both customs and these recent or regional śāstras were generally regarded as smṛti, and therefore authoritative. For Rammohun, however, their authority needed to be demonstrated, and could be demonstrated only by agreement with reason and śruti. Their authority, therefore, was derivative.

The third basis for dharma in the Dharmasastra texts is the conduct of virtuous men (śiṣṭācāra).[11] There is no clear line separating smṛti and śiṣṭācāra, since the continuation of the tradition which is suggested by the term smṛti is most often done by the śiṣṭa. We noted, in concluding our discussion of personal authority, that Rammohun acknowledged the value of religious teachers and leaders who were men of good action and knowledge, and that would indicate that he was in agreement with this basis of dharma. But we also noted that in practice he opposed most religious leaders; that is, he asserted that most religious

---

[11] There is a great deal of value placed on the opinions of the virtuous men. Radhakrishnan, p. 110 describes how smṛti regulations could be ignored if virtuous men thought it proper to do so. Irawati Karve describes the behaviour of the elders (vṛddhācāra - Marathi) as the means by which the śāstras were applied to changing circumstances. See her Hindu Society - An Interpretation (2nd ed.; Poona: S.R. Deshmukh, 1968), pp. 96, 100-101.

leaders were not śiṣṭas. This difference of opinion between Rammohun and the religious leaders was more than a simple matter of theoretical definition. Since Rammohun did not regard most religious leaders as virtuous men, he felt little compulsion to respect them or accept their opinions about God and the good life. But his disregard for them seemed like a disregard for this form of authority, since it was expected that religious leaders would in fact be the śiṣṭas of society.

The last basis for dharma listed in the texts is individual interest (priyamātmanah). This does not figure in Rammohun's discussions at all, but that hardly matters. It seems that the texts which mention it at the end of the list of sources of dharma do so not because it is an important source, but because they wish to stress that it should be the last source. In fact, when individual interest is mentioned as the fourth source of dharma in Yājñavalkya Smriti I.7, there is a gloss by the commentator Bālambhaṭṭa which notes that priyamātmanah is only for instances in which all other categories of authority offer no guidance. What is being stressed is that this should be one of the very last considerations rather than that this is the fourth most important consideration.

Perhaps this brief comparison of the bases of authority in Rammohun's writings and in the Dharmaśāstra literature may seem to indicate that Rammohun was actually very close to what these texts represented. After all, Rammohun accepted the primary authority of the śruti texts, he accepted the slightly lesser authority of the smṛti texts, and when he refused to accept the authority of customs and the

religious leaders he was refusing only because he felt that they at
times were inconsistent with the authority of śruti. His disagreement
with customs and religious leaders was practical rather than theore-
tical.

The disagreement between Rammohun and the position presented in
these Dharmaśāstra texts was, however, a very significant one. In the
first place, Rammohun, despite his acknowledgement of the utility of
customs and the value of qualified religious leaders, generally deni-
grated the importance of custom and religious leaders. His attacks on
customs and religious leaders amounted to attacks on the life of the
tradition, for it was through customs and religious leaders that the
śastras were remembered and transmitted. The śastras themselves did
not provide infallible guidelines for life, since much of what was in
the śastras was not in a form that could be immediately appropriated
either theologically or socially. Even those parts of the śastras
which spoke directly to theological or social issues were often very
difficult to understand, and were appropriated by most people through
the mediation of customary practices or the interpretation of religious
leaders. As society changed, the application of the śastras to the
changing conditions was the special responsibility of the respected
leaders who knew what was appropriate in new circumstances. When
Rammohun attacked their authority he was undermining the process by
which the authority of the śastras was transmitted to the people and by
which that authority was made relevant to new circumstances.

Rammohun was no mere iconoclast, and so he did not attack

customs and religious leaders without suggesting some other means by which the śāstras could be transmitted and made relevant. As we have seen, he translated śāstras into the vernacular so that they would be accessible to more people. He also emphasized the role of reason in the study of the śāstras. But the method which he used, translation and critical thought, constituted the second substantial difference between his understanding of authority and that portrayed by the Dharmaśāstra literature. He felt that it was best for as many people as possible to be exposed directly to the śāstras, so that they could read or hear for themselves exactly what the description of God was and what social responsibilities were expected of them. He had faith in man's natural capacity of reason and felt that by and large men would be able to interpret the śāstras adequately on their own.

But this took the interpretation of the śāstras out of the context of corporate interpretation and put it into the hands of individuals. This suggested that the interpretation of the craftsman might stand in opposition to the interpretation of the priest or scholar. In fact Rammohun's life represented such opposition. Although he was a brahmin with a very good education, his position in society did not make him a religious leader or an authority on questions of sastric interpretation. And yet because of his publications, his opinions about such questions became well known and were a threat to the established religious leaders. This situation could be multiplied endlessly if many others had access to the śāstras and were able to propagate their opinions.

Rammohun's emphasis on reason opposed the Dharmaśāstra

presentation at this point. Reason is not even mentioned in the Dharmaśāstra discussion of the bases of authority, although it is clear that reason is highly regarded as a tool to be used in understanding what comes to be known through the sources (mūla) of dharma. Yet Rammohun elevated reason so that it had about the same authority as śāstra. In doing so he was arguing that a reasonable interpretation of the śāstras should be given credence even if it was advanced by someone who was not a religious leader. This again threatened to take the interpretation of the śāstras out of the corporate context. The religious leaders whose lives were so deeply and fully implicated in their understanding of the śāstras, became no more authoritative than the clever rationalist who might live relatively unaffected by the implications of the theology or sociology which he drew from the śāstras. As we shall see later in this study, this was one of the central issues which was raised by Rammohun's theological involvement and his own lifestyle.

So Rammohun's position on authority was the cause of opposition to him because he challenged those forms of authority which were most central in the continuity and adaptability of the tradition. Customs represented particular adjustments to particular circumstances. Religious leaders provided the contemporary authority which was needed to adapt ancient principles to contemporary circumstances. Both customs and religious leaders also represented continuity with the tradition as well as stability of authority. In relegating these forms of authority Rammohun was making the śāstras ineffective, for they had little

effective authority without interpretation and application. Rammohun's proposed solution, the elevation of authority of reason applied by individuals on the basis of their own reading of the *śāstras*, seemed likely to result only in claims prompted by self-interest, the factor which was to have the least authority.

## II. THE NATURE AND WORSHIP OF GOD

## 7.  Introduction

Most studies of Rammohun's religious thought concentrate on his discussions of the nature and worship of God.  His discussions of these themes are generally recognized to have been contentious, and in fact, many studies suggest that the major criticisms of Rammohun are directed against his understanding of the nature and worship of God.[1]

There is no doubt that Rammohun's discussions on these themes did provoke opposition, although it remains to be seen whether these issues were the major causes of opposition to him.  Rammohun generated opposition both by his attack on polytheism and image worship, and by his support of monotheism and forms of worship like those of the Brahmo Samaj.  His writings provide ample material for an analysis of these themes.  Many of his publications were translations of selections from the Upaniṣads and Brahma Sūtra,[2] some were discussions of worship and others were debates about the nature and worship of God.

_____

[1] To merely cite some examples, see Amitabha Mukherjee, Reform and Regeneration in Bengal, 1774-1823, pp. 155-163; Benoy Gopal Ray, Religious Movements in Modern Bengal, (Santiniketan: Visva Bharati, 1965), pp. 5-10; Nagendranath, Chattopadhyay, Mahātmā Rājā Rāmmohana Rāyer Jibancharit (title page missing), pp. 38-250, especially pp. 75-85.

[2] He translated the Kena, Īśā, Katha, and Muṇḍaka Upaniṣads into English.  He published the same four Upaniṣads as well as the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad into Bengali.  He published both an English and Bengali abridgement of the Brahma Sūtra, the English being entitled Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedanta, and the Bengali being entitled Vedānta-Grantha.

104

Our interest in studying these questions is to clarify several issues. Firstly, we wish to understand exactly what it was in his opponents' understanding of God that Rammohun objected to. This takes us into his attack on polytheism. Secondly, we want to understand what conception of God Rammohun thought was adequate and how he defended this. Thirdly, we wish to understand Rammohun's attack on many of the contemporary forms of worship. Fourthly, we will describe the forms of worship which Rammohun supported. Finally, we will evaluate these discussions to see what the major issues of disagreement between Rammohun and his opponents were. Later, in the conclusion of this study, we will evaluate the importance of Rammohun's controversies about the nature and worship of God. Our intention there will be to determine whether these controversies were, as most scholars suggest, the major reason for the opposition which Rammohun encountered during his life.

8. Rammohun's Criticism of Polytheism

In 1823, in the Introduction to his Translation of the Cena Upanishad, Rammohun wrote that he hoped this translation would explain to his countrymen ". . . the real spirit of the Hindoo Scriptures, which is but the declaration of the unity of God. . ."[1] Four years earlier, in the Preface to his Translation of the Kuth-Opunishud, he had written, "This work not only treats polytheism with contempt and disdain, but inculcates invariably the unity of God. . ."[2] He made similar remarks[3] in the introductions to all of his translations of Upaniṣads, as well as in several other essays which he wrote about Hindu religious texts and concepts.

This same theme was predominant in his debates with Christian missionaries. In 1821, after defending Hindu śāstras and philosophy against the attacks of a writer in the Samāchār Darpan,[4] Rammohun

---

[1] Works, Part II, p. 13.

[2] Works, Part II, p. 23.

[3] For example, in the Introduction to the "Translation of the Moonduk Opanishud" (1819), Works, Part II, pp. 1-9; also in the Preface to the "Translation of the Ishopanishad" (1816), Works, Part II, pp. 39-55, especially pp. 41-47.

[4] The letter, published in the Samāchār Darpan on July 14, 1821, is reprinted and answered in two parts in "The Brahmunical Magazine" (1821), Works, Part II, pp. 135-158. The letter itself is at pp. 141-143, 151-152.

addressed the following questions to Trinitarian Christians who criti-
cized Hindu polytheism:

> They call Jesus Christ the Son of God and the very God:
> How can the son be the very Father?[5]
>
> They say that God is one, and yet say that the Father is
> God, the Son is God and the Holy Ghost is God.[6]
>
> They say that the Son is of the same essence and existence
> as the Father, and they also say that the Son is equal to
> the Father.
> But how can equality subsist except between objects pos-
> sessed of different essences and existences?[7]

The arguments which ensued as a result of these questions filled the
third and fourth numbers of Rammohun's Brahmunical Magazine until
November, 1823.[8]

It seems that Rammohun engaged the Christians in debate pri-
marily because he resented their criticisms of Hindu śāstras and
philosophy, criticisms which seemed to him to be both uninformed and
prejudiced. He felt that they should be expected to defend their own
theology at those points where it was liable to the same criticisms
which they levelled at others. The vehemence with which the Christian
missionaries responded to his questions was evidence that they regarded
it as of utmost importance to defend themselves against the suggestion
that Trinitarianism was another form of polytheism.

---

[5] Works, Part II, p. 157.

[6] Works, Part II, p. 158.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Works, Part II, pp. 159-189.

But was the same attack on polytheism justified in his dis-
cussions with Hindus?  It has been suggested that Rammohun's attempt
to establish monotheism[9] at the centre of Hindu religion and philoso-
phy was both narrow and artificial; narrow because he ignored other
conceptions of the deity within Hindu thought which were supported by
substantial authority, and artificial because monotheism (ekeśvarbād)
was a concept appropriate to Semitic rather than Hindu thought.[10]
According to this argument, his failure to establish widespread support
for monotheism was not the result of inherent narrow-mindedness and
stubbornness on the part of his contemporaries; but rather, it was the
result of his own failure to understand that by using a foreign model
as the basis for his religious discussion, he would be unable to speak
convincingly to his countrymen.

Some of Rammohun's European contemporaries living in Calcutta
would have agreed with this evaluation, for to them it seemed obvious
that his attack on polytheism[11] was either motivated by Christian
theology or a step toward Christianity.  A writer in the Calcutta Jour-
nal remarked in 1823, that Rammohun, "it would appear, is of the sect

---

[9] Rammohun uses the term 'monotheism' at Works, Part II, p. 99.

[10] See Mohitlal Majumdar, Banglar Nabajug (Calcutta:  Vidyodaya
Library Ltd., 1965), p. xii.  Majumdar also suggests that idolatry
(pauttalikatā) is an equally foreign Semitic notion imposed on Hindu
practice by Rammohun.

[11] Rammohun uses the term 'polytheism' at Works, Part II, p. 99.

of Vedanties, who have rejected the popular polytheistical notions of the Hindus".[12]  The same writer expressed pleasure at noting that "the dark superstition of Hinduism is assuming so enlightened a form; since even a partial reformation, is one step gained; and the destruction of a single error must help to clear the way for the full reception of revealed truth."[13]  The "revealed truth", of course, was Christianity. For most of the European Christians in Calcutta it seemed natural that Rammohun's attack on Hindu polytheism would eventually lead to his conversion to Christianity; it seemed impossible that he would suggest an alternative which was Hindu rather than Christian.

But his writings on this subject demonstrate very clearly that Rammohun's criticism of polytheism was based on Hindu śāstras and philosophy.  It would have been impossible, for example, for him to grant polytheism even provisional utility if he had been arguing from Christian premises.  And yet, although he insisted that the Vedas upheld the ". . .Divinity of that Being, who is out of the reach of comprehension and beyond all description",[14] he agreed that many other śāstras ". . . expressly declare the divinity of many gods and goddesses, and the modes of their worship;"[15] even though ultimately these

---

[12]Quoted in Records, p. 44.  The passage quoted appeared originally in the Calcutta Journal, March 15, 1823.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Works, Part II, p. 41.

[15]Ibid.

same śāstras affirmed the unity of God. The apparent contradiction between a plurality of gods and the unity of God was resolved, he said, by the insistence of the Vedas, Tantras, and Purāṇas that the passages describing a plurality of gods were intended for those ". . . who are incapable of elevating their minds to the idea of an invisible Supreme Being",[16] and were intended only in a figurative sense.[17]

He never interpreted these metaphors as literal descriptions of the Supreme Being. In his Abridgment of the Vedanta[18] he acknowledged that the Vedas often referred to celestial bodies, space, mind, food, breath, animals, fire, etc., as deities or as the Supreme Being. Such appellations, he said, were only intended to denote the omnipresence of the Supreme Being. Should all these things be

---

[16] Ibid.

[17] But in this provisional, figurative sense Rammohun was quite willing to use the accounts of the gods and goddesses in the śāstras to illustrate his arguments. When he referred to the deities he usually did so respectfully. Therefore when Kavitakar accused Rammohun of being antipathetic to Rām, Kṛṣṇa, and Śiva, Rammohun argued that this was untrue. He pointed out that whenever he spoke of these gods he preceded their names with "Bhagavān" or "paramārādhya" (worthy of highest worship) as an indication of his respect.

The debate in which this occurs may be found in Granthabali, Part II, p. 65-93. The debate, entitled "Kavitākārer Sahit Bicār", took place in 1820, and was published by Rammohun in that year. The discussion about reverence to the gods occurs on pp. 70-71.

[18] Works, Part II, pp. 57-72, especially pp. 67-69. This was published in 1816.

acknowledged to be separate deities, ". . . there would be a necessity for acknowledging many independent creators of the world, which is directly contrary to common sense, and to the repeated authority of the Veda."[19] Similarly, when celestial gods "declared themselves to be independent deities, and also the object of worship. . ."[20] these declarations should be understood to result from their being "abstracted from themselves and their being entirely absorbed in divine reflection."[21]

> It is therefore optional with every one of the celestial gods, as well as with every individual, to consider himself as God, under this state of self-forgetfulness and unity with the Divine reflection, as the Veda says, 'You are that true Being'. . . [22]

> But in consequence of this reflection, none of them can be acknowledged to be the cause of the universe or the object of adoration.[23]

The distinction between God and gods was of utmost significance for Rammohun: God was the creator and object of worship; the gods were created beings who worshipped God. To substantiate this point he quoted Sankara's commentary on Brahma Sūtra I.iii.26: "even the gods can have the hankering for glory, included as it is within the range

[19] Works, Part II, p. 67.

[20] Works, Part II, p. 68.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Works, Part II, p. 68-69.

[23] Works, Part II, p. 69.

of created things.[24] Liberation was necessary for gods, because they shared with man the limitation of form. Śaṅkara said that they had fewer limitations than men, for whereas men were limited to particular bodies during each lifetime, the gods were able to assume many bodies simultaneously.[25] But even this relative superiority of gods to men was diminished by the fact that <u>yogins</u> could, through their mastery of mystic powers, "have association with many bodies at the same time".[26] The gods then, although less subject to limitations than most men, were nonetheless created beings who could be liberated from the limitation of form only through worshipping God.

While Rammohun used Śaṅkara's interpretation of the gods at this point to support his own argument that gods were created beings rather than independent creators, it is quite evident that in other places he interpreted the gods quite differently from Śaṅkara. In Rammohun's words,

> The Veda, having in the first instance personified all
> the attributes and powers of the Deity, and also the
> celestial bodies and natural elements, does in conform-
> ity to this idea of personification, treat them in the
> subsequent passages as if they were real beings,

---

[24]Śaṅkarācārya, <u>Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāsya</u>, trans. Swami Gambhī-rananda (2nd ed.; Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972), p. 205. All refer-ences to the <u>Brahma Sūtra</u> are taken from this edition. Hereinafter referred to as <u>B.S.</u>

[25]<u>B.S.</u> I.iii.27.

[26]<u>Ibid.</u>

ascribing to them birth, animation, senses, and accidents,
as well as liability to annihilation.[27]

It seems clear from this that while Śaṅkara attributed 'reality' to gods

in the same sense that he attributed it to men, Rammohun regarded gods

as metaphorical creations of the religious texts. They were personi-

fications of attributes, treated "as if they were real beings." They

were 'created', not in Śaṅkara's sense as "real beings", but in the

literary sense as metaphors. And yet he realized that these 'metaphors'

had become so real to people, that if he wished to demonstrate that

the Hindu śastras upheld the unity of God, he would need to prove that

when the śastras used polytheistic language, they were doing so meta-

phorically rather than literally. Furthermore, he would need to explain

the reason for the use of such language.

He gave a single, consistent reason for this whenever he had

to face the issue in his writings and debates. He said that the

śastras were concerned that those who were ignorant or unable to under-

stand abstract matters might totally neglect the worship of a Supreme

---

[27]Works, Part II, p. 104n. In a note to his translation of the
Cena Upanishad Rammohun says, "In the Akhyayika it is said that those
powers of the Divinity which produce agreeable effects and conduce to
moral order and happiness, are represented under the figure of celestial
gods, and those attributes from which pain and misery flow, are called
demons and step-brothers of the former, with whom they are in a state of
perpetual hostility." Works, Part II, p. 19n. When discussing the mean-
ing of the gāyatrī Rammohun says that ". . . . Om implies the three Vedas,
the three states of human nature, the three divisions of the universe,
the three deities, Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, agents in the creation,
preservation, and destruction of this world, or, properly speaking, the
three principal attributes of the Supreme Being personified as Brahma,
Vishnu, and Siva." (emphasis mine) Works, Part II, p. 75n.

Being if they were not given some more concrete description of such a Being. As he put it:

> . . . the directions to worship any figured beings are only applicable to those who are incapable of elevating their minds to the idea of an invisible Supreme Being, in order that such persons, by fixing their attention on those invented figures, may be able to restrain themselves from vicious temptations. . .[28]

> The doctrine of a plurality of gods and goddesses laid down in the preceding chapter (of the Vedas) is not only controverted (in subsequent chapters), but reasons assigned for its introduction; for instance, that the worship of the sun and fire, together with the whole allegorical system, were only inculcated for the sake of those whose limited understanding rendered them incapable of comprehending and adoring the invisible Supreme Being, so that such persons might not remain in a brutified state, destitute of all religious principle.[29]

Sometimes the metaphorical language used in the śāstras to describe the Supreme Being seemed to be describing separate beings, but Rammohun insisted that this was only a method used to accentuate and

---

[28] Works, Part II, p. 41.

[29] Works, Part II, p. 14. In describing the intention of the śāstras in permitting the worship of God through human and animal forms, Rammohun says: ". . . lest persons of feeble intellect unable to comprehend God as not subject to the senses and without form, should either pass their life without any religious duties whatsoever or should engage in evil work - to prevent this they have represented God in the form of a man and other animals and as possessed of all those desires with which we are conversant whereby they might have some regard to the Divine Being. Afterwards by diligent endeavours they become qualified for the true knowledge of God: but ever and ever again the Puranas have carefully affirmed, that they have given this account of the forms of God with a view to the benefit of persons of weak minds, and that in truth, God is without name, forms, organs, and sensual enjoyment." Works, Part II, p. 153.

draw attention to the various attributes of the Creator.[30]  In his

Preface to the <u>Translation of the Ishopanishad</u> he quoted from various

sāstras to substantiate his interpretation on this point, and then he

concluded:

> From the foregoing quotations it is evident, that though
> the Vedas, Puranas, and Tantras, frequently assert the
> plurality of gods and goddesses, and prescribe the modes
> of their worship for men of insufficient understanding,
> yet they have also declared in a hundred other places
> that these passages are to be taken merely in a figura-
> tive sense.[31]

This explanation, he said, was not his own fabrication, but was used

in the Veda itself, as well as by "its celebrated commentator Vyasa,"[32]

and if it was not accepted as an adequate reconciliation of passages

that seemed at variance with each other, then the whole work would need

to be not only "stripped of its authority, but be looked upon as alto-

gether unintelligible."[33]  What was at stake then, was not simply the

question of whether there was one God or many gods, but also the

intelligibility and authority of the sāstras.

When the figurative language of the sāstras was misinterpreted,

there were, according to Rammohun, three results.  Firstly, the accounts

of gods as well as their claims to supremacy were taken literally, and

---

[30]<u>Works</u>, Part II, p. 14.

[31]<u>Works</u>, Part II, p. 42.

[32]<u>Works</u>, Part II, p. 14.

[33]<u>Ibid.</u>

consequently the gods were understood as rivals. Secondly, the stories

in which the gods were described fighting or seducing the wives of men

were repeated and admired, with the result that their immorality was

imitated in human society. Finally, the vivid descriptions of the gods

led men to make and worship idols.

Rammohun dealt extensively with the first of these points in two

debates with Vaisnavas between 1816 and 1818. In the first debate,

his opponent, Utsabananda Vidyavagish,[34] tried to establish the supre-

macy of Visnu/Krsna[35] by citing passages from Vaisnava texts which

praised the glory of Visnu/Krsna and the efficacy of his worship. In

---

[34]For information about this debate see above, Chapter 2, p. 50.
n. 19.

[35]These terms are used together here for two major reasons.
First, in these debates Rammohun and his opponents alternate between
the names 'Visnu' and 'Krsna' freely. They tend to use Krsna more
often when speaking of the object of devotion, and Visnu more often
when speaking about the god in relation to other gods such as Brahmā
and Śiva. But clearly they are referring to the same deity regardless
of what name they use.
The second reason for using the terms together is to draw
attention to the relationship between Visnu and Krsna in Bengal
Vaisnavism. The post-Caitanya theologians especially the Gosvāmīns
of Brndavana, ultimately worked out a position which made Krsna the
source of all avatāras rather than an avatāra himself. This was
especially the theme of Jiva Gosvāmin's Srikrsna Samdarbha. For a
thorough discussion of this work see Sushil Kumar De, Early History
of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Bengal, (2nd ed.; Calcutta:
Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961), pp. 314-454. A shorter work, the
Samksepa Bhāgavatāmrta of Rūpa Gosvāmin, describes the various forms
(rūpa) by which Krsna appears, and Visnu is regarded as an avatāra
of one of these forms. See De, pp. 239-242, and A.K. Majumdar,
Caitanya: His Life and Doctrine (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,
1969), p. 285.

the second debate, on this occasion with Gosvami,[36] the question of the supremacy of Visnu/Krsna again formed a substantial part of the discussion.

Utsabananda suggested that since Vaisnava texts proclaimed the particular efficacy of worshipping Visnu/Krsna, men should worship him rather than any other god. In fact, he said, in Vaisnava texts other gods were pictured worshipping Visnu/Krsna, and obviously if they did so, men should follow their example. Rammohun answered that this kind of argument was precisely the kind of confusion which resulted if the figurative language of the śāstras was taken literally. When the śāstras praised a particular god they were really eulogizing some attribute of Brahman. While focusing on that attribute, (god), other attributes (gods) were temporarily regarded as secondary.[37]

---

[36]For information about this debate see above, chapter 2, p. 49. n. 17.

[37]This is very much like Max Müller's theory of 'henotheism', although on closer analysis some important differences emerge. Müller used the term 'henotheism' to designate an early state in the development of religious understanding, a stage at which various gods were successively regarded as supreme. This was the stage at which ". . . a belief and worship of those single objects. . . in which man first suspected the presence of the invisible and the infinite, each of which, . . . . was raised into something more than finite, more than natural, more than conceivable; and thus grew in the end to be . . . in fact a God. . ." F. Max Müller, Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion (2nd ed.; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1878), p. 260. This stage of religious development preceded polytheism, for in polytheism all these gods together formed ". . . one divine polity, under the control of one supreme god." Ibid., p. 289. Polytheism was in turn succeeded by monotheism, which involved the "distinct denial of other gods". Ibid.
  While for Müller henotheism represented a stage in the evolutionary development of religion (see especially Ibid., pp. 254-309), for

Unfortunately, those who wished to prove the superiority of a particular god used such references to prove the superiority of their god and the inferiority of others. Both Utasabananda[38] and Gosvami[39] tried to explain the superiority of Viṣṇu by using this method. They said that in the Garuḍa Purāṇa Viṣṇu was regarded as the embodiment of sattva guṇa, the highest of the guṇas, and thereby established as the highest among the gods. Rammohun argued that this was simply an instance of Viṣṇu being praised so that some attributes of Brahman would be especially noticed; but there were other descriptions of gods in the śāstras which gave Viṣṇu a less elevated role. In the Upaniṣads,[40] for example, Viṣṇu was associated with the state of jāgrat (wakefulness), Brahmā with the state of svapna (dreaming), Śiva with the state of suṣupti (deep sleep), and Brahman with the state of turiya (consciousness). According to the explanation of those states given in the

---

37 continued

Rammohun a similar understanding of the gods' relationship to each other was a hermeneutic tool to be used in explicating all references to a plurality of gods. Rammohun would not have agreed that the Vedic references to gods represented a primitive understanding of the divine.

In subsequent scholarship there have been varied reactions to Müller's theory. Keith says that the theory involves believing that the Vedic poets could have shut from their minds the other gods in the pantheon, and he finds this incredible. Arthur Berriedale Keith, The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads (First Indian Reprint; Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), Part I, p. 89. Glasenapp, however, finds Müller's theory useful as a description of the process leading to monotheism. Helmuth von Glasenapp, Die Religionen Indiens (Stuttgart: Alfred Kroner; 1943), pp. 72-73.

[38] Granthabali, Part II, pp. 27-28.

[39] Granthabali, Part II. p. 48.

[40] The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad.

Upaniṣads, this meant that Viṣṇu was associated with the lowest state, while Śiva was the highest among the gods, inferior to only Brahman. Similar descriptions could be found elsewhere in the śāstras, and they could be quoted by those who wished to prove Śiva's superiority to Viṣṇu. But this was not the intention of the śāstras. When they exalted one god they were simply drawing attention to one characteristic of Brahman: they were not demeaning other gods. The intention of the śāstras was to glorify the one Supreme Being, but if they were not read with this intention in mind, isolated passages could be used to demonstrate the superiority of nearly any god or goddess. This frustrated the purposes of the śāstras and turned discussions of the gods into divisive arguments.

The way in which these divisive arguments undermined the authority of the śāstras was evident in the arguments which Utsabananda used to explain away the passages in the śāstras in which Śiva was exalted. He simply said that in these passages, although Śiva's name was used, Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa was really meant.[41] Thus all praise to Śiva was meant as praise to Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa. Rammohun pointed out just how faulty such an argument was, by reminding Utsabanda that there was nothing to prevent devotees of Śiva from using precisely the same logic to prove that all references to Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa actually referred to Śiva. If words were twisted in this way they would lose the meanings which had been established through common understanding and dictionaries, and once words

---

[41] Granthabali, Part II, p. 29.

lost their meanings the śāstras would also become meaningless.

In many of his other writings Rammohun made it clear that the divisiveness which resulted from literalistic interpretations of figurative language was not found only among Vaiṣṇavas, nor only among Hindus. In his debates with Christians[42] Rammohun pointed out that while they were quick to see the faults of the Hindus, they were apparently unable or unwilling to recognize that their interpretations of their Scripture fostered the same divisiveness and confusion. They insisted that God was spirit, and yet claimed that Jesus the man was fully God. They said that God was one, and also said that he was triune. Consequently Trinitarian Christians said that Unitarians were not truly Christian. There were divisive arguments among Christians as to whether the Trinity referred to three separate but related beings, or whether it was a metaphor describing the creative, redemptive, and sanctifying attributes of one Being. Christians of one sect often refused to recognize other sects as Christians because they differed in the way in which they described and defined God. And while many Christians insisted on the literal acceptance of accounts such as the descent of the Spirit in the form of a dove, they mocked Hindu stories in which the gods appeared in human or animal form. They

---

[42]The examples which follow are but a few of the many which Rammohun used. These and others can be found especially in the third and fourth numbers of "The Brahmunical Magazine", Works, Part II, pp. 159-189; in "An Appeal to the Christian Public" (1820), Works, Part V, pp. 55-71; and in "Second Appeal to the Christian Public" (1821), Works, Part VI.

accepted without hesitation the miraculous acts performed by Jesus and other Biblical figures, yet they scoffed at the fantastic miracles of the Hindu Purānas. The problem was that the Christians, like the Hindus whom they criticized so severely, were too literalistic in the interpretation of their own Scripture, and too sectarian in their rejection of the scriptures of others.

The second result of misinterpreting the figurative language of the śāstras, according to Rammohun, was ethical insensitivity and immorality. Polytheists justified their immorality either by appealing to the examples of their gods, or by claiming that their actions were done in the cause of serving their gods. In his Preface to the Trans- lation of the Ishopanishad he regretted the tenacious sectarianism which caused some of his countrymen to settle disputes about the prece- dence of the gods by "blows and violence".[43] But he was even more concerned that "every humane and social feeling"[44] was being violated in the propitiation of the gods, even to the point that "acts of self- destruction and the immolation of the nearest relations"[45] were en- couraged as acts of great devotion.

He was not unaware of the fact that monotheistic religions also often perpetuated and sanctioned unethical behaviour, but he was

---

[43] Works, Part II, p. 45.

[44] Works, Part II, p. 52.

[45] Ibid.

inclined to blame that on the self-interest of their leaders rather than on the nature of their theology.[46] Polytheism, on the other hand, encouraged immorality. He never analyzed the relationship between polytheism and immorality systematically in his writings. The nearest he ever came to explaining this relationship was his discussion of some "practical grounds for objecting to the idolatrous worship of the Hindus"[47] in A Defence of Hindoo Theism. There he suggested that the stories of Krsna encouraged the belief that uncleanness, nudity, debauchery, and murder were sanctioned by the example of Krsna. The worship of Kālī was equally immoral, he said, since it included human sacrifice, the use of wine, criminal intercourse, and licentious songs. After citing these examples he said that he hoped that his opponent, having understood

> the nature of worship adopted by Hindoos in general,
> for the propitiation of their /deities'/ attributes,
> in direct opposition to the mode of pure divine
> worship inculcated by the Vedas. . . will no longer
> stand forward as an advocate for the worship of
> separate and independent attributes and incarnations.[48]

---

[46]This is especially clear in Rammohun's first published work Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin, pp. 1-5.

[47]Works, Part II, p. 92. In the Introduction to his "Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedant", Works, Part II, p. 60, Rammohun says that the rites involved in Hindu idolatry, "more than any other pagan worship", destroy "the texture of society". But again, he does not specify how this occurs nor why it occurs.

[48]Works, Part II, pp. 92-93.

He believed that the worship of "separate and independent attributes and incarnations" led directly to immorality and was "destructive of social comforts."[49] He suggested that devotees either imitated the immoral behaviors of their gods, or justified other immorality by claiming that it was done in the service of their gods. But his argument consisted of juxtaposing examples of immoral social behaviour with accounts of the exploits of the gods; and that procedure is not wholly persuasive. He did not argue that commendable social behaviour was based upon the inspiration of the recorded exemplary actions of the gods. Although he attempted to attribute immoral behaviour to the imitation of the gods, it is quite clear that he did not regard all social behaviour as simply imitative of the gods. While his concern is understandable, especially in view of his long campaign against sati, it is not surprising that because of the peculiar nature of his argument on this issue, his opponents never took this criticism very seriously.

But on the third issue, Rammohun's attack on idolatry, his opponents had a great deal to say. Rammohun said that the use of images in worship had been permitted by the śāstras only so that those who were incapable of elevating their thoughts beyond concrete representations would have some form of worship. His argument here was identical to the one he had used to explain the use of metaphorical language in the śāstras:

---

[49]Works, Part II, p. 105. Compare Works, Part II, pp. 90-91.

> . . . the Vedas, although they tolerate idolatry as the
> last provision for those who are totally incapable of
> raising their minds to the contemplation of the invisible
> God of nature, yet repeatedly urge the relinquishment of
> the rites of idol-worship, and the adoption of a purer
> system of religion, on the express ground that the obser-
> vance of idolatrous rites can never be productive of
> external beatitude.  These are left to be practiced by
> such persons only as, notwithstanding the constant
> teaching of spiritual guides, cannot be brought to see
> perspicuously the majesty of God through the works of
> nature.[50]

The use of images implied a serious deficiency of understanding, for it

suggested that the only way in which some consciousness of God could be

induced was through the use of physical images.  Hopefully these would

illustrate attributes of the Supreme Being sufficiently, even though

imperfectly, so that there would be not only awareness of the Creator,

but also reverence toward him.

In elaborating this theme in many of his writings and debates,

Rammohun often referred to his Translation of the Ishopanishad.  In the

Preface and Introduction to that work he dealt with many of the arguments

which had been advanced to justify the use of images.  In answering

those arguments he said that even the authorities and texts which per-

mitted the worship of images did so with the clear indication that they

were consciously sanctioning an inferior system of worship for those

adhikāris[51] who had "insufficient understanding" to grasp abstract or

---

[50] Introduction to the "Translation of the Moonduk Opanishud", Works, Part II.  The Introduction precedes page 1.

[51] Literally, "those with the rights" or "those with competence". See chapter 13 below.

even figurative language.[52] Even the Viṣṇu Purāṇā, which described the

avatāras[53] of Viṣṇu, agreed that ultimately "God is without figure,

epithet, definition or description", and that "The vulgar look for their

gods in water; men of more extended knowledge in celestial bodies; the

ignorant in wood, bricks, and stones; but learned men in the universal

soul."[54]

---

[52]Rammohun had in mind what might be called a hierarchy of understanding. At the top were those who could grasp abstract concepts and language. Below them were those who needed figurative language to help them grasp abstract concepts. Many of these never understood that the figurative language pointed beyond itself, and therefore they regarded it as literal rather than figurative. The lowest on this hierarchy were those who could not even grasp figurative language without making physical forms which they could look at. Among these there were many who were so ignorant that they came to regard the physical forms as living beings.

[53]Avatāra literally means "descent", and when used in relation to a deity suggests a condescension to a lesser form. In its earliest use the term was not used to refer to the deity appearing in animal or human form. It came to be used in this sense only when Viṣṇu came to be understood as a supreme deity who had been manifested in many lesser forms for specific purposes. Even in the Mahābhārata various other terms are used for the appearance of the divine. In the Gītā IV.5 the word 'janman' (birth) is used, and in the following verses (IV.6,8) the word 'sambhava' (come into being) is used. Neither of these imply a condescension. At IV.7 Krsna speaks of his appearance on earth as srjana (creation or generation). For brief but useful discussions of the concept of avatāra see Hermann Jacobi, "Incarnation (Indian)", The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribners, n.d.), VII, pp. 193-197; Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, Evolution of Hindu Sects (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970), pp. 56-64; Suvira Jaiswal, The Origin and Development of Vaisnavism (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967), pp. 118-132.

[54]Works, Part II, p. 42. Rammohun is referring to Viṣṇu Purāṇa I.2. Although he indicates that he is quoting from that section of the Purāṇa, there is no passage like the one he gives. He does seem to be accurately reflecting the general meaning of the section, but he is not using the exact words present there. See Vishnu Purāṇa, trans. H.H. Wilson (3rd ed.; Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1961), pp. 6-19.

But in his debate with Rammohun, Goswami argued that although
it might be true from a transcendental point of view that Brahman was
_arūpa_ (formless), _advaita_ (non-dual), _acintya_ (incomprehensible), and
_atīndriya_ (beyond sensory perception), to contemplate and worship
Brahman it was necessary to have some symbols. _Śruti_ had instructed
men to worship, and would not have done so if the command was impossible
to follow. Yet it was impossible to worship and speak about something
which was formless.

Rammohun replied that any forms or symbols which might be
required by those with dull minds were readily available in the world,.
and did not need to be fashioned by men. Even the Vaisnava _śāstras_[55]
which gave such support to image worship, acknowledged that the whole
world was the image of Brahman, and by its dependence on Brahman pointed
to the Transcendent. For those who needed symbols to comprehend
Brahman, the man-made image of Kṛṣṇa was no more adequate than a tree
or a stone pillar. The image of a god made by human imagination and
skill was no more representative of the formless Brahman than pots made
by the same imagination and skill. All symbols and forms were inade-
quate, and those of one particular religious group were no better than
those of other groups.

When the _śāstras_ permitted the construction and worship of images,
they did so with the intention that those who engaged in such worship
would transcend it and move to a form of worship more adequately.

---

[55]Here again Rammohun refers to _Viṣṇu Purāṇa_, I.2.

expressive of the nature of the Supreme Being. Previously[56] these

adhikārīs who were not able to immediately comprehend Brahman without

qualities (nirguṇa Brahman), knew that the image worship which they

took part in was to be regarded as a means of helping them to a fuller

realization of the transcendental, formless Brahman. They never

accepted the images as actual representations of Brahman, nor did they

attribute life to the images; for even they understood that this would

have been irrational.

> Recently, said Rammohun, all that had changed.

> Hindus of the present age, with a very few exceptions,
> have not the least idea that it is to the attributes
> of the Supreme Being, as figuratively represented by
> shapes corresponding to the nature of those attributes,
> they offer oblation and worship under the denomination
> of gods and goddesses. . . Neither do they regard the
> images of these gods merely in the light of instruments
> for elevating the mind to the conception of those sup-
> posed beings; they are simply in themselves made objects
> of worship.[57]

And so Śiva or Kṛṣṇa or Kālī were worshipped not as figurative represen-

tations of aspects of saguṇa Brahman, but as beings in their own right

with histories, shapes, and holy places.

The whole process had now been inverted, said Rammohun, and

instead of the forms and metaphors pointing to the unqualified Brahman,

---

[56]Rammohun is making an historical judgment here which is diffi-
cult to verify. One of his major arguments was that image worship was
a recent degradation of earlier, purer forms of worship. He always
argued that the provision of image worship was a concession to ignorance,
and that only "recently" had it become the general system of worship.
His assumption that earlier generations of image worshippers had under-
stood the limitations of their form of worship, is even more difficult
to verify.

[57]Works, Part II, pp. 44-45.

statements about Brahman were now taken to be characterizations of particular gods. Among Vaisnavas, for example, the most abstract symbols, intended to point to Brahman, were taken to refer to Krsna "who has a body with hands and feet."[58] Vaisnavas took the words of *Śruti* which said that Brahman is *arūpa* (formless), *arasa* (devoid of experiental delight), and *kautasthya* (changeless), and by interpreting them through the sectarian Upanisads concluded that all these references applied to Krsna in his various forms and activities. Their attempt to justify such interpretations by saying that the forms and activities were non-spatial, non-material, and non-temporal, amounted to a complete confusion of language.

All of this confusion, and all these incorrect assumptions about the worship of Brahman were the result of taking what was intended as a concession to ignorance and elevating it to the prescribed form of worship for all. Images had been permitted for those too ignorant to understand figurative or abstract language about Brahman, and the intention of image worship had been to gradually elevate the mind so that it could comprehend Brahman more adequately. But the worship of images had become an end in itself. Its illustrative function had been lost sight of. Now it had become so perverted as a system of worship that instead of the gods being interpreted as illustrations of Brahman's attributes, Brahman was interpreted as a manifestation of sectarian gods.

---

[58]*Granthabali*, Part II, p. 30.

Furthermore, said Rammohun, even though the sāstras had made the concession to image worship in very ancient times, it was only in recent times that there had been a widespread increase in the use of this form of worship. Formerly this kind of worship had been left for the few who were too ignorant to do without it. But in recent times there had been a widespread increase in the number of images made. The Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivites, and Śāktas were constantly inventing new images and commissioning them to be built. Had this system of worship been widespread for many years, there would have been sufficient images available to serve the needs of those who wished to use them.[59]

Rammohun was unconvinced by the reasons given for image worship. Many Europeans with generous intentions defended the use of images by saying that they were clearly intended symbolically, since no one could be foolish enough to believe that there was real life in the images.[60] But, said Rammohun, that was unfortunately exactly what people believed. Once they received their image from the craftsman who made it, they had a ceremony which endowed the image with animation (prāṇa pratiṣṭhā). By this ceremony the image was changed from the mere material of

---

[59] Granthabali, Part II, p. 63-64.

[60] Works, Part II, p. 40. In the Introduction to his "Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedant" Rammohun said, "I have observed, that both in their writings and conversation, many Europeans feel a wish to palliate and soften the feature of Hindoo idolatry; and are inclined to inculcate, that all objects of worship are considered by their votaries as emblematical representations of the Supreme Divinity!" Works, Part II, p. 60.

construction to a being not only with life, but with supernatural powers. The devotees' care of the image proved that they believed it to have life. If it was male it might be married to a female image. In the hot season the image was kept cool with a fan; in the cold season it was kept warm with a covering.[61]

Another rationale for image worship was suggested by those who said that since all aspects of nature were aspects of Brahman, therefore Brahman would also be present in the images made by men out of the materials of nature.[62] Rammohun said that this explanation failed on at least three counts. Firstly, it was clear that those who worshipped images did not regard these images as manifestations of Brahman in the same way that they regarded trees and pots. The images were regarded as accurate descriptions of gods and goddesses who were themselves regarded as ultimate. Their metaphorical function was no longer understood. Secondly, as he had already argued, instead of the attributes of the images being understood as characteristics of saguna Brahman, many of the characteristics of Brahman were predicated of the images. For example, the worshippers of Kālī, Śiva, and Kṛṣṇa all believed that their god was omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. Thus the function of image worship had been distorted; now it was the gods identified with the images, rather than Brahman, who gained in stature and importance.

The third failure of this explanation of image worship,

---

[61] Works, Part II, pp. 45-46.

[62] Works, Part II, pp. 46-47.

according to Rammohun, was that it was based on an incorrect interpretation of Śruti. When the Upaniṣads said that "All this is surely Brahman",[63] and "The world is nothing but Brahman, the highest",[64] the intended meaning was that there was no existence apart from Brahman

> . . . whose existence is the sole support of the conceived
> existence of the universe, which is acted upon by him in
> the same way as a human body is by a soul. But God is at
> the same time quite different from what we see or feel.[65] _

Those who used these passages of Śruti to support the worship of images, tried to argue that since everything was Brahman, anything could properly become the object of worship. But Śruti said that Brahman was quite distinct from matter. Whenever the Upaniṣads recorded the attempts of someone trying to define Brahman in terms of matter in general or a particular material substance, they always showed how all such attempts were impossible until they led beyond all matter to the ground of being (adiṣṭhāna). Brahman was not some final very subtle form of matter that could be worshipped. Brahman was the ground of being which made the existence of matter possible.

Before we proceed to a discussion of Rammohun's understanding of monotheism, let us summarize the main points established in this analysis of his criticism of polytheism. We noted briefly at the outset that

---

[63] Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad 2. References to the Upaniṣads, are to the edition translated by Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957, 1958).

[64] Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad II.ii.11.

[65] Works, Part II, p. 47.

Rammohun's insistence on strict monotheism was a focal point in his
debates with both Hindus and Christians. We saw that although some of
his contemporaries and some recent scholars suggested that monotheism
was a concept relevant only to Semitic religion, Rammohun insisted
that monotheism was not only relevant but also at the very heart of
the Hindu tradition. He argued that polytheism was simply a provisional
metaphor used by the sāstras to assist those who found it difficult to
understand the existence and nature of God without such concrete
imagry. But we noted that to sustain this argument, Rammohun was forced
to shift from Śankara's understanding of the gods as real but unliberated
beings, to a position where he regarded the gods as merely figures of
speech. These figures of speech, said Rammohun, were intended only as
aids to those incapable of comprehending God without them, and when
they came to be regarded as adequate descriptions of God, three serious
distortions of theology arose: firstly, individuals and groups devoted
to a particular god saw other gods and groups devoted to them as rivals,
and thus what were intended as metaphors leading to unity became the
cause of divisions and conflict; secondly, immoral behaviour was legi-
timated by appealing to the stories of gods, who by engaging in it had
supposedly sanctioned it; thirdly, image worship, which was intended as
an aid for the most ignorant, had become the usual form of worship,
and people no longer understood images as representations of the attri-
butes of Brahman, but regarded them as representations of independent
gods. Thus image worship became idolatry.

## 9. Rammohun's Monotheism

It should be clear from the preceding discussion of Rammohun's criticism of polytheism that he based many of his arguments upon reason rather than śāstra, although he did claim to be accurately representing the intentions of the śāstras. He argued not only that polytheism was a perversion of the intentions of the śāstras, but that its results were detrimental to spiritual, moral and social life. He substantiated these latter charges by pointing to the contemporary situation, not by appealing to the śāstras. But as we direct our attention to his discussion of monotheism, we note that the basis for his argument here was primarily the śāstras, especially Śruti. We have already seen some intimations of his theology in our consideration of his attack on polytheism, and we turn now to a more systematic discussion of that subject.

Initially we should consider his various terms for God. In his English writings he used 'God', 'Supreme Being', 'Almighty Power',[1] 'Creator',[2] 'Supreme Divinity',[3] 'true Deity',[4] 'Most High',[5] and

---

[1] Works, Part II, p. 15.

[2] Works, Part II, p. 49.

[3] Works, Part II, p. 60.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Works, Part II, p. 77.

'Supreme Spirit',[6] but of these the most common names he used were 'God' and 'Supreme Being'. He used those terms interchangeably, without any apparent systematic distinction between them. It is evident from his English writings that 'God' or 'Supreme Being' could be the equivalent of 'Brahman', 'Ātman', or 'Iśvara', and in quoting from Sanskrit passages which used these three terms he used either of these two English terms. He did not introduce the terms 'Brahman', 'Ātman', and 'Iśvara' into his English writings, and thus the subtle distinctions between them are lost in those materials.

This point can be illustrated by comparing Rammohun's English and Bengali translations of the Upaniṣads and Brahma Sūtras to the Sanskrit. At Iśā Upaniṣad 3 the word "ātma" appears in the compound "ātmahanaḥ". In his Bengali translation of this passage he renders it "paramātma".[7] In the parallel English passage he renders it "Supreme Spirit".[8] At Iśā Upaniṣad 5 the Sanskrit simply refers back to the subject of the previous two verses by using the pronoun "tat", which Rammohun, in his Bengali translation makes more definite by rendering it "shei ātmā" (that ātman).[9] In his English translation he has "Supreme Being".[10] At Iśā Upaniṣad 7 the Sanskrit again is "ātma",

---

[6] Ibid.

[7] Granthabali, Part II, p. 207.

[8] Works, Part II, p. 53.

[9] Granthabali, Part II, p. 207.

[10] Works, Part II, p. 53.

and Rammohun uses "paramātma"[11] in Bengali. However in this case he uses "God"[12] as the English translation. These are all instances in which the Sanskrit original was explicitly ātma or was understood to be ātma, and yet Rammohun gave a different English equivalent in each case.

There are similar examples in all of Rammohun's writings. In the Abridgment of the Vedanta[13] Rammohun quoted extensively from the Upaniṣads and Brahma Sūtras, and even a brief examination of his trans-lation makes it clear that his use of English terms for Ultimate Reality was not intended to systematically correspond to the Sanskrit terminology. In quoting from Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad III.i.10 he translated "ātma" as "Supreme Being".[14] But when he used "Supreme Being"[15] again in translating Brahma Sūtra III.ii.16, he was translating an implied reference to Brahman. In translating the less common term "antaryāmi" in Brahma Sūtra I.ii.18, Rammohun simply used "God",[16] even though most subsequent English translations have used the more literal 'Inner Ruler' for this passage. In several passages he made it clear how

---

[11]Granthabali, Part II, p. 208.

[12]Works, Part II, p. 54.

[13]Works, Part II, p. 57-72.

[14]Works, Part II, p. 70.

[15]Works, Part II, p. 67.

[16]Works, Part II, p. 65.

interchangeable he regarded the terms 'God' and 'Supreme Being', by

using one of the terms to introduce a translation of a Sanskrit passage,

and the other terms within the translated section:

> The following passages of the Veda affirm that God is
> the sole object of worship, viz. 'Adore God alone.'
> 'Know God alone; give up other discourse.' And the
> Vedanta says, that 'It is found in the Vedas, 'that
> none but the Supreme Being is to be worshipped, nothing
> excepting him should be adored by a wise man.'[17]
> (emphasis mine).

> Veda now illustrates the mode in which we should worship
> the Supreme Being, viz., 'To God we should approach. . .'[18]

These illustrations are enough to demonstrate that whereas in

his Bengali translations Rammohun stayed very close to the precise

wording used in the Sanskrit text and Śankara's commentary, in his

parallel English translations he alternated freely between using 'God'

and 'Supreme Being' as translations of the various Sanskrit terms.

When he was writing in a language which had the terminology of 'Ātman',

'Brahman', and 'Īśvara', he used that terminology just as it was used

in the texts and commentaries which he quoted from. He was less

precise in his use of terminology when writing in English because he

was using a language which did not have terms parallel to the Sanskrit

ones, and he was writing for an audience which was largely unaware of

the nuances contained in the Sanskrit terms. In his English writings

he tried to establish the same content of meaning for his less precise

---

[17] Works, Part II, p. 69.

[18] Ibid.

terminology by discursively describing shades of meaning which in Sanskrit were already present in the terms themselves. We may conclude that he felt that neither the English language nor the theology known to his English readers contained the terms and concepts necessary to make the distinctions between Ātman, Brahman, and Īśvara meaningful.

Yet for his purposes this was not a serious difficulty. The central point which he wanted to make was that Ultimate Reality was a unity upon which everything depended. He never tried to make very systematic distinctions between Ātman and Brahman, ātman and Ātman, or Īśvara and Brahman in either his English or Bengali writings. He seemed to feel that those issues became relevant only for those already persuaded that a single Reality was responsible for, and pervaded all existence. Then the subtle distinctions between Ātman, Brahman, and Īśvara became relevant as means of giving this more general understanding precision. Even when he briefly touched upon these issues in his debates with Hindu theologians, he only did so in direct answer to questions raised by them. He seemed to feel that the preliminary task of convincing people of the unity of Reality had not yet been accomplished, and that it was his primary work to complete that task.

In describing the knowledge which men could have of God, Rammohun consistently distinguished between knowledge of God's existence and knowledge about God's attributes. He said that this distinction was made in the śāstras, and it accounted for an apparent contradiction in the sacred writings. In some places, he noted, the śāstras said that God was imperceptible, and in others that God was "capable of being known". This was really no contradiction he said, for

> Where it is written that he is imperceptible and unde-
> finable, it is meant, that his likeness cannot be con-
> ceived; and where it is said that he is capable of being
> known, his mere existence is referred to, that is, that
> there is a God, as the indescribable creation and govern-
> ment of this universe clearly demonstrate. . .[19]

This distinction in the śāstras corresponded precisely to the distinction which Rammohun made in man's capacity to know God. As he put it,

> I agree. . . . that the attainment of perfect knowledge of the
> nature of the God-head is certainly difficult, or rather
> impossible; but to read the existence of the Almighty
> Being in his works of nature, is not, I will dare to say,
> so difficult to the mind of a man possessed of common
> sense. . .[20]

The existence of God was knowable through observation of the physical universe, without the information contained in the śāstras. In stating this position Rammohun occasionally used what has come to be known as the teleological argument.

> We see the multifarious, wonderful universe, as well as
> the birth, existence, and annihilation of its different
> parts; hence we naturally infer the existence of a Being
> who regulates the whole, and call him the Supreme: in
> the same manner as from the sight of a pot we conclude
> the existence of its artificer.[21]

And in spelling out the implications of this argument he used an illustration which was common in Hindu philosophy. He said that the relationship of the "Supreme all-pervading power" to the universe was like the

---

[19] Works, Part II, p. 130.

[20] Works, Part II, p. 87.

[21] Works, Part II, pp. 63-4. See also pp. 76, 115, 129.

relationship of the individual soul to the individual body: the soul provided life and order for the body and the Supreme Being provided animation and guidance for the universe.[22]

In his Translation of an Abridgment of the Vedanta he stated the same position in terms of the argument used in the śāstras. He pointed out that in the śāstras there was an attempt to probe behind the various manifestations of the universe to discover what the independent cause[23] of everything was. Air, light, the void, atoms, the individual soul, the gods and goddesses, etc., were all discussed and found to be dependent upon something more fundamental. That "something" was declared to be the Supreme Being, "without any figure, and beyond the limit of description".[24] That Supreme Being was known in the Brahma Sūtras[25] as both the material and efficient cause of the

---

[22]Works, Part II, p. 76. See also p. 130, where he says that it is the action of the body which reveals the presence of the spirit within.

[23]Rammohun uses "independent cause", Works, Part II, p. 64. Other terms have been used to express the same concept. Surendranath Dasgupta uses "unchangeable reality", A History of Indian Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), I, pp. 42-44. R.D. Ranade speaks of the "substratum", A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy (2nd ed.; Bombay; Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1968), pp. 53-75. Robert Ernest Hume, The Thirteen Principal Upanishads (2nd ed.; Madras: Oxford University Press, 1931), pp. 9-13 calls it the "unitary world-ground".

[24]Works, Part II, p. 66.

[25]B.S. I.iv.23. Cited by Rammohun in Works, Part II, p. 68. For a brief discussion of some of the difficulties involved in understanding God as the material cause of the universe, see Works, Part II, p. 148.

universe.

Rammohun argued that whereas Nature was transparent in revealing the existence of God, it was inscrutable with regard to his nature. It was incorrect to assume that because Nature revealed the existence of God, God was somehow united with the material of Nature. God was the independent ground of all material and non-material phenomena, but this did not mean that the characteristics of these phenomena were the characteristics of God. Rammohun argued this point in his A Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Vedas, which he wrote in response to Mrityunjay Vidyalankar's Vedāntā Chandrikā in 1817.[26]

He said:

> A belief in God is by no means connected with a belief of his being united to matter: for those that have faith in the existence of the Almighty, and are endued with common sense, scruple not to confess their ignorance as to his nature or mode of existence, in regard to the point of his relation to matter, or to the properties of matter.[27]

But this did not mean that men were left without any information

---

[26] Works, Part II, pp. 95-119. Mrityunjay published both an English and a Bengali version of his criticisms of Rammohun, and this English publication by Rammohun was intended to specifically answer Mrityunjay for what Rammohun called his "European readers". Rammohun wrote a shorter Bengali reply to Mrityunjay under the title Bhattāc-āryer Sahit Bicār, which is included in Granthabali, Part I, pp. 153-84. Mrityunjay's attack on Rammohun was not based on his opposition to the Vedānta, but rather on his objection to Rammohun's distribution of this sacred literature in the market place. He also insisted that this literature should be expounded only by those who were specially trained and competent to do so.

[27] Works, Part II, p. 107.

about the nature of God. True, this information was not to be found
in Nature, but it was available in the śāstras. All the śāstras
agreed that ultimately God was incomprehensible, indescribable, and
beyond the categories of human language. Yet, said Rammohun, for those
who were "beginners in the study of theology"[28] the Vedānta often
ascribed to God "such attributes as are held excellent among the human
species; as truth, mercy, justice, etc."[29] But it should always be
kept in mind that

> The Veda having at first explained the Supreme Being
> by different epithets, begins with the word Atha or now,
> and declares, that all descriptions which have been
> used to describe the Supreme Being are imperfect (ideal),
> because he (the Divine Being) by no means can be
> described.[30]

Thus the few descriptions of God which could be used with some assurance
(such as omnipresence, omniscience, justice, and truth), were really
not being used "according to the human notion of qualities in objects."[31]
In making this point in the debate with Sastri, Rammohun quoted Kena
Upaniṣad I. 3-4.

> Hence no vision can approach him; no language can describe
> him; no intellectual power can compass or determine him.

---

[28] Works, Part II, p. 175.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

> We know nothing of how the Supreme Being should be
> explained: He is beyond nature, which is above
> comprehension. . .[32]

This question of the nature of God and the adequacy of human descriptions of God is a recurrent theme in Rammohun's writings. He engaged the question again at some length in his debate with Kavitakar in 1820.. Kavitakar had suggested that Śruti really made no firm distinction between Brahman with form and without form, and that even in the Vedānta Brahman was spoken of in terms of form (sākāra)[33] on most occasions. Rammohun's reply to this amounted essentially to a paraphrase of Śankara's commentary on Brahma Sūtra III.ii.11-21.[34] Śankara there says that although some Vedic texts describe Brahman as having qualifications, while others describe Brahman as free of quali-fications, it is evident that both characterizations of Brahman cannot be true.

---

[32]Quoted by Rammohun at Works, Part II, p. 115. Rammohun's translation of the last line of the text is somewhat loose, since the word 'nature' is not present in the Sanskrit. The Sanskrit is: anyadeva tadviditādatho aviditādadhi. I would translate it as, "different indeed is that (Brahman) from the known, and also (it is) above the unknown". Rammohun's use of the term 'nature' for viditād is understandable, since he was trying to establish that the existence of Brahman could be known through nature, but that Brahman was not to be identified with nature.

[33]The meaning of sākāra is "having form". In Bengali the same term has a more specific connotation, meaning "embodied". Compounds of the term in Bengali explicitly refer to the worship of a God who can be given attributes. Thus sākārabād (teaching of a personal God), sākārabādi (worshipper of a personal God), and sākāropāsanā (worship of a personal God).

[34]The following summary of Śankara's discussion is taken from Rammohun's argument at Granthabali, Part II, pp. 81-5.

> As to that, the supreme Brahman, considered in Itself,
> cannot logically have both the characteristics; for it
> cannot be admitted that the very same thing is naturally
> possessed of attributes like form etc., and that it is
> also without these; for that is self-contradictory.
> . . . it is the Brahman that is absolutely attributeless
> and unchangeable that has to be accepted and not the
> opposite. For in all texts which aim at presenting
> the real nature of Brahman, as for instance in, 'sound-
> less, touchless, colourless, undiminishing' (Ka.I.iii.15)
> etc., Brahman is presented as devoid of all distinguishing
> attributes. (B.S. III.ii.11)[35]

In any case, it was absurd to think of Brahman with forms, since all

forms were known to be transitory and changeable, and all forms,

regardless of their magnitude, had some limitations of space. Con-

sequently, to ascribe form to Brahman would involve ascribing

limitation to it. And the teaching of both Śruti and Smṛti (B.S.

III.ii.17) was that Brahman was both unchangeable and omnipresent.

Rammohun faced another challenge to his conception of Brahman

in his debate with a Vaiṣṇava opponent known only as Gosvami.[36]

Gosvami suggested that all that Rammohun said about Brahman being

attributeless was accurate and supported by the śastras. Rammohun's

error, said Gosvami, consisted in his identification of Brahman with

the Highest Reality. Actually the Highest Reality was known in

three aspects: Brahman, Paramātman, and Bhāgavat. It was known as

Brahman when it was known in an abstract way. The concept of Brahman

was a metaphysical abstraction intended to emphasize the essential

---

[35]Compare B.S. I.i.4.

[36]For this discussion see especially Granthabali, Part II,
pp. 51-3.

unity of Being. The concept suggested no relationship between Ultimate

Reality and the world, or Ultimate Reality and the individual, other

than that all of them were essentially one. When the Ultimate Reality

was known as Paramātman it was being spoken of as the transcendent

Self, and the emphasis was being placed on the relationship between the

transcendental Self and the individual self (jīva). This was a term

to emphasize relationship rather than unity. But when Ultimate

Reality was spoken of a Bhāgavat it was being described in all its

fullness of both powers and relationships. Bhāgavat was essentially

pure bliss (ānanda); all other powers were its qualities. This was

the highest possible concept of the Ultimate, and because Kṛṣṇa was

called Bhāgavat in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, he was superior to Brahman.

Rammohun replied that Śruti was quite clear when it said that

the best description of Ultimate Reality was the negative "neti,

neti" ("not this, not this"),[37] and that this was the description of

Brahman. It was impossible to define Brahman essentially according

to either jāti (species) or śakti (power). It was impossible to define

Brahman methodologically according to either abhidā (direct meaning) or

lakṣanā (implied meaning). But this did not imply a deficiency in

Brahman. On the contrary, any attempt to define Ultimate Reality in

a way which went beyond the "neti, neti" of Śruti, involved lapsing

into a form of speech which was only permitted by Śruti for those

---

[37]Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad II.iii.6. All references to this
Upaniṣad are based upon the edition translated by Swami Madhavananda
(4th ed.; Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965).

incapable of grasping the truth that Ultimate Reality was beyond any conditioning adjuncts (upadhi). The Vaiṣṇava description of Bhāgavata/ Kṛṣṇa was merely an attempt to take this lower form of description and exalt it to a position of supremacy.

In summary then, what did Rammohun's monotheistic theology involve? We noted that although he was not systematic in his translation of Sanskrit terminology into English, he was consistent in his insistence that Ultimate Reality, by whatever term it was referred to, was a-unity. He argued that although the existence of God could be known through observation of Nature, only the śāstras were able to give information about God's nature. The description of God in the śāstras was of two kinds: on the one hand, God was described in terms of human characteristics and natural forms; on the other hand, God was said to be formless, changeless, and omnipresent. The first of these descriptions, said Rammohun, was intended for those incapable of understanding the second; but the second description was really the more accurate.

## 10.  The Worship of God:  Rammohun in Theory and Practice

What emerges as one of the basic reasons for the various criticisms of Rammohun's positions on polytheism and monotheism, is the threat which his positions seemed to represent to contemporary forms of worship.  We have noted that some of Rammohun's critics did not deny that his description of Brahman was accurate and properly grounded in Śruti.  But we have seen that these critics insisted that there were other descriptions of deity which Rammohun was ignoring or improperly relegating to a position of inferiority.[1]  The pattern which his opponents seemed to perceive was that the descriptions of deity which Rammohun was rejecting were precisely those which were most important in the various ceremonies of worship.  Rammohun acknowledged that worship[2] was "the chief duty of mankind and the sole

---

[1] See above p. 143.

[2] When Rammohun and Brahmos since his time have spoken of worship they have customarily used the word 'upāsana', which suggests reverence, adoration, and humble service.  'Pūjā', another word for worship with the same shades of meaning in the dictionary, has in fact come to be more associated with worship using images, flowers, water, etc.  In Bengal the word 'pūjā' is especially associated with the seasonal and lunar festivals dedicated to various female deities such as Durgā, Kālī, and Sarasvatī.  To say "pūjā korā" in Bengali means to perform some active kind of worship like going to a temple, bowing before an image, etc.  To say "upāsana korā" suggests performing some more reflective, quiet form of meditation.  (korā is a phonetic spelling of karā.  In Bengali conversation the initial unlengthened 'a' is usually pronounced more like our English 'o', and is often transliterated that way.)

cause of eternal beatitude,"[3] but to many of his contemporaries it

seemed as though he had made worship impossible by his refusal to grant

metaphorical descriptions of God any more than provisional status, and

by his overwhelming objections to the use of images in worship. What

forms of worship were appropriate to a Being without qualities?

Sankara Sastri raised that question when he asserted, "That

which cannot be conceived cannot be worshipped."[4] To this Rammohun

replied:

> Should the learned Brahman consider a full conception
> of the nature, essence, or qualities of the Supreme
> Being, or a physical picture truly representing the
> Almighty power, with offerings of flowers, leaves,
> and viands, as essential to adoration, I agree with
> the learned Brahman with respect to the impossibility
> of the worship of God. But, should adoration imply
> only the elevation of the mind to the conviction of
> the existance of the Omnipresent Deity, as testified
> by His wise and wonderful works, and continual con-
> templation of His power as so displayed, together
> with a constant sense of the gratitude which we
> naturally owe to Him, for our existence, sensation,
> and comfort, - I never will hesitate to assert that
> His adoration is not only possible, and practicable,
> but even encumbent upon every rational creature.[5]

It is significant that in this passage Rammohun used 'adoration' as a

synonym for 'worship', and that he defined the essence of adoration as

simply "the elevation of the mind to the conviction of the existence

---

[3]Works, Part II, p. 41.

[4]Works, Part II, p. 115.

[5]Works, Part II, pp. 115-6.

of the Omnipresent Deity" (my italics). For him the adoration and contemplation of God the Creator was enough to result in gratitude and, as he suggested at another place,[6] the purification of the mind. Such adoration was not dependent upon being able to describe the characteristics of God in detail, nor was it dependent upon the possibility of visualizing God through the use of images.

We have already described Rammohun's opposition to the use of images as means of expressing the attributes and nature of God. Many of his opponents questioned his position, and they argued that the śāstras sanctioned image worship without hesitation. In a small pamphlet published in 1825,[7] Rammohun acknowledged that worship by means of images and rituals was not altogether useless, since the śāstras permitted it for the ignorant. But such methods of worship, he insisted, were by no means, "indispensable steps towards attaining divine knowledge."[8] To substantiate this point Rammohun quoted from Manu:

> All rites ordained in the Veda; oblations to fire and solemn sacrifices, pass away; but that which passes not away is declared to be the syllable Om, thence called Akshara since it is a symbol of God, the Lord of created beings.[9]

---

[6]Works, Part II, p. 48.

[7]"Translation of a Sanskrit Tract on Different Modes of Worship" (1825), in Works, Part II, pp. 195-8.

[8]Works, Part II, p. 123.

[9]Works, Part II, p. 87. This quotation is from Manu II. 84. Bühler's translation is essentially the same.

> Thus must the chief of the twice-born, though he neglect
> the ceremonial rites mentioned in the Sastra, be diligent
> in attaining a knowledge of God, in controlling his organs
> of sense, and in repeating the Veda.[10]

He said that the Śāstras provided many examples of people who had

attained divine knowledge

> without observing the rules and rites prescribed by the
> Sastra to each class of Hindus; and also, examples /were/
> frequently found in the Veda of persons, who, though they
> neglected the performance of religious rites and ceremonies,
> attained divine knowledge and absorption by control over
> their passions and senses, and by contemplation of the
> Ruler of the universe.[11]

Rammohun also insisted that there were numerous precedents in

which those who had attained divine knowledge were not in what were

normally regarded as the proper classes for the attainment of such

knowledge. He cited the examples quoted in Brahma Sūtra III.iv.36-39[12]

and at Brahma Sūtra I.iii.38. The latter passage is particularly

---

[10] Works, Part II, pp. 87, 105. This is from Manu XII.92. There
is an interesting difference in Bühler's translation of the first part
of this verse. Where Rammohun has ". . . though he neglect the cere-
monial rites. . .", Bühler has "After giving up even the above-mentioned
sacrificial rites. . ." Rammohun prefers to make the text sound as
though the rites are optional, whereas it is possible to argue that the
point of the text is that the rites must be done and then given up for
even better things.

[11] Works, Part II, p. 101.

[12] The examples cited here concern those who are not associated
with any particular āśrama (order, stage of life). Śańkara argues that
there are examples of such people acquiring knowledge in both Śruti
and Smṛti, and that the methods by which they did so ranged from yogic
discipline to japa (repetition of mantras) to good deeds. This dis-
cussion is at Works, Part II, pp. 123-125.

interesting since it deals with a Śūdra attaining knowledge of God. In his commentary, Śaṅkara accepts the Vedic teaching that Śūdras should not hear the Vedas, but he acknowledges that they may attain divine knowledge without hearing the Vedas. Their attainment may be the result of good previous lives[13] or the result of perceiving the truth lying behind the anecdotes and mythologies of the Āgamas and Purāṇas. Rammohun concluded from this that although the Vedas were by far the best sources for imparting knowledge of the divine, the Smṛti, Āgama, and other works could also "afford means of attaining final beatitude"[14] when they taught "the true and eternal existence of God, and the false and perishable being of the universe."[15]

Rammohun's position was that while the use of images was sometimes sanctioned as a proper method of worship, this was only done as a concession to the ignorant; while the rituals of particular classes of people were encouraged, this was only to help them develop a more adequate understanding of God; and while the regulated life of the

---

[13]This suggests that Śaṅkara's understanding of rebirth was a good deal less mechanistic than one might expect. Here Śaṅkara suggests that although a person is a Śūdra, their previous lives may have been good enough to make them ready for highest knowledge. The fact that a person is born a Śūdra does not mean that we can conclude that his previous lives have been so evil that he is restricted to this class of birth. This suggests that the comparative virtue of peoples' past lives cannot be too quickly deduced from their present birth.

[14]Works, Part II, p. 125.

[15]Ibid.

various classes was generally advisable, it was by no means an indispensable aid to the full understanding of God which was the sole cause of "final beatitude." All of these aspects of contemporary worship were potentially helpful, but they were not the essence of worship, and too much emphasis upon these methods was misleading and harmful.

The best summary statement of how Rammohun believed worship should be understood, is one which he himself made in Religious Instructions Founded on Sacred Authorities:

> Q. - In what manner is this worship to be performed?
> A. - By bearing in mind that the Author and Governor of this visible universe is the Supreme Being, and comparing this idea with the sacred writings and with reason. In this worship it is indispensably necessary to use exertions to subdue the senses, and to read such passages as direct attention to the Supreme Spirit. Exertion to subdue the senses, signifies an endeavour to direct the will and the sense, and the conduct in such a manner as not only to prevent our own or others' ill, but to secure our own and others' good. . .[16]

This passage contains the four elements which were central to Rammohun's concept of worship. Firstly, as we have already seen, he felt that one could begin to understand God by looking at the universe and realizing that God was its "Creator and Governor". That, one might say, was the discovery of the object of worship. Secondly, although Rammohun did not believe that the rituals and laws of social class were necessary aids in the discovery and understanding of God's existence, he did believe that they were useful in providing discipline and order. Those who

---

[16]Works, Part II, p. 131. This was first published in 1829. It is reprinted at Works, Part II, pp. 127-134, under the title "The Universal Religion: Religious Instructions founded on Sacred Authorities".

tried to regulate their "food and conduct"[17] completely according to their own preferences were self-willed, and, said Rammohun, "to act according to our own wish is opposed both by the Scriptures and by reason."[18] The third element of worship was reading śāstras which inculcated the worship of the unitary God. The fourth element, moral and useful action, was in some sense a result of the other elements, but it was also a constituent part of worship. Just as he assumed that immoral actions resulted from improper and degraded forms of worship, so he assumed that moral action would result from proper worship.

Rammohun seems to have been dissatisfied with the conventional forms of worship for many years. Even before he moved to Calcutta he had tried to create a context in which he and his friends could engage in stimulating religious discussions. While in Rangpur he had begun such a group, and even then, before he became known as a publisher of religious texts, he had encountered opposition.[19] In 1815, soon after he settled in Calcutta, he and some of his closest friends formed the Atmiya Sabha,[20] a society dedicated to the spiritual improvement of its members. The weekly meetings were held in the houses of members,

---

[17]Works, Part II, p. 131.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Collet, pp. 27-28.

[20]See Collet, pp. 68, 74. There is also a reference to the Atmiya Sabha, although not by name, in the Missionary Register, London, 1816. The reference is reprinted in Records, p. 4.

and consisted of recitation of passages from various Hindu śāstras,

chanting of monotheistic hymns composed by Rammohun, and his friends,

and discussion. This group encouraged debate on religious and social

issues, and soon became the centre of controversy. The society ceased

to meet in 1819.

Soon after this society came to an end, Rammohun began regular-

ly attending and supporting the Unitarian services established by the

Calcutta Unitarian Committee under the leadership of William Adam in

September 1821.[21] Rammohun became one of the most active members of

the group, as well as one of its largest financial supporters. He

said that he attended the services there because they focused upon the

Creator of all who was worshipped without recourse to doctrines of

"Man-God" or "God-Man", or to doctrines of a unitary God in many forms.[22]

But even though Rammohun was in fundamental agreement with the

unitarian theology of this society, he was not blind to the fact that

this group was essentially European in membership and theological orien-

tation, and that his participation was somewhat anomalous. In enunciat-

ing the aims of this society, William Adam had used language which was

decidedly Christian: "We aim to remove ignorance and superstition, and

---

[21]Collet, p. 131. For more about the Calcutta Unitarian
Committee, formed in 1821, see Collet, pp. 131-34, 224-27, 244-45.

[22]Works, Part II, pp. 191-94. Rammohun was undoubtedly asked
the question many times, but the way in which his reply is made is in
a small pamphlet in which he uses the question as the title: "Answer
of a Hindoo, to the Question, 'Why do you Frequent a Unitarian Place of
Worship Instead of the Numerously Attended Established Churches?'" (1827).

to furnish information respecting the evidences, the duties, and the doctrines of the religion of Christ."[23]. Much as Rammohun admired the life and teachings of Jesus, he must have felt somewhat uncomfortable with such an expression of purpose. He wanted to see a group formed which would base its strict monotheism on Hindu śāstras, and which would provide an atmosphere more congenial to Indians. After all, the major purpose of his religious writings was to prove that Indian religious and philosophical literature provided a sound foundation for a monotheistic system of worship.

With the founding of the Brahmo Samaj in 1828 Rammohun had the setting which he had wanted for so long. It is clear from the Trust Deed of the Brahmo Samaj that he intended this society to represent in practice the ideals which he had encouraged in his writings. In the Trust Deed he wrote that the premises which he and his friends had purchased as a place of worship could be used

> . . .as and for a place of public meeting of all sorts and
> descriptions of people without distinction as shall be-
> have and conduct themselves in an orderly sober religious
> and devout manner for the worship and adoration of the
> Eternal Unsearchable and Immutable Being who is the Author
> and Preserver of the Universe but not under or by any
> other name designation or title peculiarly used for and
> applied to any particular Being or Beings by any man or
> set of men whatsoever and that no graven image statue
> or sculpture carving painting picture portrait or the
> likeness of anything shall be admitted within the said
> premises and that no sacrifice offering or oblation of
> any kind or thing shall ever be permitted therein. . .
> and that in conducting the said worship and adoration no
> object animate or inanimate that has been or is or shall

---

[23]Collet, p.132. Adam wrote this in a letter to R. Dutton, June 26, 1827.

hereafter become or be recognized as an object of wor-
ship by any man or set of men shall be reviled or
slightingly or contemptuously spoken of or alluded to
either in preaching praying or in the hymns or other
mode of worship that may be delivered or used in said
Messuage or building and that no sermon preaching dis-
course prayer or hymn be delivered made or used in such
worship but such as have a tendency to the promotion of
the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the
Universe to the promotion of charity morality piety
benevolence virtue and the strengthening /of/ the bonds
of union between men of all religious persuasions and
creeds. . .[24]

This was the kind of worship practiced by the Brahmo Samaj.

According to the testimony of an observer who attended a meeting of the

Brahmo Samaj in 1832,

. . .preaching from the Vedant and singing psalms in praise
of the one true God occupy the time of those who meet under
the roof to worship the eternal Creator of the universe,
and to pour forth their supplications at his throne with-
out being detracted (sic) by the unmeaning and gaudy
pageantry of superstition. Christians and men of every
persuasion are permitted to be present at the religious
acts that are performed within this sanctuary, and as
the preaching on the texts of the Vedant is in _pracrito
bhasa_, or the vernacular Bengalee, all can understand
what is said. No image of any kind is allowed to enter
this house, nor is there any kind of sacrifice. . .
The chief objects of this institution are to deliver
the Hindoos from the thraldom of superstition and idolatry,
to lead them to the worship of one God, and to improve
their moral character by instructions calculated to raise
their ideas from groveling objects, which only appeal to
the senses, to those which are of a mental nature, and
which raise the soul to a Being who is Spirit, and who
wishes that all who worship him should worship him in
spirit and in truth.[25]

---

[24]Collet, pp. 471-2.

[25]Records, p. 90. The article was originally in the _Reformer_ and
was subsequently reprinted in the _Asiatic Journal_, January, 1832.

The meetings were based essentially upon the reading and exposition of Vedāntic texts.[26]  Two Telegu Brahmins read passages from the Veda, one of the members of the Samaj read from the Upaniṣads, the ācārya (teacher, minister) of the Samaj gave an explanation of the Upaniṣads in Bengali, and various members of the group sang monotheistic hymns composed by Rammohun and his friends.  The meetings were open to all races, religions, and classes.

Rammohun's feeling that such a specifically Indian form of worship was necessary, was confirmed by the response of many Europeans to the establishment of the Brahmo Samaj.  One of the English newspapers[27] in Calcutta regretted Rammohun's establishment of the Brahmo Samaj because this seemed to indicate that Rammohun would not be the important agent in helping to Christianize India that Christians had hoped he would be.  The same newspaper regarded the Brahmo Samaj as a degenerate form of Unitarianism, nearer Deism than Unitarianism. Even Rammohun's close friend William Adam reflected sadly that he now realized that Rammohun had only used Unitarianism as a means of undermining idolatry and spreading pure notions of God, "without believing in the divine authority of the Gospel."[28]

---

[26]Collet, pp. 225-6.  Records, pp. 91-3.

[27]The newspaper was the John Bull.  Between January and October 1830 it included several letters and articles opposed to the formation of the Brahmo Samaj.  See Records, pp. 82, 85-6, and also Collet, pp. 226-7, 242-48.

[28]Collet, p. 227.

As much as Europeans praised Rammohun for his efforts against idolatry, polytheism, and sectarianism, it was evident that they did so primarily because they regarded all of these activities as preliminary to his becoming a Christian. When they realized that he fully intended to base all of these efforts on Indian authority, they felt either that his efforts had degenerated or that he had in some sense betrayed them. Such attitudes could only have inhibited most Indians from participating in the activities of religious organizations founded by Europeans, for they would not have wished to appear to have been converted to Christianity when their only purpose was to worship God in a manner which corresponded with their convictions.

Despite the fact that Rammohun wrote so much about religious issues, and despite the fact that he founded and participated in several different religious groups, little is known about his own participation in the worship of these groups. Although he founded the Brahmo Samaj and was recognized as its most important member, he did not dominate the services. He put the regular conduct of the services into the hands of others. Two Telegu Brahmins were hired to recite the Vedas, Utsabananda Vidyavagish read the Upaniṣads, and Ramchandra Vidyavagish gave expositions of the Upaniṣads in Bengali. The first secretary of the Brahmo Samaj was Tarachand Chakravarti.[29] Rammohun never took over these positions to insure that his own interpretations of the śāstras would be more explicitly promulgated. He

---

[29]Collet, p. 226.

did write monotheistic hymns which were sung in the services, but his friends also wrote hymns which were used frequently.

We know that the content and style of service in the Brahmo Samaj reflected Rammohun's wishes, but beyond the institutionalized form of worship which he established there, we know little about his personal devotional life. There are suggestions in his writings and in anecdotes told about him that he may have followed Tantric practices in his private religious life. Partially this is suggested by the familiarity with Tantric writings which is so evident in his own writings. He referred to at least nineteen different Tantric texts in his more than one hundred references to Tantric material.[30] The bulk of his references are to Śaiva-Śākta Tantras, which might suggest a preference for these Tantras and the forms of worship associated with them. But the context in which he used many of these references makes us hesitate to draw too definite a conclusion from their preponderance. After all, he used many of these references in his debates with Vaiṣṇavas in an attempt to demonstrate that the claims which they made were not unique, and that the same claims which they made for Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa could be made with equally good justification for Śiva. Had Rammohun been faced with

---

[30] See Dilip Kumar Biswas, "Rāmmohan Rāyer Dharmamot O Tantraśāstra", Visva-Bharati Patrika. XVI (1959-1961), 225-248. Biswas has a detailed list of Rammohun's references to Tantric material on pp. 234-5 and in notes 48-67. This article is the only thorough analysis of Rammohun's relationship to Tantra in either Bengali or English.

other opponents his choice of texts might well have been different.[31]

But his interest in Tantra is demonstrated in other ways than merely his textual knowledge. Throughout most of his life he had a close friendship with a well known Tantric samnyāsin Hariharananda Tirthaswami.[32] Hariharananda stayed with Rammohun for extended periods of time in both Rangpur and Calcutta, and they seemed to share not only a common interest in Tantric texts, but also a common dedication to establishing a monotheistic form of worship. Yet despite their close friendship, little is known with any certainty about the effects of this association on Rammohun's personal religious life. After Rammohun's death there was a tradition among certain Tantrics that he had been initiated into some form of Tantric practice by Hariharananda;[33] but this tradition is so tenuous that is is impossible to say with any certainty whether it is true, and if it is true, what kind of practice Rammohun might have been initiated into.

---

[31] Biswas, pp. 232-240 suggests that Rammohun was attracted to Tantra because it was a monistic system which ultimately had the same ideal as Vedānta, because it emphasized the need to worship, because it did not emphasize world renunciation, and because it was socially progressive in its attitudes toward women and class. Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, Vividha Prabandha (Chinsura: Budhodaya Jantra, 1905), Part II, pp. 165-71 says that Rammohun realized that Tantra was the proper religious system for the Kali age, and so although he knew Hindu, Muslim and Christian religious ideas, he realized that for the Kali age there could be no salvation outside Tantra. Mukhopadhyay's views are not very helpful, since they are based more upon the statements about Tantra found in Tantric texts, than upon statements about Tantra found in Rammohun's writings.

[32] See Collet, pp. 45, 68-9, 101, 224n., 241.

[33] Biswas, pp. 240-243.

It seems surprising that a man who devoted so much of his attention to religious questions, and whose life was so public, should have a private religious life about which so little is known. No one could be in doubt about his dedication to monotheism and his opposition to image worship. Everyone knew what places of public worship he attended. And yet even those who read his writings and knew him while he lived in Calcutta, were unsure of the nature or extent of his personal religious practices.[34] We shall see in a subsequent part of this study that this appeared to his critics to mean that he was in fact not a deeply religious man and that his attacks on polytheism and image worship were not motivated by deep personal religious conviction, but by a general antipathy toward his own tradition.

---

[34]It was Debendranath Tagore, for example, who told of meeting Sukhananda Swami in Delhi in 1857 and hearing from him that Rammohun was a disciple of Hariharananda. Debendranath was a friend of Rammohun, and it is surprising that he would have first heard such a story only 24 years after Rammohun died. It is an indication of how little even Rammohun's closest friends knew about his personal religious life. For Debendranath's description of this meeting, see Biswas, pp. 242-243.

## 11. Evaluation

There are several obvious and substantial disagreements between
Rammohun and his opponents on questions about the nature and worship
of God. Rammohun insisted that polytheism represented a misleading
understanding of God: his opponents argued that polytheism was a
useful and essentially accurate way of speaking about God. Rammohun
said that the best description of God was found in the Upaniṣads and
_Brahma Sūtra_ where Brahman was described as essentially without attri-
butes: his Vaiṣṇava opponents said that such a description of God was
not the ultimate one and that the best description of God included many
of the highest attributes of love, relationship, and power as they
applied to Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa. Rammohun said that God could best be worshipped
by simple adoration of his majesty and his works in Nature: his oppo-
nents said that the God whom Rammohun described could not be worshipped
at all, for he had no qualities.

It is not surprising that Rammohun differed from some of his
contemporaries on such questions. Theologians, whether professional
or popular, often differ, and the fact that they differ is not par-
ticularly noteworthy. And yet scholars have often made a great deal
of the fact that Rammohun differed from his contemporaries on theo-
logical questions. Some have even suggested that the differences were

161

so substantial that it is possible to argue that Rammohun was not a Hindu.[1] In view of such evaluations of Rammohun's theology it seems worthwhile to analyze the issues of disagreement more carefully. Perhaps the disagreements which he had with some of his contemporaries were more substantial than the normal disagreements between theologians, representing different positions within a tradition.

The first major area of disagreement was polytheism. Rammohun saw little justification or use for polytheism. He said that at best polytheism was a very provisional metaphor which might help some of the most ignorant people to focus their attention on a god and eventually lead them to a better understanding of God. But polytheism was always a form of understanding which should be superseded by a more adequate form of understanding. Rammohun also rejected most of the mythology which accompanied polytheism. He rejected it either in the sense that he objected to it (for example, the stories of the exploits

---

[1]Piyus Kanti Das argues that although Rammohun was faithful to the Upaniṣads, he neglected many other parts of the Hindu tradition which are important in Hindu theology. He concludes that because of this neglect Rammohun cannot fairly be called a Hindu. See, Piyus Kanti Das, Raja Rammohun Roy and Brahmoism (Kakdwip Bengal: author, 1970), p. 102.

This kind of argument is not always intended as an indictment of Rammohun, and Das certainly does not intend it as an indictment. It is a favorite form of argument among Brahmo Samaj members who are interested in proving that Brahmoism is a separate religion and not merely a branch of Hinduism.

One of the most important Brahmo theologians, Sitanath Tattvabhushan, argued that Rammohun was a Hindu in the tradition of Śaṅkara because of the way in which he interpreted the Vedānta tradition. So he, using the same evidence as Das, comes to exactly the opposite conclusion. See Sitanath Tattvabhushan, The Philosophy of Brahmaism (Madras: Higginbotham, 1909), pp. 4-6.

of Kṛṣṇa) or that he regarded it as childish fantasy. He agreed that

it might be able to hold the attention of some who were otherwise

uninterested in God or gods, but he felt that the damage caused by

many of the mythological stories outweighed the benefit which they

might have.

Rammohun's opponents did not leave a record of any systematic

defence of polytheism and mythology. Usually they argued in defence

of a particular god or a particular mythology. They seemed more con-

cerned that Rammohun was attacking their particular god than that he was

attacking the whole system of polytheism. In fact, they argued from

precisely the sectarian basis which Rammohun said was the pernicious

result of polytheism. The Vaiṣṇavas said that Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa was higher

than other gods and that other gods bowed to him. They based this on

many texts in Vaiṣṇava literature, but they appealed primarily to

Bhagavad Gītā IX.23-24, where Kṛṣṇa says that he is always the object

of devotion and worship, even when people worship him under another

name and in another form.[2] Rammohun said that a similar claim to

---

[2]Even those who are devotees of other gods,
And worship them permeated with faith,
It is only Me, son of Kuntī, that even they
Worship, (tho) not in the enjoined fashion.

For I of all acts of worship
Am both the recipient and the lord;
But they do not recognize Me
In the true way; therefore they fall (from the 'heaven' they win).

Quoted according to The Bhagavad Gītā, trans. Franklin Edgerton, (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1964), IX.23-24.

supremacy could be made by any other group for the god whom they worshipped, and the result would be a series of mutually exclusive claims to supremacy.

Rammohun's Vaisnava opponents were so interested in defending their own gods that they did not challenge Rammohun very vigorously on the general attack on polytheism which was implied in his criticisms of their position. What he was saying was that some ways of understanding God were not very useful, and some of these were actually misleading. This was a major theological challenge because it was not simply a question of deciding which god should be more highly regarded than another. Rammohun was not just trying to change the order of rank among the gods. He was challenging polytheism precisely in terms of its intention, which was to point people to a fuller and more adequate understanding of Being. Rammohun felt that this intention was to be fulfilled in two ways. Firstly, polytheism was to capture the attention of those who were uninterested in God. Secondly, polytheism was to help provide a fuller and more composite picture of what God was like than would be possible if the complete description of God was based only on one god. Even the composite picture would be incomplete, since God was always greater than our understanding of Him, but this composite picture would be nearer to the truth than any individual picture could be. Rammohun's point was that polytheism might occasionally be fulfilling its function of capturing people's interest, but it was failing to make them aware of the larger picture. Instead,

people were enamoured by the god whom they had become interested in

and they were unaware of the total picture of God which could be seen

by looking with equal interest at other gods. Polytheism should be

a series of parts which created a whole picture of what God was like.

Unfortunately people took individual parts and defended them as though

they constituted the whole.

The discussion between Rammohun and the defenders of polytheism

involved theoretical and practical issues, and in evaluating Rammohun's

contribution to this discussion both kinds of issues are important.

Those who defend polytheism at the theoretical level do so because

they see that it presents a view of reality which acknowledges both the

complexity of the world and the finitude of man's understanding. Alain

Danielou, for example, says that polytheism is an attempt to get a

more complete sketch of the world and the transcendent by adding up a

number of approaches.[3] He and other defenders of polytheism assume

that the polytheist will readily acknowledge that his understanding

of a god comprises only a limited part of the whole. Ideally poly-

theists will not argue that their view is any more than one view of

a reality which is larger than anything which they understand. The

practical results of such an understanding of God should be humility,

tolerance, and an eagerness to learn from others. Humility should

result because every person will realize how limited his understanding

---

[3]Alain Danielou, Hindu Polytheism, Bollingen Series LXXIII (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 7.

is. Tolerance should result because every person will acknowledge that other views, even though partial, are helpful in developing a more complete understanding. Each person should be eager to learn from others so that his understanding of God will be as complete as possible.

Rammohun would have been prepared to acknowledge the utility of polytheism if he had observed that it had these results. However he argued against polytheism largely because it did not have these results. He cited instances of devotees of Visnu and Siva insulting and even physically attacking each other. He noted that many devotees regarded their god as the supreme god or even as the only God. They were arrogant in their claims, intolerant of the claims made by others, and unwilling to learn from the experiences of others. Rammohun argued that these practical consequences of polytheism proved that it had become a mis-leading way of conceptualizing God.

Rammohun took seriously the intentions of polytheism and said that by those very standards it had failed. It was intended to attract those who might have remained uninterested in God without the pageantry of polytheism. But instead of remaining a system of belief and practice for the very irreligious or ignorant, it had become the system for everyone. This, said Rammohun, involved a serious misunderstanding of the adequacy of polytheism as well as a significant underestimation of people's capacity to understand more accurate and less sensational accounts of God.

The second intention of polytheism was to allow people to develop a more adequate understanding of God by gradually constructing a more composite understanding based on the cumulative effect of learning

about many gods.  Polytheism was merely a symbol which pointed to something beyond itself, and if it properly served its purpose people would become less and less dependent upon it as they came more and more to understand what it was pointing to.  The more they understood the real nature of God the less they would rely on the stories of particular gods.

Rammohun argued that polytheism was not fulfilling this second intention.  People contined to worship the gods whom they had worshipped for years, and most people had no idea that these gods were symbols pointing to some greater reality.  For most people there was no question of a fuller understanding of God, since they assumed that their understanding of their god was sufficient.  Because allegiance to gods had blinded people to the search for God, Rammohun insisted that polytheism was a harmful system of conceptualizing and worshipping God.

Rammohun's difference of opinion with his opponents about polytheism had practical issues as its basis.  Rammohun accepted the intentions of polytheism but argued that these intentions were consistently subverted as polytheism became an end in itself rather than a means to an end.  His opponents replied that polytheism was all that most people were capable of understanding, and the reason that polytheism was not self-transcending was because it corresponded to people's capacity for understanding God.  Rammohun insisted that people were generally capable of far more.  We shall consider this difference of opinion about human capacity more fully in our discussion of the religious life.

The second major area of disagreement between Rammohun and his opponents was his discussion of monotheism. Rammohun claimed that his monotheism was based on the śāstras and on Śaṅkara. In a sense that was correct. He quoted the śāstras frequently to substantiate all of his theological points, and he cited Śaṅkara's interpretation of the śāstras more often than any other to illuminate the meaning of the śāstras. He also emphasized the difference between the essential nature of God and the nature of God as it could be known through human understanding and categories - a distinction which is central in Śaṅkara's theological writings.[4] But where Śaṅkara made a sharp distinction between his descriptions of God in human terms and his discussions of the inadequacy of such terms, Rammohun was less clear. For Śaṅkara there was a great distinction between the God of the philosopher and the God of the devotee, and he regarded such a distinction as a necessary one. Rammohun thought that the God of the philosopher and the God of the devotee could be closer; that is, the gap between the description of God in His transcendent form and the description of God for purposes of worship should be a small one.

----

[4]In Advaita philosophy a distinction is made between two kinds of definitions of Brahman. The tatastha-lakṣana is the accidental definition which speaks about Brahman in terms such as Creator. The svarūpa-lakṣana is the essential definition which speaks about Brahman as sat (being), cit (intelligence), and ānanda (bliss). Although this issue cannot be developed at length here, I must acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor T.R.V. Murti, who, in a course entitled "Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja" taught at McMaster University during 1969-1970, introduced me to the importance of this distinction.

Rammohun's opponents were not defenders of Śankara's Advaita

Vedānta, and yet they had something in common with Śankara which

made them disagree with Rammohun on this question of how God should

be described. They, with Śankara, assumed that the way in which God

was known by the philosopher or theologian was quite different than

the way in which God was known by the average devotee. Rammohun

merged the two perspectives in most of his writings, arguing that the

devotee could usually understand what the theologian explained. His

opponents said that Rammohun was insisting on an understanding of

God which was too difficult for the average person to understand, and

that he was doing so after having removed the intermediate polytheistic

concepts which could help people to improve their capacity to under-

stand God.

Rammohun's tendency to merge the perspective of the theologian

and the devotee has another implication for our understanding of Ram-

mohun's relationship to Śankara. Rammohun did not speak about God in

two clearly distinct ways. He tried to exalt the language of polytheism

so that it more adequately reflected the true nature of God. Simul-

taneously he disregarded much of the language about Brahman which

Śankara used because much of that language did not reflect a God who

could be worshipped. As a result he often used language which resembles

the discussions of God in Rāmānuja.[5] He talked about the good qualities

---

[5]Rāmānuja's position is thoroughly developed in a recent book by John Braisted Carmen, The Theology of Rāmānuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). Some parts of that discussion which are particularly relevant here are pp. 67-71 where the concept of the Supreme Person (Puruṣottama) is described, and pp. 98-115

of God such as omniscience and omnipotence.[6] He frequently referred
to God as the Creator. He admitted that even though we could say these
things about God we still had to admit that God was beyond our under-
standing, but he did not seem to mean that a true knowledge of God
would negate the validity of these descriptions. What he seemed to
mean was that a true knowledge of God would involve even more than these
descriptions suggested. It seems clear that in Śaṅkara's theology even
these descriptions of God are ultimately negated. In Śaṅkara's
theology, for example, the description of God as a Creator is still
part of the limited human perspective which must be negated before a

---

[5]continued where the defining attributes of God's essential
nature and God's action as Creator are described.

From Carmen's discussion it is clear that Rāmānuja's position
was not identical to what Rammohun said on these questions, but it is
apparent that Rammohun's discussion was occasionally close to Rāmānuja's
concept of a Supreme Person who was the Creator.

[6]Despite the fact that Rammohun identified himself with the
theology of Śaṅkara and the Upaniṣads and Brahma Sūtra, he did not place
as much emphasis on the impossibility of positive descriptions of God.
His emphasis was on the unity of God. For example, when he introduced
his translation of the Katha Upaniṣad he said that "This work not only
treats polytheism with contempt and disdain, but inculcates invariably
the unity of God as the intellectual Principle, the sole Origin of
individual intellect, entirely distinct from matter and its affection;
and teaches also the mode of directing the mind to him." Works, Part II,
p. 23.

He accepted the ultimate result of Vedānta theology, which was
the essential definition of Brahman as sat, cit, and ānanda, but he
rarely used that definition. He mostly used some description of God
which emphasized the unity of God but which was more descriptive than
the formula sat, cit, and ānanda.

true realization of God can result. Rammohun's difference from Śaṅkara on these issues can perhaps best be summarized by the use of a spatial metaphor. Rammohun, it might be said, raised the level of language and understanding of God for the devotee; but because he usually spoke of God at only one level, he also lowered the level of language and understanding of God for the theologian. The result was one kind of language which seemed inadequate for both of the purposes for which he intended it: for the edification of the devotee and to identify with the theology of Śaṅkara.

This can be explained at least partially by Rammohun's confidence in reason. Rammohun felt that all but a very few men were capable of understanding God in the terms he was defending. Rammohun felt that sound theology would result in a description of God which, although limited, was put in positive terms; and because it was in positive terms it was the basis for a system of worship. Śaṅkara's evaluation of human reason seemed to lead him in another direction. He said that human reason eventually pointed to the negation of human reason, and thus the negative description of God (the "neti, neti" of the Upaniṣads) was the ultimate consequence of human reason. The result of sound theology for Śaṅkara was a negative result, a rejection of all attempts to describe God. A system of worship would obviously be impossible if it was based purely on the negative consequences of sound theology. Therefore polytheism was a necessary although provisional way of understanding God, since it allowed a system of worship to develop.

There are some interesting implications of this difference in
position. Śankara seems to have created a philosophical system which
is highly defensible, and the conception of God which is a part of
this system is so philosophically refined that it cannot be easily
discredited by most of the usual problems such as theodicy. The
polytheism for the devotees, on the other hand, is open to numerous
objections, but that is not regarded as problematic, since significant
theological defence does not take place at that level but rather at the
level of the discussion of Brahman. Rammohun wanted both kinds of theo-
logical discussion to be free of the problems which would make them sub-
ject to the ridicule of "freethinkers". That is why he dismissed
miracles and mythology. He was concerned about developing a theological
system which was able to meet the doubts of the skeptic. Śankara seems
to have been interested in developing a theological system which had
ample provisions for the devotional needs of the pious, even if those
needs were fulfilled through a theology which was only defensible through
its own negation.

The system of worship which resulted from Rammohun's theology
was also not entirely consistent with Śankara, even though Rammohun
identified himself with Śankara. The logical result of Śankara's
theology was a form of worship which aimed at the negation of the
self and its absorption into Being. There could be no room for
distinctions between the object and subject when the nature of Reality
was accurately understood. Rammohun, however, emphasized the
transcendence of God as well as the difference between God and man.

He occasionally made some comments about absorption as the goal of worship, but when he did so he seemed to be simply describing various interpretations of an interesting phenomenon.[7] He wrote about the

---

[7]In his discussion of different kinds of worship in "Translation of a Sunskrit Tract on Different Modes of Worship", Works, Part II, pp. 195-198 Rammohun made the following comments:

> Spiritual Devotion is of two kinds. The first consists in meditation on the soul being of divine origin. A continuance of such meditation is believed to have a tendency to rescue the soul from all human feelings and passions, and thereby the soul is ultimately brought to its original divine perfection for surpassing both human search and description. This is the state which is commonly called absorption. The devotees who adhere to this mode of devotion being supposed naturally incapable of committing any moral or social crime, are not subjected to the precepts or prohibitions found in the Sastras.
> The second kind of devotion consists in believing that the Deity is possessed of all the attributes of perfection such as omnipresence, omnipotence, &c., and that the individual sentient soul is, in its present state of material connection, separate from, and dependent on, the Deity. Besides, the practice of charity, &c., as mentioned in this text are enjoined on the performers of this mode of devotion as their religious duties. This class of devotees enjoy, after death, eternal beatitude in the highest heaven, as existences separate from the deity and from each other, while worshippers by means of forms, as the Vedanta affirms, enjoy only temporary bliss.
> From what I have noticed as to the two kinds of notions entertained respecting spiritual devotion, the reader will perceive the reason why a teacher of spiritual knowledge sometimes is justified in speaking of the Deity in the first person, in reference to the assumed divine nature of his soul, although in the same discourse, he again treats of God in the third person, in reference to the present separated and subordinate state of the soul. Works, Part II, pp. 197-198n.

It is noteworthy, I think, that Rammohun treated these two as valid options. Although he acknowledged that the results of these two major forms of worship were different, he did not seem to suggest that absorption was preferable to "eternal beatitude in the highest heaven, as existences separate from the deity".

two major views of absorption as though these were simply two views of

one option which was available in the tradition. He did not suggest

that either of these was the purpose of worship. In fact, the worship

service of the Brahmo Samaj emphasized the worship of God as object,

not as subject. Some of the language used in worship was about the God

who is really the true Self, but the form and emphasis in the worship

was on the adoration of the transcendent God.

So the worship developed by Rammohun was neither like the

polytheistic forms of worship which he disapproved of with such vehemence,

nor like the inner contemplation which resulted from knowing the identity

of the individual and cosmic Self. It was not vivid and sensational.

It was austere. It symbolized how Rammohun's theology was somewhere

between polytheism and Śaṅkara's monism. It demonstrated that Rammohun

was correct when he referred to his theology as "monotheism".

It is not difficult to see why people opposed his theology and

system of worship. He had too little patience with the provisional

understanding of God upon which the tradition had always based so

much of its cultic life even while it was negating this understanding

at another level of theology. He was so concerned about the practical,

social effects of sound theology that he never showed much interest in

the traditional discussions of liberation and absorption. His theology

resulted in a system of worship which involved neither ultimate

identification with the deity nor celebration of the deity as a superhuman

figure. There was more descriptive content to his monotheism than there

was to Śaṅkara's monism, so he was not completely identifying with

Śaṅkara as he claimed to be; but there was not enough content to attract those who were accustomed to the rich variety of polytheism. The system of worship which he advocated seemed to include no aids for those who felt that they were unable to grasp the theology upon which it was based. The only consolation Rammohun offered such people was his insistence that they were more capable of theological understanding than they thought they were.

III. THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

## 12.  Introduction

Two general objections to Rammohun's theological publications
and debates recurred throughout his career.  The first was that Rammohun
should not be carrying on such discussions in public.  The second was
that Rammohun was not the proper person to be involved in such dis-
cussions.

At first these objections might seem to be unrelated to Rammohun's
theological concerns, and they may seem trivial in comparison to such
issues as the role of śāstras in religious debate and the nature of
God.  Yet Rammohun did not ignore these objections.  Instead he fre-
quently answered them and discussed their implications.  In answering
the first objection he developed his understanding of man's innate
capacity to understand the nature of God.  In responding to the second
objection he defended his understanding of the lifestyle which was
appropriate for someone involved in teaching others about God.

Rammohun disagreed with many of his contemporaries on both of
these issues because he had a fundamentally different view of the
religious life, that life which was devoted to the fullest possible
understanding of God.  Rammohun felt that this life was intended for
the majority of people and he felt that the majority of people were
capable of participating in such a life.  His opponents argued that such
a life was suited to very few, and these were the few who had the
highest intelligence and who had renounced all other worldly concerns

177

to concentrate only on achieving a fuller understanding of God.

The purpose of our discussion here is to examine these issues in an attempt to understand the basis for the disagreement between Rammohun and his opponents.

## 13. Religious Competence

Rammohun often disagreed with some of his contemporaries about the kind of theology or worship which was most appropriate for the majority of people. This disagreement was not only theological but anthropological; that is, the disagreement was based on differences in understanding the nature of man as well as the nature of God. Even when Rammohun agreed with his opponents on some theological point, he often disagreed with them on how this theological point should be communicated to people. At issue was the question of man's natural capacity to understand theology. For example, Rammohun suggested that the discussions of saguṇa and nirguṇa Brahman in the śāstras, complex and abstract as they were, were intended for the majority of people, while the polytheistic descriptions, with their direct and vivid imagery, were intended for only the most ignorant people. His opponents argued for a quite different interpretation of man's capacity. They said that the abstract descriptions of Brahman were intended for the very few people who were able to grasp them, and that the vivid polytheistic descriptions of God were intended and suited for the capacities of the majority of people.

Behind these disagreements about the application of a particular kind of theology, lay conflicting presuppositions about the inherent differences in human capacity. In the Indian tradition the difference in capacity between individuals is expressed by the concept of 'adhikāra-bheda'. The term 'adhikāra', in its most general sense, means

179

capacity, competence, qualification, or inclination. Most explanations

of the term 'adhikāra' refer to a more limited meaning of the word.

Monier-Williams[1] suggests that the word means authority, prerogative,

claim, or right. Bothlingk and Roth[2] give Oberaufsicht (authority),

Berechtigung (title or claim to), and Prärogativen (prerogatives).

These meanings all reflect a specific and quite-common use of the term

in discussions of politics and administration. But the more general

meaning is also mentioned by Bothlingk and Roth. They suggest that

another meaning of adhikāra is Befähigung (qualification, capacity).

Although the Sanskrit adhikāra will be used in this study, it should be

noted that it is being used to express both rights and competence. Thus

adhikāra-bheda refers to the difference in rights/competence between

individuals. An adhikārī is one who has certain rights, capacities, or

competence.

When the word 'adhikāra' is used to express the rights/competence

of some person or group, the content of the word changes with the context,

but as it changes it always suggests both rights and competence, and

competence suggests expected performance. Thus the word suggests both

rights and duties. The adhikāra of Arjuna at Kurukshetra was to fight

as a kshatriya. This means that it was his privilege and right to fight,

but also, that this was what was expected of him. This could be expected

---

[1]Monier Monier-Williams, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, (Indian ed., 1970), p. 20, col. 3.

[2]Otto Bothlingk und Rudolph Roth, Sanskrit-Wörterbuch, Erster Teil, Die Vocale (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller Verlagsbuchhandlung. 1966), pp. 146-147.

of him because it was part of his nature. There is a delicate balance

suggested here between predisposition and achievement. If too much

emphasis is placed upon predisposition, adhikāra becomes too deterministic.

If too much emphasis is placed upon achievement, adhikāra suggests that

someone becomes an adept, a highly trained and very skilled person whose

expertise depends upon personal effort. To use the example of Arjuna,

the deterministic understanding of adhikāra suggests that he was destined

to be on that battlefield: an overemphasis on achievement suggests

that Arjuna was on the battlefield simply because he had become a very

good soldier. Adhikāra suggests a combination of these two emphases.

It represents a judgment about inclinations as well as an assessment of

abilities.

Two aspects of this concept are relevant here. In the first place,

what are the implications of the variety of adhikārīs for society in gen-

eral and for religious life in particular? Did Rammohun and his opponents

disagree on this issue? Secondly, what was the basis upon which judgments

about adhikāra were made? Rammohun disagreed with many others in

assessing the adhikāra of the majority of his contemporaries. What was

the nature of this disagreement, and what were its roots?

Several scholars have suggested that the concept of adhikāra has

had very wide consequences in Indian culture. They have described it as

being at the very heart of Indian culture, providing the basis for much

of the distinctiveness and strength of the culture. They have pointed

out that Indian culture has largely avoided more competitive models for

human society by acknowleding the differences which separate people and

accepting them as the basis for a culture of rich diversity.

The social implications of this view of adhikāra-bheda are sig-

nificant. Ananda Coomaraswamy, in The Dance of Shiva,[3] states that there

are two extreme sociological ideals which societies may adopt or between

which they may try to work a compromise. The first of these he calls

Puritan asceticism, which imposes the life-style of the old on the young.

The second is competitive self-assertion, which denies the value of both

philosophy and discipline. But in the face of these two extremes, he

says,

> Brahman sociology, just because of its philosophical basis,
> avoided both errors in adopting the theory of sva-dharma, the
> 'own-morality' appropriate to the individual according to his
> social and spiritual status, and the doctrine of the many
> forms of Ishvara, which is so clumsily interpreted by the mis-
> sionaries as polytheistic.[4]
> The Brahman sociologists were firmly convinced that in an
> ideal society, i.e., a society designed deliberately
> for the fulfilment of his own purpose (purushartha), not only
> must opportunity be allowed to every one for such experience
> as his own spiritual status requires, but also that the best
> and wisest must rule.[5]

All of this, says Coomaraswamy, is simply a recognition that "In a

just and healthy society, function should depend upon capacity; and in

the normal individual, capacity and inclination are inseparable..."[6]

---

[3]Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, The Dance of Shiva (rev. ed.; New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1968), pp. 12-18.

[4]Coomaraswamy, p. 12.

[5]Coomaraswamy, p. 15.

[6]Coomaraswamy, p. 17.

Part of the elaboration of this concept of the uniqueness of individual inclinations was the traditional distinction between the three (sometimes four)[7] ends of man: _kāma_ (pleasure), _artha_ (wealth), and _dharma_ (order). It was considered natural that men might wish to pursue pleasure, wealth, or order. Some would pursue one more than the others, while other men might pursue all of these ends simultaneously or serially. It was assumed that the end which was pursued would be determined by the individual's inclination and capacity.

Another way in which this concept was elaborated was through the discussion of the three basic qualities (_guṇas_) of human beings: _sattva_ (goodness), _rajas_ (passion), and _tamas_ (ignorance). Again, it was assumed that each individual would have some combination of these qualities which was unique. These categories were broad but not restrictive. They acknowledged what might be called the different psychological dispositions of men and described appropriate lifestyles for those in each category.

This concept of _adhikāra-bheda_ was also at the basis of the social structure. The general _varṇa_ (class)[8] structure of Indian society can be understood as a very basic sketch of several fundamentally different

---

[7]The fourth end, _mokṣa_ (liberation), is sometimes regarded as one of this group and at other times is considered a separate kind of goal which involves turning away from these other three. Therefore in both texts and secondary sources there are examples of the ends of man being described as three and as four.

[8]I use "class" to indicate that the groups to which I refer here are very broad. The broad _varṇa_ distinctions are not to be identified with the more specific and functionally important caste (_jāti_) distinctions. It is on the caste system that regulations about endogamy and commensality

groups of people. These classifications are not intended to limit resourcefulness, but they are intended to point to general characteristics of people in the different roles in society.

This recognition of variety is equally important in religious matters. Radhakrishnan suggests that Indian religion and philosphy acknowledge the inherent variety in human inclinations by the very terminology which they use. He points particularly to the word 'darśana' which is customarily translated as philosophy. The word means a view or a viewpoint, a perception; it suggests that all philosophy is essentially a particular view or vision of reality held by one person or one school of thought. That view is based on the particular capacities and experiences which that "viewer" has had. This means, says Radhakrishnan, that

> The Hindu philosophy of religion starts from and returns to an experimental basis. Only this basis is as wide as human nature itself.[9]

As Aurobindo puts it in The Foundations of Indian Culture,

> Indian religion has always felt that since the minds, the temperaments, the intellectual affinities of men are unlimited in their variety, a perfect liberty of thought and of worship must be allowed to the individual in his approach to the Infinite.[10]

---

8 continued are based in practice.

Class, in this context, does not suggest economic distinctions; for although such distinctions may be present, they are not based completely on those essential differences which separate classes.

[9] S. Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life (London: Unwin Books, 1960), p. 16.

[10] Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1959), p. 138.

Thus even when men turned from the responsibilities of varṇa, when
they turned from the pursuit of kāma, artha, and dharma and devoted them-
selves to the pursuit of mokṣa (liberation), even then, when they were
trying to move beyond their own particular combination of sattva, rajas,
and tamas, the concept of adhikāra was relevant. For according to their
adhikāra there was a particular way through which mokṣa might best be
attained. In a very general way there was the broad distinction between
the way of jñāna (knowledge), bhakti (devotion), and karma (action). Each
of these ways was suited to a general type of adhikārī. More specifically,
when each person wished to begin to learn about spiritual matters, he
was asked to name the god who appealed to him the most. This god became
his iṣṭadevatā, the personal name and form of god which represented deity
for him. Whatever path he chose to follow to mokṣa, this deity, this
starting point would be ja-reference point for him. The Ultimate Reality
which he hoped to understand was not limited by this starting-point,
nor was the Ultimate Reality to be identified with this starting point.
But since all beginnings were only beginnings, since they were all
only ways to begin the quest for the Real, they were all useful; and they
all, in various ways, led to the Ultimate Reality. What was the starting
point for one man might not be at all useful for another, or it might
be a point well along the way for another. But because of the concept
of adhikāra it was assumed that the various starting points and the
various paths were valid because they corresponded to the rights/competence
of particular individuals.

Rammohun was familiar with the implications of the concept of

adhikāra and used the concept both explicitly and implicitly in his writings. Although he did not agree with his opponents on many of the applications of this concept, he did accept the central meaning of rights/competence, and he did accept the fact that the concept implied variety. This can most easily be established by three brief references to his Bengali writings. In his debate with Kavitakar Rammohun at one point argued that it was not necessary for a person to engage in ritual action as a means of being competent for the discipline (sādhana) of knowledge, since such actions might have already been completed in the person's previous lives. On the basis of such previous action, said Rammohun, "...he becomes an adhikārī for the discipline of knowledge."[11] Later in the same debate Rammohun said to Kavitakar that if he would fulfil the requirements of true spiritual discipline he would become qualified to speak of himself as Brahman. Rammohun's phrase was "You become an adhikārī who may speak of himself as Brahman."[12] At another point in the same debate Rammohun quoted a passage from Manu which referred to the path of works and the path of knowledge. He explained that passage by saying, "That shows that the words should be understood in terms of adhikāra; that is, the words about works are for those competent in works, those about knowledge for those competent in knowledge."[13] In

---

[11]Granthabali, Part II, p. 78. The Bengali is, "jñāna sādhaner adhikārī hay."

[12]Granthabali, Part II, p. 81. The Bengali is, "āpnāke brahmarūpe barṇam karibār adhikārī hay."

[13]Granthabali, Part II, p. 92. The Bengali is, "purbbāpar bacaner tatparyya adhikāribiseshe hay arthāt karnmādhikārer bacan karnmider prati o jñānādhikārer."

all these passages Rammohun spoke of <u>adhikāra</u> as rights/competence, and he acknowledged that the <u>adhikāra</u> of one person may not be identical to the <u>adhikāra</u> of another.

In his first published pamphlet against <u>satī</u> Rammohun elaborated his understanding of <u>adhikāra</u> without referring to the concept explicitly.

> As men have various dispositions, those whose minds are enveloped in desire, passion and cupidity, have no inclination for the disinterested worship of the Supreme Being. If they had no Sastras of rewards, they would at once throw aside all Sastras, and would follow their several inclinations, like elephants unguided by the hook. In order to restrain such persons from being led only by their inclinations, the Sastra prescribes various ceremonies, as Syenayaga for one desirous of the destruction of the enemy, Putreshti for one desiring a son, and Jyotishtoma for one desiring gratifications in heaven, &c.; but again reprobates such as are actuated by those desires, and at the same moment expresses contempt for such gratifications.[14]

This passage indicates his recognition that people have "various dispositions". But just as evident is his contention that the <u>śāstras</u> regard some dispositions as vastly inferior to others. It is this theme, this insistence that the <u>śāstras</u> elevate some kinds of <u>adhikāra</u> and denigrate others, which dominates his discussion of <u>adhikāra</u>.

Many of Rammohun's comments about <u>adhikāra</u> were made in the context of his discussions of figurative language and image worship, and it is especially in these passages that he emphasized the difference between forms of <u>adhikāra</u> which are highly regarded by the <u>śāstras</u> and those which are deplored but for which concessions are made. In describing the reasons for polytheism in his <u>Introduction to the Cena Upanishad</u>

---

[14] The work is <u>Translation of a Conference Between an Advocate for and an Opponent of, the Practice of Burning Widows Alive, from the Original Bungla</u> (1818). It is included in <u>Works</u>, Part III, pp. 87-97. This quotation is from p. 94.

Rammohun remarked,

> ...the worship of the sun and fire, together with the whole
> allegorical system, were only inculcated for the sake of those,
> whose limited understandings rendered them incapable of compre-
> hending and adoring the invisible Supreme Being, so that such
> people might not remain in a brutified state, destitute of all
> religious principle.[15]

In the "Preface" to his Translation of the Ishopanishad Rammohun para-
phrased the explanation for the efficacy of the worship of gods and
goddesses in the Kali age which is given in the Mahānirvāṇa Tantra. As
Rammohun put it, "Thus corresponding to the nature of different powers
or qualities, numerous figures have been invented for the benefit of
those who are not possessed of sufficient understanding."[16]

When discussing image worship Rammohun suggested that adhikāra
was the only conceivable explanation for such a practice to be permitted.
In the "Preface" to his Translation of the Ishopanishad Rammohun said that

> ...the directions to worship any figured beings are only appli-
> cable to those who are incapable of elevating their minds to
> the idea of an invisible Supreme Being, in order that such
> persons, by fixing their attention on these invented figures,
> may be able to restrain themselves from vicious temptations, and
> that those that are competent for the worship of the invisible
> God, should disregard the worship of Idols.[17]

He did not simply suggest that the use of images was permitted for some
people because their 'competence' was deficient, but he emphasized that
the people for whom image worship was an appropriate system were not merely

[15] Works, Part II, p. 14.

[16] Works, Part II, p. 42.

[17] Works, Part II, pp. 41-42. In his Bengali translation of the
Īśā Upaniṣad he has a similar Preface, and there he uses "adhikāra" for
competent. See, Granthabali, Part I, p. 195.

slightly less competent than others, but were actually significantly weaker and more ignorant. The śāstras, he said, "...only direct those who are unfortunately incapable of adoring the invisible Supreme Being, to apply their minds to any visible thing rather than allow them to remain idle."[18]

His opponents had other views. Whereas Rammohun regarded the adhikāra of some people as lamentably deficient, they simply acknowledged that some people were less intelligent than others. This, to them, was a simple observation. They saw no reason to be distressed, since there was a form of worship especially suited to such people. Mrityunjay Vidyalankar said that even the slightest deficiency in understanding rendered people incapable of understanding the Supreme Being according to its true nature.[19] But Mrityunjay saw nothing distressing about this, since there were numerous forms of worship and various expressions of the Supreme Being which were available for people like this. All of these forms of worship, said Mrityunjay, led eventually to true devotion to God and true happiness. So although most people were deficient in understanding and therefore unable to understand and worship God in the fullest way, Mrityunjay had confidence that the forms of worship which they were limited to would be just as efficacious as the forms used by those whose understanding of God had no deficiencies.

---

[18] Works, Part II, p. 69.

[19] Mrityunjay's Vedānta Chandrikā, which raised this issue, is reprinted in Granthabali, Part I, pp. 127-152.

Rammohun felt that such an attitude undermined any motivation to improve people's understanding of God.[20] If the lower forms of worship ultimately had the same results as the higher forms of worship, then there was no reason for people to leave the familiar forms of ritual and image worship and turn to a more austere and reflective form of worship.[21] If understanding God as a heroic warrior was ultimately just as valid as understanding God as the Being from which everything emanated, then there was no reason to try to help people understand the far more abstract and difficult concept of God as Being. Whereas Rammohun understood the numerous popular forms of worship as temporary stopgap measures which could help to make ignorant people aware of the presence of God, he saw that his opponents understood these same forms of worship as permanent and satisfactory.

While some might argue that Rammohun showed less consideration for human ignorance than did his opponents, Rammohun's own explanation for the difference in attitude between himself and his opponents toward people with a poorly developed understanding of God was harsh. He said that those who tolerated inadequate conceptions of God and popular forms of worship did not do so because they were trying to be considerate, but because their own welfare depended on it. Religious leaders benefited most from the forms of worship which were intended for

---

[20]What follows here is a summary of Rammohun's reply to Mrityunjay. This may be found in Granthabali, Part I, pp. 153-184 as "Bhattāchāryer Sahit Bicār". It is also included in Works, Part II, pp. 95-119 as "A Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Vedas in Reply to an Apology for the Present State of Hindu Worship".

[21]This particular issue, which is so central for Rammohun, is found at Works, Part II, p. 116.

the ignorant, and as a result they were unwilling to help these people to transcend these forms of worship. The popular forms of worship should be understood as steps upon which to climb to better forms of worship and understanding. But the religious leaders were more interested in having the majority of people dependent on them than they were in helping the people to a fuller understanding of God. This was the reason why they tolerated, defended, and even encouraged a system of worship which was able to give people only a very inadequate knowledge of the true nature of God.

So Rammohun and his opponents, although they agreed that the concept of adhikāra-bheda implied a difference between the rights/competence of individuals, disagreed substantially in their evaluation of this difference. For Rammohun it indicated that some people needed to begin understanding God through forms of worship which were grossly incapable of expressing the true character of God. Yet inadequate as these forms were, they were capable of capturing the imagination of ignorant people and getting them to think about God. Once they began to think about God it became possible to introduce more adequate conceptions of God and thereby to move away from these crude forms of worship. Rammohun's opponents argued that Rammohun should not disparage the forms of worship which he regarded as inadequate. They said that these were the forms of worship which were suitable for most people, and that most people would not be able to do without them. They saw no need to try to wean people away from these ways of understanding and worshipping God, since in their estimation these represented the capacities of the majority of people.

This introduces the second major area of disagreement between Rammohun and his contemporaries, namely, what proportion of people was capable of understanding God as Supreme Reality and what proportion was capable only of understanding God as a god with a vivid and attractive mythology. Put very generally, what was at issue was this: if one observed the general range of capacities for religious understanding to be found among men, would the majority of people be considered capable of a very high level of understanding or would they be considered limited to a low level of understanding?

Rammohun differed from his opponents on this issue as sharply as he disagreed on the evaluation of the fact that there were great differences in adhikāra. Rammohun said that all but the most ignorant, and they were few, could at least partially grasp that God was without qualities.[22] Rammohun's opponents said that a very small minority could understand God in this way and the vast majority needed concepts and forms of worship which were more vivid. Most people needed the rich mythology of polytheism, a personal deity with whom they could develop a relationship, and images to help express the qualities of the gods.[23] Rammohun's concept of God, they argued, was useful for only a small

---

[22] See the discussion of this above, chapter 8, pp. 124-129.

[23] Kavitakar, for example, insisted that everyone should begin to worship through forms and images, and only after having completed an appropriate amount of such worship could there be any thought of advancing to worship independent of these forms. See Granthabali, Part II, p. 78.

minority, and those who composed that small minority were the few for whom the way of knowledge (jñānamārga) was suited. Most people were not suited for such an approach to God and had neither the education nor the time to cultivate such an approach. Rammohun answered this by saying that nearly all people could grasp the basic elements of such a concept of God, and by prescribing a lower form of understanding and worship for the majority, his opponents were forcing them to adopt a system of understanding and worship which had been intended for only the most ignorant.[24] Only those who could not even grasp the existence of God by looking at nature should be encouraged to use such rudimentary forms of understanding God; and Rammohun believed that nearly everyone could grasp God's existence by simply reflecting on the world in which they lived.

Rammohun said that the religious leaders did not even give people an opportunity to prove their capacity for understanding God. Adhikāra was being defined in a prescriptive rather than in a descriptive way. Whole classes of people were automatically expected to be incapable

---

[24] In his discussion with Kavitakar Rammohun debated the relevance of the religious achievements of past lives. He said that Kavitakar recognized the benefits of the achievements of past lives, but still wanted everyone to begin with the simplest and most inadequate forms of worship in this life. That, said Rammohun, amounted to a denial of the effects of past achievements.

Rammohun said that it was more realistic to acknowledge that many people had been purified by action and lower forms of worship in previous lives, and that they were now ready for the discipline of knowledge. The way to find out if people had been purified in previous lives was to expose them to the highest teachings about God. If they benefited from them they were ready. If they were incapable of understanding even the basic thrust of such teachings, then it was clear that they had not been previously prepared for such knowledge. They should then be directed to other forms of worship. See Granthabali, Part II, pp. 76-79.

of understanding the way in which the Upaniṣads spoke about God.

Rammohun insisted that it was the exception to find people who could

not understand what the śāstras taught so plainly about God's nature,

and yet most of his contemporaries seemed to feel that it could be

assumed that people had no interest or capacity for such knowledge.

Rammohun felt that people's capacities were being underestimated without

having been evaluated. At one point in his writings,[25] while arguing

against the customary view of women's limitations, he used an argument

which is a model for his position on determining the adhikāra of people.

Rammohun's opponents had argued that women were inferior to men in

all respects and were likely to indulge in immoral behaviour after

the death of their husbands. They also argued that women were vastly

inferior to men in their ability to understand the śāstras, and to this

Rammohun replied,

> As to their inferiority in point of understanding, when did you
> ever afford them a fair opportunity of exhibiting their natural
> capacity? How then can you accuse them of want of understan-
> ding? If, after instruction in knowledge and wisdom, a person
> cannot comprehend or retain what has been taught him, we may
> well consider him as deficient; but as you keep women generally
> void of education and acquirements, you cannot, therefore, in
> justice pronounce on their inferiority. On the contrary,
> Lilavati, Bhanumati, the wife of the prince of Karnat, and
> that of Kalidasa, are celebrated for their thorough knowledge
> of all the Sastras: moreover in the Vrihadaranyaka Upanishad
> of the Yajur Veda it is clearly stated that Yajnavalkya
> imparted divine knowledge of the most difficult nature to
> his wife Maitreyi, who was able to follow and completely attain
> to it![26]

---

[25] This discussion is in A Second Conference Between an Advocate
for and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows Alive (1820). It
is included in Works, Part III, pp. 99-127.

[26] Works, Part III, p. 125.

The criteria by which people's <u>adhikāra</u> should be established were not the sex or group to which they belonged, but their responses to opportunities to prove their capacities.

Rammohun felt that judgments about people's <u>adhikāra</u> should be made only after people had been given opportunities to respond to the most accurate statements about God and the most elevated forms of worship. He said that if this happened it would be demonstrated that most people could receive substantial benefits from such statements and forms of worship. The general level of <u>adhikāra</u>, he insisted, was far higher than his opponents thought it to be. He said that this could and should be proved by giving people opportunities to participate and respond to the elevated forms of worship which he recommended. <u>Adhikāra</u> should be determined after, not before people were given an opportunity to demonstrate their capacity for religious instruction. If that was done <u>adhikāra</u> would be descriptive rather than prescriptive, <u>adhikāra</u> would be based on the individual rather than the group, and the general level of <u>adhikāra</u> would be proved to be considerably higher than expected.

When Rammohun put the implications of this into practice he encountered more opposition. He felt that there was no harm in allowing everyone to be exposed to the highest teachings about God. Those who could understand such teachings would benefit from them and those who could not understand them would simply leave them and turn to forms of instruction more suited to themselves. So he distributed his translations of the Upaniṣads as widely as he could, hoping that they

would be read by a substantial number of people who would not other-wise read them. In the worship service of the Brahmo Samaj he placed great importance on the public reading of the Upaniṣads, again hoping that some might hear these śāstras who would not otherwise hear them.

Kavitakar opposed Rammohun's wide distribution of the Upaniṣads and said that the publication of Rammohun's books was undermining dharma and causing uncounted evils and natural calamities.[27] He said that any genuinely religious man would not follow Rammohun's procedure but would be silent about the understanding of God which he had achieved.[28] A genuinely religious man would know that most people were not qualified to read the material which Rammohun had distributed. People became entitled to read the Upaniṣads only after they had demonstrated their ability to understand them by mastering other, less difficult śāstras, and by fulfilling the numerous requirements of religious action.[29] The Upaniṣads represented the highest form of religious teaching and were therefore not for everyone. They should not be indiscriminately dis-tributed to the general public, since some people might become confused by the Upaniṣads and consequently become irreligious. It was better for such people to read the simpler śāstras first to cultivate their religious interest and to demonstrate whether or not they were capable of understanding the Upaniṣads.

---

[27]Granthabali, Part II, pp. 71-72.

[28]Granthabali, Part II, p. 73.

[29]Granthabali, Part II, p. 78.

Rammohun said that the śāstras themselves suggested another
order of approach.[30]   He said that brahmins were told to read the
Upaniṣads of their family tradition first, next the other Upaniṣads, and
finally, if they had time, they were to also read the other śāstras.  For
those who did not have time to read all the śāstras it was recommended
that they first read the gāyatrī,[31] then the parts about Rudra (Siva),
and then the puruṣa sūkta.[32]  According to Manu,[33] those who could not
read all of the Vedas should be sure to repeat the gāyatrī, for by
repeating it they could gain as much merit as though they had read the
whole Veda.  Thus, said Rammohun, the śāstras did not insist that people
should begin at the simplest and most inadequate śāstras, but that
they should start with the central and most essential sections of the
śāstras which best enucleated the highest concepts of God.  Only if
these sections proved too difficult to comprehend should a person
concentrate on the simpler śāstras which contained less adequate descrip-
tions of God.

---

[30]Granthabali, Part II, pp. 76-78.

[31]The gāyatrī has come to refer to Ṛg Veda III.lxii.10, a verse
which is repeated as a prayer at the beginning and end of the day.  It
is addressed to the sun.  Rammohun published a Sanskrit and an English
pamphlet describing the gāyatrī and its meaning.  The English pamphlet
is entitled A Translation into English of a Sunskrit Tract Inculcating
the Divine Worship (1827).  It is included in Works, Part II, pp. 73-80.

[32]The puruṣa sūkta is Ṛg Veda X.90.  It relates how everything
emanated from one being.  It specifically describes the origin of the
world, of the Indian varṇa system, and the sacrificial system.

[33]Manu II. 77-83.

Another way in which Rammohun attempted to implement his under-
standing of the implications of <u>adhikāra</u> was through the worship service
of the Brahmo Samaj. The service took the form of congregational worship.
The assumption underlying the service was that anyone who attended
would be able to gain something of value from what was done. The
service consisted of readings from the <u>śāstras</u>, exposition of these
readings, prayer, and singing. Nearly everything which was done was
based on the Upaniṣads and <u>Brahma Sūtra</u>, although some portions of the
Vedas were used as well.

In the worship service of the Brahmo Samaj there were no pro-
hibitions against the attendance of any caste, religion, or nationality.[34]
Rammohun assumed that everything which was said at these meetings could
be heard by anyone who was interested. Even though the early records
of these meetings indicate that most of those who attended were friends
of Rammohun who were quite similar to him in social rank,[35] there
was nothing to prevent lower classes and foreigners from attending.

Such an arrangement was contrary to an assumption about worship
which is fairly widespread in Indian religion, even though it is rarely
articulated. That assumption is that such diverse people cannot share
a common form of worship because of the fundamental and substantial

---

[34]In fact the Trust Deed specifically mentions that the meeting
place of the Brahmo Samaj was to be "....a place of public meeting of all
sorts and descriptions of people without distinction..." Collet, p. 471.

[35]Collet, p. 226. <u>Records</u>, pp. 90-91.

differences between them.  As a recent author has put it,

> Vedic religion does not appear to have any form of public
> worship in the sense in which the word is generally under-
> stood; Agamic forms, such as temple worship too, may not be
> considered to be congregational worship, though temples are
> places for all to worship, and the deity is worshipped there
> by the priest for the benefit of the universe as a whole.
> In fact, Hinduism cannot have congregational or public
> worship, as one of its most important tenets is the indi-
> vidual's competency (adhikari-bheda), which is based on many
> factors; all are not competent for all kinds of worship.[36]

The forms of worship which seem to be congregational or public, such
as temple worship and worship at seasonal festivals, are really not
congregational in the sense that all present participate in the same
kind of worship.  They are congregational only in the sense that many
people are present worshipping together.  The exchange between the
worshipper, the priest, and the deity is an individual or private one.
In many temples and festivals this is symbolized by the long lines of
people waiting to enter a temple for their own private view (darśana)[37]
of the deity.

---

[36] L. A. Ravi Varma, "Rituals of Worship", The Cultural Heritage
of India, Vol. IV, The Religions, ed. Haridas Bhattacharyya (2nd. ed.;
Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1956), p. 447.

[37] It is significant that this word for a view of an image is
the same word which is used for philosophy. In both uses it indicates
the personal and partial view of what is seen and known, but in doing
so there is no suggestion that because the view is partial it is faulty.
It is simply in the nature of things that our knowledge and our exper-
iences are only a part of the whole. At the same time, they are uniquely
our own.

The emphasis on privacy which is common in Indian worship is also expressed by the emphasis on the private religious teacher, the guru. The guru is expected to be able to determine the special spiritual capacity of the person who comes to him for instruction and he will then teach him only those things which he is capable of understanding. This takes seriously the concept of adhikāra-bheda, but it also takes seriously the privacy or secrecy of the knowledge which is communicated. The guru gives each of his disciples a mantra, and this mantra is generally regarded as a secret which should not be shared with anyone, especially not with those who are unworthy of such knowledge. In the Paramasamhitā (of the Pāñcharātra) there is an example of a prohibition against spreading secret knowledge to those who are not ready for it. After instructing Brahmā in the essential spiritual truths, Paramah says,

> I have told you thus far, O Brahman, the essence of everything
> (worth knowing). This is to be maintained as a secret from
> common people.[38]

Rammohun's public and congregational worship seemed to oppose this understanding of private and secret instruction. In the first place it permitted anyone to hear even the highest and most difficult spiritual teachings without any regard for whether or not those listening were capable of understanding what was being taught. Rammohun recognized

---

[38] S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar, trans. and ed., Paramasamhitā (of the Pāñcharātra) (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1940), II:116. This is p. 19 of the English translation and p. 20 in the Sanskrit text. In this text, as in many others, there is a distinction made between what can be taught to the initiated (dīkṣita) but must be kept from the uniniated (adīkṣita). This is another aspect of the distinction between private and public knowledge.

that not everyone would completely understand the descriptions of God based on the Upaniṣads, but he argued that "effect being produced in each person according to his state of mental preparation, it will be proportionately successful."[39]  He did not expect everyone to benefit fully from such teachings, but he felt that everyone would benefit in some way.  The worst that he seemed to expect was that those who were very unprepared for such teachings would not return, but would find some form of worship which was more suited to their adhikāra.  Even for them this exposure to the highest teachings would be beneficial, since it would always remind them that there was a more adequate understanding which their own understanding and form of worship merely pointed toward.  But although they might prove incapable of grasping the true nature of God, they could not be harmed by being exposed to such teaching.

The second thing which Rammohun's worship seemed to do was to desecrate the highest spiritual truths.  This may seem to be a strange accusation to make against Rammohun, since his high regard for the most elevated and refined concepts of God is apparent throughout his works.  But to many who opposed him, his general dissemination of the Upaniṣads through publication and worship services seemed to indicate a lack of respect for the Śruti texts.  The highest truth was always revealed in privacy, not only because most people were incapable of understanding it, but also out of high regard for this special knowledge.  To make it public and common was to debase it.  If it became the subject of

---

[39]Works, Part II, p. 132.

popular and uninformed discussion it would lose its purity and end up a
a marketplace theology. When Rammohun made copies of the Upaniṣads
available in vernacular publications and through vernacular discussions
at the Brahmo Samaj, he was removing the secrecy and reverence which
kept these śāstras from the vast majority of people. He thought that
by doing so he was elevating people's theology to a higher level; his
opponents thought that he was lowering theology to the level of the
common people.

## 14. Social Life

Throughout his life Rammohun had to justify his participation in theological discussions. He had to do so theoretically and practically; that is, he had to explain why a person in his position had the right to be involved in theological debates, as well as why he in particular had this right. In his discussions of these issues he articulated his understanding of the role of the householder (grhastha)[1] in religious life. He also explained why he felt that his own life-style, even though it had become the subject of so much controversy, was not inappropriate for someone deeply involved in religious debate and publication.

Sometimes Rammohun's opponents themselves raised the general question of whether or not it was legitimate for a householder to be involved in the kinds of religious activities which took so much of Rammohun's time. Kavitakar, for example, noted that Rammohun had

---

[1]The grhastha is the householder, the family man, in the āśrama system. The āśrama system divides life into four stages or periods through which the twice-born Hindu male (a member of the upper three classes) progresses. First he is a student (brahmachara), then a householder (grhastha), then a retired forest-dweller (vānaprastha), and then a wandering renunciant (sannyāsi). There is a good deal of debate about whether this system was ever in general practice, but it is generally agreed that the householder is the basis for the existence and continuation of the system. A formal and probably idealized portrait of the responsibilities of this stage of life can be found in Manu III and IV.

stated that the purpose of his religious quest was to learn about

Brahman.[2] Kavitakar said that it was inappropriate for a householder

to claim such a purpose. He mocked Rammohun's attempts to be actively

involved in social life while trying to understand Brahman. Brahman

could not be understood, he argued, by someone who was involved in the

obligations of social life. Only those who had taken care of their

family responsibilities and had fulfilled their social obligations were

qualified to devote their time to a fuller understanding of Brahman.

Rammohun's answer was that the *śāstras* were full of examples

of people who had become renowned for their knowledge of Brahman, but

who nevertheless were actively involved in the obligations of a house-

holder's life. He mentioned Vasiṣṭha,[3] the sage (*ṛṣi*) of the *Ṛg Veda*,

epics, and Purāṇas; Parāśara,[4] another sage associated with the *Ṛg Veda*

as well as with some of the *Dharmaśāstra* literature; Janaka,[5] an

ancient philospher-king of Mithilā; Aṅgiras,[6] another famous Ṛg Vedic

sage; and Yājñavalkya,[7] a famous sage and teacher associated with the

*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, and the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*.

---

[2]*Granthabali*, Part II, pp. 72, 74-75.

[3]For a brief outline of available information about Vasiṣṭha see
Benjamin Walker, *The Hindu World: An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism*
(New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), Vol. II, pp. 553-554. This two
volume encyclopedia is very useful in helping to identify many of the
historical, legendary, and mythological characters of Indian literature.

[4]Walker, Vol. II, p. 189.

[5]Walker, Vol. I, p. 497.

[6]Walker, Vol. I, pp. 45-46.

[7]Walker, Vol. II, pp. 611-613.

All of these men were highly revered for their understanding of Brahman and they were all householders. Their lives were the precedents to which he appealed to justify his own involvement in a similar religious quest while actively involved in social life.

Rammohun also referred to some of the discussions of this theme in the śāstras. In the "Preface" to his translation of the Īśā Upaniṣad he noted that the Yājñavalkya Smṛti said that a householder who lives honestly can become one with the Supreme Being.[8] In the same "Preface"[9] he pointed out that according to Śaṅkara's commentary on Brahma Sūtra III.iv.48 the householder, even though he was expected to be very busy because of his social obligations, was also expected to fulfill those virtuous duties of other stages in life which involved meditating on the highest truths. In fact Rammohun noted that Śaṅkara had commented that because the householder's life was so comprehensive it was sometimes the custom to end the discussion of the obligations of the orders of life with the discussion of the householder. The householder was not regarded only as the one on whom the continuation of the social order depended, but also as the one who was responsible for maintaining the religious life.

The means by which the householder should do this were also the subject of much of Rammohun's writing. In 1826 he published a small Bengali pamphlet entitled Brahmaniṣṭha Gṛhasther Lakshman (The Signs

---

[8] Works, Part II, pp. 43-44.

[9] Works, Part II, p. 43.

of a <u>Householder who is Truly Devoted to Brahman</u>).[10]   In it he argued

that according to the <u>śāstras</u> the best way  to acquire knowledge of

Brahman was through control of the instincts, meditation on the meaning

of the self, and study of the Vedas.  This did not mean that rituals

needed to be completely abandoned,but it did mean that it was important to

pass beyond the use of rituals to those methods which the <u>śāstras</u> agreed

were even better.  He based this primarily on two passages from <u>Manu</u>:

> After giving up even the above-mentioned sacrificial rites, a
> Brahmana should exert himself in (acquiring) the knowledge of
> the Soul, in extinguishing his passions, and in studying the
> Veda.[11]

> Other Brahmanas, seeing with the eye of knowledge that the
> performance of those rites has knowledge for its root, always
> perform them through knowledge alone.[12]

The rites and duties of caste and order (<u>āśrama</u>) were at best

aids leading to the control of instincts, meditation, and study of the

Vedas.

> We admit that it is proper in men to observe the duties and
> rites prescribed by the Sastra for each class according to
> their religious order, in acquiring knowledge respecting God,
> such observance being conducive to that acquisition, an
> admission which is not inconsistent with the authorities of
> the Vedas and other Sastras.  But we can by no means admit the
> necessity of observing those duties and rites as indispensable
> steps towards attaining divine knowledge...[13]

In his translation and exposition of the <u>gāyatrī</u> in 1827 he said that

a person who had come to know God could perform rituals if he wished

to do so, but his doing so would have no effect upon the knowledge of

---

[10]This is reprinted in <u>Granthabali</u>, Part IV, pp. 29-33.

[11]<u>Manu</u> XII.92.

[12]<u>Manu</u> IV.24.

[13]<u>Works</u>, Part II, p. 123.

God which he already had; similarly if he chose not to do rituals his knowledge of God would not be impaired as a consequence.[14] In an earlier work, A Defence of Hindoo Theism (1817), he argued that the Upaniṣads, Manu, and Śankara all agreed that rituals were not necessary means of attaining knowledge of God, and that many people had come to know God without participating in the worship of gods or the ceremonies associated with the sacred fire.[15] In A Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Vedas (1817) he said that the Brahma Sūtra

> positively declares that the true knowledge of God may be acquired without observing the rules and rites prescribed by the Sastra to each class of Hindus; and also, examples are frequently found in the Veda of persons, who, though they neglected the performance of religious rites and ceremonies, attained divine knowledge and absorption by control over their passions and senses, and by contemplation of the Ruler of the universe.[16]

Finally he referred to Manu IV.22-24,[17] the same passage upon which he later based Brahmaniṣtha Gṛhasther Lakshman, as further proof that a

---

[14] Works, Part II, p. 77.

[15] Works, Part II, p. 87.

[16] Works, Part II, p. 101.

[17] This passage, according to Bühler's translation, is as follows:

> Some men who know the ordinances for sacrificial rites, always offer these great sacrifices in their organs (of sensation), without any (external) effort.
> Knowing that the (performance of the) sacrifice in their speech and their breath yields imperishable (rewards), some always offer their breath in their speech, and their speech in their breath.
> Other Brahmanas, seeing with the eye of knowledge that the performance of those rites has knowledge for its root, always perform them through knowledge alone.

householder could gain knowledge of God independently of the performance of rituals.

His devaluation of the importance of rituals and social duties was often used as the basis for attacks on his credibility as a householder involved in religious discussions. Kavitakar, in his 1820 debate with Rammohun, suggested that Rammohun only encouraged disregard for rituals and customs because it was in his own interest to do so. Kavitakar made it clear that in his opinion Rammohun found adherence to rituals and customs inconvenient and his exposition of the śāstras was simply an attempt to justify his own lifestyle.[18]

This same issue was raised two years later in a letter to the editor of the Samāchār Darpan.[19] The writer, who signed himself simply as Dharmasaṃsthāpanākāmshī (One who wishes to establish religion), asked what the readers thought their attitude should be toward someone who said that he knew God, but who nevertheless consistently disregarded and denigrated the rituals and practices recommended by the Vedas and Purāṇas. Implicit in this letter was the suggestion that anyone who disregarded the prescribed rituals and practices could not really know God.

In Rammohun's replies to such questions[20] he did not try to prove that his opponents had misunderstood his attitude toward ritual.

---

[18]Granthabali, Part II, p. 75.

[19]The letter was dated April 6, 1822. It is included in Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, ed., Sangbād Patre Sekāler Kathā Vol. I (1818-1830) (2nd. ed.; Calcutta: Bangīya Sahitya Parishat, 1949), pp. 326-328.

[20]Rammohun's replies to these questions may be found in "Cāri Prasner Uttar", Granthabali, Part VI, pp. 5-20.

He also did not try to prove that he actually did the rituals which his opponents accused him of neglecting. Instead he argued that the importance of rituals in the life of a householder had been overemphasized and that the śāstras provided ample grounds for recognizing that the best way to God for a householder as for any other person was through self-control, meditation, and study of the Vedas.

But there was another kind of criticism which Rammohun had to respond to. This was criticism of the things which he did rather than things which he did not do. This was criticism of his lifestyle. It was often related to the more general criticism of his role as a householder, but it was usually more specifically related to particular actions which his opponents found objectionable. Some of his contemporaries, as well as some subsequent scholars, suggested that because his life was controversial he had no right to speak with authority on religious questions. In responding to these charges Rammohun usually replied to the specific accusations as well as to the assumption that he was unqualified to speak publicly on religious questions.

In response to the letter in the Samāchār Dārpan[21] which suggested that Rammohun's lifestyle disqualified him from speaking authoritatively about religious questions, Rammohun raised and elaborated four questions. He first asked what the writer meant when he accused Rammohun of neglecting important rituals and customs. There were so many systems of ritual and practice that it was impossible for one person to keep all the regulations of all of the groups which claimed

---

[21] This is found especially at Granthabali, Part VI, pp. 13-15.

the Vedas as their authority. The practices of different groups were often directly contrary to each other, and consequently adherence to the practices of one group would necessarily involve breaking the traditions of the other. If the writer was accusing Rammohun of failing to keep all of the customs of all of the available religious groups, then the writer was obviously guilty of the same failure. If the writer was willing to acknowledge that everyone had to choose a particular system of action to adhere to as conscientiously as possible, then he would have to acknowledge that Rammohun was following an acceptable option. Rammohun was following the system of behaviour advocated by Manu. According to Manu those householders who were devoted to Brahman could fulfill their ritual obligation by their knowledge, since they realized that everything which they did was a sacrifice to Brahman. Whereas others might have to offer sacrificial rituals (yajña) to Brahman, those householders who had a better knowledge of God made the equivalent sacrifice by offering their lives to Brahman. Thus Rammohun, who cultivated true self-knowledge, was fulfilling the requirements expected of him even though he did not satisfy all of the specific requirements of action which might be expected of him by individual religious systems.

Rammohun next asked whether the writer could claim that he had fulfilled the requirements of action which might be expected of him by a particular system. Even here, said Rammohun, everyone had to acknowledge some failure, however minor, and if everyone who committed a single error in practicing his religious requirements was shunned, there would be no one who was faultless. Perfect adherence to a system of ritual or custom could not be expected of anyone before they became

worthy to speak about religious issues.  Therefore Rammohun's right to
speak publicly about God was not necessarily negated simply because
someone could prove that he was guilty of a single or occasional
lapse in behaviour.

Rammohun's third question was about the basis for good conduct.
He asked whether the writer of the letter understood good conduct
to refer to the actions of great men.  Did the writer mean that a
person should follow the example of some great man?  If so, said Rammohun,
a difficulty still remained, since there were many great men and each
of them was slightly or even substantially different in their lifestyle.
Rammohun listed several great Vaiṣṇavas, Śāktas, and others who did
not fit into any general category, and asked how a person was to decide
which of these great men to emulate.

The final question which Rammohun raised also was concerned with
the basis for good conduct.  He asked if good conduct meant following the
ways of one's forefathers.  He pointed out that although that might seem
to be an attractive interpretation of good conduct, it also had its dif-
ficulties.  It was possible that a person might have had very wicked an-
cestors.  Surely it would not be virtuous to imitate their conduct.  There-
fore if some deviated from the ways of his forefathers because he regard-
ed  them as unworthy, it could not automatically be assumed that his
conduct was evil.

It is clear from Rammohun's response to the letter to the
Samāchār Darpan that he was interested in more than simply vindicating
himself from the charges made against him.  He could have done that
by listing all of the acceptable things which he did and by showing that

the accusations against him were based on incorrect information.
Instead he preferred to undermine the charges against him by showing how
they were based on an inadequate understanding of what good conduct
was. His interest in these debates was primarily to establish what
he regarded as a more adequate basis for evaluating conduct.

And yet, whatever his major interest in these debates may have
been, he did have to spend a great deal of time responding to personal
and specific attacks on his lifestyle. One of the criticisms which the
"Establisher of religion" made in his letter to the Samāchār Darpan
was that Rammohun was too proud to be a religious authority.[22] The
letter writer said that Rammohun was proud of his education and knowledge
and that he was distributing śāstras and pamphleteering out of pride
rather than out of love for the truth. He was so proud that he assumed
that he was able to decide what was true religion and what was not, and
he had already rejected many aspects of Hindu religion and adopted
alien (bijātiya) practices. In reply to this Rammohun said that even
though he did not emphasize performance of works as much as many people
did, his emphasis on knowledge was completely consistent with the
teachings of the śāstras.[23] And as for his pride, he said that he had
no hesitation in acknowledging his deficiences. That, he said, was more
than could be said for his opponent, who posed as a faultless judge of
others, but who in fact was like a blind man trying to lead other blind
men.

---

[22] Bandyopadhyay, Vol. I, p. 327.

[23] Granthabali, Part VI, pp. 7-11.

Another charge which Rammohun faced was made by Gaurikanta Bhattacharya in a book entitled Jñānānjana which was published in 1821.[24] He said that Rammohun was a man committed to personal pleasure, and that Rammohun's emphasis upon knowledge rather than ritual and action was Rammohun's attempt to justify his failure to fulfill the ritual obligations which he had neglected because he found that they demanded too much self-discipline of him. When Rammohun wrote that rituals were optional he was merely trying to justify his failure to fulfill them.[25] Rituals, said Bhattacharya, had a refining and purifying effect.[26] It was impossible to have true devotion to God without first having attained the stability which came from disciplining of the instincts. A person only became ready for the highest understanding of God after a long period of careful attention to rituals. If Rammohun tried to avoid performing rituals it was not because he wished to become closer to God, but because he wanted to allow himself the pleasures which he would have to deny himself if he followed the careful discipline of rituals.

Many of the charges against him were even more specific. He was often accused of eating forbidden food. Bhattacharya, in Jñānānjan, accused Rammohun of eating meat and drinking excessive amounts of milk.[27]

---

[24] I have only been able to locate the 2nd edition, published in Calcutta in 1838. All references are to that edition.

[25] Gaurikanta Bhattacharya, Jñānānjan (2nd.ed.; Calcutta: no pub., 1838), pp. 4, 14-17.

[26] Bhattacharya, pp. 106-122.

[27] Bhattacharya, pp. 139-140.

This, said Bhattacharya, caused Rammohun to have an unrestrained sexual appetite. The author of the letter to the Samāchār Darpan also questioned Rammohun's eating habits. He asked how Rammohun could consider himself non-violent and philanthropic when he had goats slaughtered for his meals. He also accused Rammohun of drinking wine.[28]

Rammohun defended himself primarily by insisting that eating meat and drinking wine were not forbidden. In response to the letter in the Samāchār Darpan he said that it was permissible to eat meat as long as it was offered to God. Killing animals for food was not an act of violence, he said, since it was natural that one creature would eat another.[29] As for drinking wine, Rammohun argued that the Kulārṇava Tantra, the Mahānirvāṇa Tantra, and Manu sanctioned the drinking of wine[30] in the Kaliyuga[31] as long as the wine was properly purified. All of the śāstras agreed that overindulgence in wine was improper and could lead a person to hell (narak). The same śāstras also agreed that women should not drink wine, but could, at the most, be allowed to smell the wine.

---

[28]Bandyopadhyay, Vol. I, p. 327.

[29]Granthabali, Part VI, p. 16.

[30]Granthabali, Part VI, pp. 17-18.

[31]This is the fourth of the four ages of cosmic time which is developed in post-Vedic Hindu thought. It is the present age, and it represents a period of general decline. Therefore the realistic expectations of conduct in this age are less than they would have been in past ages. Thus wine drinking, for example, is permissible under certain circumstances during this age, whereas it would have been inappropriate in earlier ages.

Rammohun's eating habits were suspect on another basis as well.
His frequent association with foreigners made it seem likely that he
ate meals with them. In most instances he seems to have been very
careful to protect himself against the charge of having eaten with
foreigners. While on a visit to France in the later years of his life
he attended a banquet in his honour but did not eat anything. Yet
when the occasion was less public it seems that he did eat with foreigners.
While he was in India he sometimes ate with foreigners after having taken
precautions to remove anyone who might tell the Hindu community that
he had done so.[32] He did not debate this issue in his writings, but
by his extraordinary care when dining with foreigners it is clear that
he was aware of the suspicions which people had.

His associations with foreigners were also criticized. Kavitakar
criticized Rammohun for appearing in public dressed as a Muslim (yavana),[33]
and others criticized him for having so many close Muslim friends.
Rammohun never defended his friendships, but he did answer Kavitakar's
criticisms of his style of clothing. He said that it was no longer
clear where the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim could be made,
since many of the current fashions in India were based at least in part
upon innovations introduced by the Muslims. Stitched clothes, for

---

[32]William Adam wrote in a letter how Rammohun had come to his
house one day and asked for "some refreshment". But he asked that all
the servants be asked to leave so that they would not see that he was
eating with a foreigner. See Collet, p. 125.

[33]This criticism and Rammohun's response are at Granthabali,
Part II, pp. 75-76.

example, had been introduced by the Muslims, and nearly all Hindus had

begun to use at least some items which had stitching. In any case,

he added, fidelity to the tradition did not depend upon matters such

as clothing styles, but on matters of spirit.

Some of Rammohun's other friendships were also criticized. During

his lifetime it was often rumoured that the famous Calcutta dancer Niki

Baiji was invited to dance in his house.[34] While this would have been

acceptable entertainment for many wealthy people, it was not acceptable

for someone involved in religious discussion and publication. Rammohun

was also accused of visiting prostitutes and of having a Muslim concubine.

He denied having anything to do with prostitutes[35] but defended his rela-

tionship with the Muslim woman. He said that such a relationship was

permissible under Hindu law, and constituted a "Śaiva marriage".[36]

He said that such a marriage was sanctioned in the Mahānirvāṇa Tantra.

It was a marriage which could disregard caste or religion, and which had

as its only purpose a sexual relationship. However valid his justifica-

tion of such a marriage may have been, it is apparent that this relation-

ship was the subject of a certain amount of gossip. Just before he left

---

[34]Raychaudhury, p. 34. Also Sushil Kumar De, Bengali Literature
in the Nineteenth Century (2nd ed.; Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay,
1962), p. 525.

[35]Raychaudhury, p. 34.

[36]Granthabali, Part VI, p. 19.

for Europe in 1830 his relationship with this woman was satirized in
the *Samāchār Darpan*.

> Javani sweetheart gave birth to a beautiful son. He named
> him Rāja and kept the son with him. He got that Javani
> woman by luck. She is very beautiful and sweet-tongued. She
> gave birth to a daughter. She is blessed with beauty and
> quality. Just imagine how beautiful the mother is who gave
> birth to such wonderful children. But he had to leave all and
> go. Only the good son Raja accompanied him.[37]

It is important to be cautious about the stories of Rammohun's
personal friendships, even though he admitted some of those which
offended some of his contemporaries. Still, all the stories about
him are not necessarily true simply because one or two of them are.
He denied all accusations that he visited prostitutes. There was
another story which became popular in Calcutta while he was in England,
and although he was not present to deny it, it quite clearly seems to have
been baseless and malicious. The story appeared formally in the
*Samāchār Darpan* on November 3, 1832.[38] The newspaper commented editor-
ially that many people were saying that Rammohun was preparing to marry
an English lady. The newspaper said that the story seemed to be a
fabricated rumour. From our knowledge of Rammohun's years in England it
seems quite evident that he never had plans to marry an English lady.
The fact that such a story would be given credence by a good number of
people shows that many people had serious reservations about the pro-
priety of Rammohun's lifestyle.

---

[37]This is quoted by Raychaudhury, p. 38 from the *Samāchār Darpan*,
of November 4 and 8, 1830.

[38]Bandyopadhyay, Vol. II, pp. 485-486.

Another area of Rammohun's personal life which was questioned by his contemporaries and by later scholars was his wealth. Kavitakar raised one of the first known queries about Rammohun's economic interests when he accused Rammohun of acting greedily in rushing to Chinsura to collect a debt from Mr. Drabing.[39] Rammohun ultimately denied the charge, saying that he did not know a Mr. Drabing and that he had not been to Chinsura for many years. But before he denied the charge he commented that it was not inappropriate for someone to be concerned about his own self-interest and survival, and to protect the interests of his relatives and friends. This was appropriate as much for someone who was deeply concerned about ultimate questions about God as for someone with no interest in such matters. He seemed to be suggesting that if he had known a Mr. Drabing in Chinsura who owed him money, he would probably have gone to Chinsura to collect from him. His discussion tends to detract from the fact that the charges against him were unfounded, since his discussion suggests that he would have done exactly what he was accused of doing had the situation arisen.

Another suggestion, made by Kissory Chand Mitra[40] several years after Rammohun's death was that Rammohun might have been involved in some dishonest business dealings to be able to amass the fortune which he had. Mitra said that the income from Rammohun's occupations was

---

[39] Granthabali, Part II, pp. 72-73.

[40] Kissory Chand Mitra, "Rammohan Roy", Calcutta Review, IV (July-December, 1845), p. 364.

not enough to provide him with the funds which he had by the time he moved to Calcutta. Although Rammohun's admirers have defended him against this charge,[41] it is interesting that someone like Mitra, who was generally sympathetic to much of Rammohun's work, would have raised such questions.

The most serious questions about Rammohun's economic affairs, however, centre on his relationship with his father and brothers.[42] It seems that Rammohun's father became heavily indebted to the Maharajah of Burdwan about 1795. In 1796 he divided his property among his sons, and since he still owed money to the Maharajah it is possible to argue that he disposed of his land in order to avoid having to repay his debt. Rammohun received his share of the money and used it to begin his own accumulation of property and money. The Maharajah was unable to collect the money owed him from Rammohun's father, so he sued Rammohun and tried to prove that he should be liable for his father's debt. But the court declared in Rammohun's favour, and the Maharjah was unable to collect anything from him.

But before the Maharajah began proceedings against Rammohun,

---

[41] See Collet, pp. 31-32, 54-58. Also Prabhatchandra Gangopadhyay, Rāmmohana Prasanga. (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1947), pp. 4-13. These defences of Rammohun seem convincing.

[42] The suspicions are described in Raychaudhury pp. 15-26 and briefly noted in De, pp. 506-507. Gangopadhyay, pp. 15-20 defends Rammohun against these charges.
    It is unfortunate that so many of the accounts of these aspects of Rammohun's life are so biased. Raychaudhury's account includes a great deal of rumour and mixes this indiscriminately with confirmed facts. Some of the defences of Rammohun, on the other hand, make him sound like a saint who could not possibly have done any wrong.

Rammohun's father became indebted to the government, and for this debt

he was imprisoned. He appealed to his sons for assistance, and Rammohun,

who could have helped him, at first refused to give him any aid.

Finally Rammohun loaned him 1,000 rupees. Rammohun was on sound legal

grounds in refusing to help his father, but he seems to have acted

selfishly if his actions are compared to Debendranath Tagore. Deben-

dranath's father Dwarkanath left large debts, and Debendranath, although

he was not legally liable for these debts, paid them all even though

it ruined him financially. Debendranath's example is often cited as a

model of what a truly great person will do in such circumstances. By

comparison Rammohun's legal defences seem petty and selfish.

Rammohun was forced to expend a great deal of energy on lawsuits

throughout his life.[43] His mother and other relatives tried to deprive

him of his property by arguing that he had lost the rights to his

inheritance by his refusal to carry on the proper family religious

ceremonies. Rammohun won all these cases, but not without the loss

of a good deal of energy and a certain amount of reputation. Even

though he could prove that he was legally right, his public rift with

his family was damaging to his reputation.

The charges against Rammohun were varied and in some instances

they were only malicious rumours, but in the end they were harmful.

He was accused of price, of self-interest, of dishonesty in business,

of indifference to his family, of intemperance, of sexual offences,

_____

[43]See especially Collet, pp. 42-54 for an account of these law-
suits.

and of eating, drinking, and socializing unacceptably. He was never

proved legally guilty, and in many cases he was able to prove his

innocence even in questions which were simply popular rumour. There

were some charges which he diverted by speaking about whether or not

the act in question was an offence. But whether the charges were

motivated by personal antipathy to him and to his work, or whether

they were motivated by a genuine sense of moral outrage, they had

their effect on the success of his work. In the end he was legally

vindicated but his reputation was tarnished. He simply did not seem

to be the kind of religious leader that the people expected, and

the controversy which surrounded his lifestyle obscured the possible

theological truth of whatever he said. In that sense his opponents,

even if they presented malicious and fabricated charges, were able to

hinder his work.

## 15. Evaluation

We have seen that Rammohun disagreed with some of his contemporaries about the appropriate context for theological discussion as well as about the standards of social conduct which might properly be expected of those participating in the discussion. Those disagreements have implications for Hindu religious thought in general, and some of these implications were never explicitly the subject of debate between Rammohun and his opponents. Our intention here is to evaluate the implications of these disagreements, to see why, in the Hindu context they were so contentious.

Rammohun, like Indian writers in general, accepted the concept of adhikāra-bheda, that is, the notion that there are significant differences of rights/competence between individuals. His acceptance of this concept is evident throughout his writings, and although his acceptance of this idea is usually implicit, it is occasionally stated very explicitly. In one of his debates about sati he acknowledged that "As men have various dispositions, those whose minds are enveloped in desire, passion, and cupidity, have no inclination for the disinterested worship of the Supreme Being."[1]

Rammohun and his opponents did not discuss particular instances

---

[1]Works, Part III, p. 94.

222

of adhikāra, but they disagreed on their analysis of the general level

of competence which people had. Rammohun's opponents said that most

people could not understand the abstract conceptions of God which he

was teaching, and if they were taught only these things they would

soon lose interest in God entirely. Therefore they needed images,

simple stories, and attractive rituals to give them a glimpse of what

God was like. They needed priests and religious teachers to interpret

God and the religious life to them in simplified forms which they could

understand. A recent author has put this interpretation of adhikāra-

bheda and its importance in this way:

> Men may be grouped into three classes: those in whom the
> faculty of intellect and reasoning is dominant; those in
> whom emotion plays the highest role; and those who are con-
> trolled by their impulses and instincts. To those who belong
> to the first group abstract thinking is easy, and they find
> satisfaction only in rational philosophy. This class is,
> naturally, a small group. For them ritualistic ceremonial re-
> ligion is not suited; in other words, the members of this group
> are not adhikārins (competent) for ritualistic religion. The
> last group is composed of children and those with childish men-
> tality. They cannot think; nor are their emotions developed.
> They can be trained to follow a routine which, in due course,
> may help them to enjoy a form of vegetable satisfaction, to
> borrow a term from biology. As children grow up and acquire
> emotional factors and capacity to think, the permanent members
> of this group are few and limited to those of low mental capa-
> city. The bulk of humanity lies between these two, forming
> the second or intermediary group. In them emotion predominates;
> they are also capable of abstract thinking, but to a limited
> extent; and most of them would also require material and mechan-
> ical measures to stimulate their emotions to the desired
> strength. Bhakti-mārga or the emotional way of realizing God
> is for them, and Āgama ritualism is designed to satisfy the
> needs of this class. The most important thing to understand
> in Hinduism is that everything taught there is not intended
> for everybody; there is a definite question of suitability or
> adhikāri-bhāva. The greatness of Hinduism lies in this fact

that it supplies forms, methods, and measures to suit all possible types of men.[2]

While Rammohun would have been in general agreement with this description of human types, he would have disagreed with the suggestion that most people were suited for bhakti mārga (the emotional/ devotional way) rather than for jñāna mārga·(the way of knowledge). He felt that most people could understand abstract descriptions of God on the basis of their own hearing and reading. Consequently it was helpful to make the śāstras available to them for their own study. Only the very ignorant, and these were the exceptions, could not comprehend God through these means and in this way; it was only for them that other forms of worship were necessary. He emphasized that those who needed images, simple stories, and attractive rituals were the minority.

This difference of opinion had some serious practical implications. If Rammohun's diagnosis of human capacity was accepted, it would mean that the majority of religious practices were meeting the needs of only a minority of people. To rectify this the emphasis in the religious system would need to be changed from ritual to knowledge, from karma and bhakti to jñāna. Such a change was not incidental, for it would involve a substantial revaluation and potential reallocation of religious leaders. The priests of various kinds would by and large find their special knowledge and services were not needed.

---

[2]Varma, "Rituals of Worship", The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol. IV, The Religions, p. 463.

Even the role of the guru was undermined by Rammohun's analysis. One of the usual consequences of the emphasis upon adhikāra-bheda was a corresponding emphasis upon private instruction by a guru. It was the task of the guru not merely to be knowledgeable and a good teacher, but also to be sensitive to the needs of those who came to him for instruction. The guru had to decide what the student should learn and how he should be taught. Everything the guru did was calculated in terms of the special adhikāra of a particular student. Agehananda Bharati describes this process in tantric practice:

> When the prospective guru has acknowledged the adhikāra
> (spiritual qualification) of the prospective disciple, he
> selects an auspicious day for the ceremony by matching the
> horoscopes of the aspirant with his own and with the respec-
> tive 'devatithi'; this 'date of the deity' is the day and the
> hour in which any particular deity is easily accessible for
> worship. Establishing the adhikāra of an aspirant is vir-
> tually identical with finding the latter's iṣṭadevatā, i.e.
> the deity or divine aspect, meditating on which the aspirant
> will find congenial; and each deity as well as every divine
> aspect has its own mantra - this has to be imparted to the
> disciple at the right time.[3]

This emphasis upon unique capacities and private instruction seemed to be ignored by Rammohun's preference for congregational worship. Even though he occasionally expressed his respect for genuine gurus who could lead their disciples to higher levels of understanding, it seems that he regarded them as well qualified instructors rather than as men who could open for each man the door to the transcendent which was uniquely his own.

---

[3]Agehananda Bharati, The Tantric Tradition (London: Rider and Co., 1965), p. 189.

This seems consistent with Rammohun's opposition to personal
authority. He favoured a religious system which was less dependent upon
the authority of individuals. Such a system was impossible as long as
the emphasis upon personal mantras and istadevatās remained, for these
things were features of a religious system which was based on indivi-
dual attention. But since Rammohun felt that these elements of
religion were dispensable for the majority of people, he could consis-
tently argue that the religious leaders who were necessary to maintain
such practices would be more useful doing other things. In taking this
position, of course, he encountered opposition both from religious
leaders and from those who felt the need for the personal attention and
mediation of religious specialists.

Rammohun's interpretation of adhikāra challenged the utility of
the large number of religious options which the tradition contained,
and he seemed to be saying that by and large one common form of worship
was adequate. Not only did he undermine the variety within the tradi-
tion, but the form of understanding and worship which he advocated also
seemed to be based on a different understanding of the capacities of
most men. He felt that most people could come to an adequate under-
standing of God through reading the śāstras themselves and by partici-
pating in common worship. The usual view was that these methods would
be inappropriate and too difficult for the majority of people, and that
most people needed a more emotional/devotional way to God under the
guidance of a religious leader who could prescribe the proper method

for them. Rammohun's analysis of the common capacities of men and his recommended form of worship amounted to an attack on the religious leadership as it was commonly understood.

What he proposed to put in its place was hardly very attractive to most of his contemporaries. In his discussion of the appropriate role and lifestyle for a person genuinely involved in understanding and teaching about God, Rammohun proved that the śāstras contained accounts of grhasthas who were renowned for their knowledge of God, that the śāstras taught that those outside the ascetic order could come to know God, and that the śāstras acknowledged in many places that the rituals and ceremonies which were so dependent upon the religious authorities were not the only way to arrive at a knowledge of God. He also argued that his own lifestyle was suitable for one involved in theological discussions. And yet, by the very nature of his defence of his position, as a result of the controversy surrounding his own life, and because of the evidence in some of the śāstras he quoted to establish his position, he encountered constant criticism as he argued for a new understanding of the characteristics of a religious life.

First of all, it was evident that the examples of grhasthas which he used were exceptions within the tradition, and part of the reason that they were so celebrated was that they were exceptions. It was far more usual for famous religious teachers to be men who had renounced the world and had ceased to be involved in worldly affairs.[4]

---

[4]One could cite numerous examples, but in Bengal the examples of Caitanya and Ramakrishna are especially relevant. Both were married men when their transformations took place, and during the years that they lived as spiritual masters they lived in chastity and austerity.

It was also noteworthy that the examples which Rammohun appealed to were from very ancient times. During recent centuries it had become even more exceptional for famous teachers to be simultaneously involved in worldly affairs. Rammohun's attempt to model religious leadership on these great figures was an attempt to establish a new rule on the basis of the exceptions to the old one.

The second reason that this appeal to these precedents failed was the apparent arrogance of Rammohun's claim to be doing essentially what these great men had done. Kavitakar quite bluntly told Rammohun that it was presumptuous of him to identify his lifestyle with that of King Janaka.[5] Even if Rammohun was correct in saying that the tradition had precedents for the involvement of _grhasthas_ in religious discussion and instruction, he was not able to assume that his contemporaries would automatically grant him that right on the basis of those precedents.

His discussions of the importance of ritual had much the same results. He argued, as we have seen, that rituals were not necessary means for those who were capable of a fuller understanding of God through knowledge. But he often argued this point using passages which, when seen in context, were discussing exceptions to the general rule: the general rule was that rituals were helpful and in many cases necessary means of attaining knowledge of God.

---

[5]_Granthabali_, Part II, pp. 73-74.

His general opposition to rituals, for example, is certainly
undermined by a closer examination of some of the passages which he
cited to defend his position.  He often cited passages from Brahma
Sūtra III.iv.1-49, a section which deals with the superiority of
knowledge to ritual in coming to a true knowledge of God.  Yet even in
this section there are indications that ritual is an important pre-
liminary stage of the process of knowing God, and that the superiority
of knowledge rests more on the fact that it is a higher and more final
stage, than that it is part of a process completely different from
ritual.  In Śaṅkara's commentary on Brahma Sūtra III.iv.26 we find the
following comments:

> The question to be considered is whether knowledge derives
> absolutely no benefit from the duties enjoined for the
> different orders of life, or it does derive some benefit...
> As a matter of fact knowledge needs the help of all the duties
> of the various stages of life, and it is not a fact that there
> is absolutely no dependence on them (for purification of heart).
> ... once knowledge has emerged, it does not depend on any
> other factor for producing its (own) result (viz. liberation);
> but it does depend on others for its own emergence.

Rammohun preferred to emphasize passages like Brahma Sūtra
III.iv.25 where it is stated that rituals are not needed for liberation.
But that passage is qualified significantly by the following passage
which we have just quoted, for that passage indicates that knowledge could
not even come into existence without the preparation of the performance
of the "duties enjoined for the different orders of life".  Rammohun
also ignored the section following these passages (Brahma Sūtra
III.iv.27-49) in which self-control is discussed as a valuable
preparation for knowledge.  Śaṅkara, in his commentary on Brahma Sūtra

III.iv.26, quotes from Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad IV.iv.22, where it is said that the Self is known through the study of the Vedas, sacrifices, charity, and austerity. Śaṅkara explains that austerity here means the "dispassionate enjoyment of sense-objects". Rammohun's enjoyment of sense-objects may have been dispassionate, but it is clear from the criticisms of many of his contemporaries that they regarded his enjoyment of sense-objects as anything but dispassionate.

This same emphasis on a dispassionate attitude toward life is present in other passages which Rammohun used to justify the gṛhastha lifestyle, but he never drew attention to it. He translated the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, and there we find that the Self is attained through austerity, knowledge, and chastity.[6] In Manu XII.92, a passage which Rammohun used, the extinction of the passions is described as part of the path to the attainment of Brahman. In Manu IV, a section dealing with the gṛhastha who is devoted to God, there is a great deal of emphasis on the simple life which he should live. Many actions are permitted such a householder, but there is a constant emphasis on simplicity and austerity. So while it is true, as Rammohun asserted that it was, that these śāstras envision the gṛhastha actively involved in gaining and transmitting knowledge of God, it is also true that the style of life which such a gṛhastha was expected to live was more restrained and austere than the style in which Rammohun lived.

There are at least two major reasons why the criticisms of

---

[6] Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad III.i.5

Rammohun's lifestyle were as sustained as they were. The first reason is that Rammohun often defended himself not by proving that the charges against him were false, but by insisting that the actions which his critics disapproved of were not offences and were sanctioned by passages in the śāstras. It must have sounded like extreme legalism for Rammohun to defend himself against the charge of having a Muslim concubine by showing that certain passages in the śāstras regarded this as appropriate behaviour in a Śaiva marriage. Similarly, when he argued that he had no legal responsibility for his father's debts he must have sounded callous in a society in which family relationships are held in high regard. The legality of his actions was likely less relevant to his contemporaries than the appropriateness of his behaviour for a man who regarded himself as a religious teacher. Had he been able to disprove the charges he would have at least demonstrated that he also regarded it as important that a religious teacher should live an exemplary life. As it was the charges seemed justified, and his, lack of concern about them seemed ample proof that his own ideals of conduct were not identical to those of many of his contemporaries.

The second reason for Rammohun's inability to divert the charges against him was his failure to respond to the charges on the same level that they were made. He often missed or ignored the emotional implications of the charges and treated them as theoretical scholastic disputes. When it was suggested that certain acts made him ineligible to speak publicly about religious issues, he usually defended himself by arguing that a grhastha had the right to be involved in such issues. He seemed

to suggest that the attacks against him were made because he was
a grhastha, not because the act itself was objectionable for any
public religious figure.  He did not seem to sense that the attacks
against him might have been motivated by genuine concern that his
lifestyle was not appropriate for a religious spokesman whether or
not he was a grhastha.

His responses to specific charges illustrates this quite clearly.
When he was accused of eating and drinking improperly he did not avoid
the charges or prove that he had not done the actions which he was charged
with.  Instead he justified his habits on the basis of sectarian reli-
gious practice, saying that while some groups preferred one lifestyle,
others preferred another.  The only charge he explicitly denied was
the charge of going to prostitutes.  The other charges he answered
by saying that the actions involved were only wrong or right depending
on the group to which one belonged or the authority upon which one
based one's behaviour.  He tried to make the accusations sound petty,
but his cavalier attitude was hardly what people seemed to expect from
one who was taking the position of a religious teacher.

Rammohun's disputes with his family were prime examples of his
failure to conform to the ideals expected of a public religious figure.
In all of these disputes he was on firm legal grounds, and despite
several court cases against him over a period of many years he was
never convicted of unlawfully taking either wealth or land from his
family.  On legal grounds he was faultless.  And yet some scholars have
pointed to the example of Debendranath Tagore and have suggested that

his willingness to assume the debts of his father demonstrated his concern for moral as well as legal propriety. Rammohun never chose to take such a stand. The Mahānirvāṇa Tantra, one of Rammohun's favorite śāstras, says that one has a special duty to father and mother and should serve them with all available means.[7] It goes on to say that the man who cares for his own well-being while neglecting the well-being of his elders and equals, is unworthy and is despised in this world. Rammohun stood indicted by that standard.

The difficulty was that because Rammohun was so involved in religious issues and because he was a person who claimed to have a fuller knowledge of God than most of his opponents, people had high expectations. Had he not been involved in religious discussions and publication it is unlikely that his lifestyle would have become the object of general scrutiny and criticism. But since he took the position of a religious leader his life was expected to exemplify the traditional virtues of austerity and self-control associated with such a position. When he did not conform to this model of behaviour his claim to religious leadership was challenged.

There were other grounds for these challenges as well. Very little is known about Rammohun's personal religious life, and many years after his death some of his former associates were still not certain whether he had been initiated into any form of religious practice. This simply indicates that he did not participate in the

[7]The Great-Liberation (Mahānirvāṇa Tantra), trans. Sir John Woodroffe (5th ed; Madras: Ganesh and Co. (Madras) Private Ltd, 1971), pp. 185-188.

usual public forms of religious practice. He once noted that his

opponents called him irreligious because he did not smear himself

with ashes and parade publicly.[8] If that meant being irreligious it is

clear that he accepted the charge gladly. But what is more important

than this is that he did not become identified as a devout person,

on other grounds. During his lifetime he participated in several forms

of worship, some of them Christian, but even in his own Brahmo Samaj

he did not become the obvious spiritual leader.[9] His life seemed to

have none of the features of religious leadership which the tradition

recognized.

In summary, his life did not seem to be that of a religious

leader. His lifestyle was open to many objections, and although he

met all accusations with reason, *śāstra*, or legal arguments, he lived

a life of controversy. The way in which he defended his lifestyle

seemed arrogant and out of keeping with what was expected of a religious

leader. He was deeply involved in the material concerns of business, and

although his lifestyle does not seem to have been ostentatious, it

certainly was not simple and austere. His lengthy legal struggles

---

[8]*Granthabali*, Part II, pp. 73-74.

[9]This is not intended to minimize his importance to the Brahmo
Samaj. It is well known that without his presence the society nearly
collapsed, and it only recovered its momentum and sense of direction
after Debendranath Tagore became its leader.

with his family seemed to indicate that he was more attached to his possessions than to his relatives. And although he published many books on questions of theology and worship, his own life did not seem to be recognizably-religious. All in all, he did not seem to be the kind of person who had the right to speak with authority of religious issues.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

We can now return to our original question and ask again
"Why was Rammohun criticized so severely?" This study has provided a
number of specific answers to that question.

In the first place, Rammohun was criticized for undermining
the authority upon which religious life was based. He said that the
religious leaders were suspect because they were self-interested.
He said that customs were open to question because many customs were
demonstrably harmful and contrary to the spirit of Sruti. He said that
the sectarian sastras only had authority insofar as they agreed with
Sruti.

His opponents argued that by attacking the credibility of
religious leaders, customs, and sectarian sastras he was undermining
the very things by which the tradition was made applicable to people's
circumstances. Personal advice from religious leaders helped to respond
to current situations in life. Customs provided a framework within which
to live. Sectarian sastras provided special insights into the lives of
the gods and goddesses and made them relevant for daily life. These
were the elements of religious authority which were especially applic-
able to individual interests and situations.

It was not adequate for Rammohun to base his theology and his

237

religious life primarily on a few śāstras and on reason, for even the śāstras were of little use without some guidance in applying them to specific situations. This guidance was provided by precedents and approved practices (customs) and by the example and advice of those who understood the intentions of the śāstras. Without customs and religious leaders the authority of the śāstras was lifeless. Rammohun was criticized because his interpretation of authority seemed to include no practical procedure by which the śāstras could be applied to the lives of average men and women. His concept of authority seemed to result in a sound authoritative basis for religious life and theology, but a basis which could not be appropriated.

His concerns seemed more scholastic than practical. He wanted to have a rational and defensible basis for authority. He wanted standards which were universally valid. But his opponents seemed to regard that as a theoretical rather than a practical problem. They were concerned with authority which might be appealed to in specific situations, and that authority, they felt, would be based on local and family customs, as well as on the example and advice of religious leaders.

The second basic criticism of Rammohun was made on somewhat similar grounds. When Rammohun attacked polytheism and image worship and advocated the simple worship of the one God, he again seemed to be more concerned with theoretical than with practical matters. He promoted a concept of God which would be universally valid, a concept

which would not be vulnerable to the criticism of free thinkers. But many of his opponents were more concerned with the cultic life of the average person, and they were convinced that Rammohun was not responding to the issues of cultic life. He advocated a God who was, not restricted to one body of texts, one family, one community, or even one nation. But while this concern was legitimate as a scholarly question, it was not very relevant to the religious life of the average devotee. The average person was interested in a vivid account of a god with whom he could identify. Commitment and devotion to such a god were religious issues. Universal validity was a theoretical concern for the scholar.

It is interesting to note how Rammohun and his opponents rarely addressed the question of polytheism and monotheism on the same level. He argued that polytheism was a faulty conceptualization of the ultimate nature of Reality. They argued that monotheism as he advocated it was too difficult to understand, and the average person would find it so unattractive that he would probably lose all interest in God. Better a poor understanding of God with a great deal of commitment, they said, than a sound philosophical principle with few advocates. Rammohun replied that it was better for people to partially understand the actual nature of Reality than for them to be content with a misleading concept of Reality.

The third basic criticism developed out of these disagreements about authority and theology, and it concerned Rammohun's understanding

of man's general capacity for religious knowledge. Rammohun's
opponents accused him of being unconcerned with people's ability to
understand the religious concepts which he was advocating, and they did
so because they accepted the usual assumption that very few people were
capable of understanding anything more than polytheistic theology.
Rammohun insisted that he did not lack concern for people's comprehension,
but that he was convinced that most people could comprehend at least
the essence of what he was saying. Yet Rammohun was still vulnerable
to this criticism even if most people had the competence which he sug-
gested they had; for instead of developing a system of worship which
was adapted to people's individual needs and abilities, he advocated
a system which assumed that all people had nearly identical competence
and needs. If he took the concept of adhikāra seriously he might
legitimately argue that people's capacities had by and large been
underestimated, but he had no right to assume that all people's
capacities were almost identical. His congregational form of worship
showed no respect for the significant differences of competence which
might separate people. Rammohun tried to make it appear as though the
question was simply whether the general level of understanding was low
or whether it was high. His opponents disagreed with him on the answer
to this question. But they also insisted that the differences between
people should be taken seriously, and this needed to be done whether
people were generally very competent or largely incompetent. Rammohun
did not appear to recognize this implication of adhikāra. This was

another example of his interest in general theoretical issues and his lack of concern for specific and personal applications of these issues.

Finally Rammohun was criticized because he seemed unwilling to live a life which was consistent with his theological concerns and his role as a public religious leader. Most of the things for which he was criticized by his opponents would have been acceptable for a man who was only a businessman. But his actions were not consistent with the usual expectations of conduct for a religious leader. Rammohun proposed to dissociate theological debate from its usual implications for lifestyle, and this was unacceptable. On the one hand Rammohun's lifestyle did not seem to symbolize renunciation of the mundane concerns of this world and a wholehearted commitment to a fuller understanding of God. On the other hand, if Rammohun's challenge to the identification of a particular lifestyle with religious leadership were to succeed, it would undermine the fundamental premise that a devoted religious life had certain necessary social implications.

All of these criticisms point in some degree to a fundamental difference in orientation between Rammohun and his opponents. Rammohun was interested in the most universal application of the theology which he advocated, while his opponents assumed that any theology would appeal to only a limited number. Rammohun wanted a basis for authority which could be appropriated by the maximum number of people, and so he advocated reason, which everyone had to some degree, and śāstra, which he proposed to make available to as many people as pos-

sible in a language which they could understand. Rammohun wanted a

theology which included all aspects of God as well as all of the interests

which people might have; so he advocated monotheism. Rammohun wanted

a majority of people to be able to benefit from such a theology, so

he argued that one's lifestyle should not be an impediment to par-

ticipating actively in theological study and debate. His opponents

believed that most people could only grasp a limited number of theo-

logical concepts, and that they could do so best with the help of

religious leaders. All of their concern for customs, sectarian śāstras,

religious leaders, various gods, and specific lifestyles, reflected

their belief that there were significant differences between people and

that these differences were adapted to both theologically and socially

in the tradition. They believed that there was more variety among

people than Rammohun acknowledged, and they also believed that this

variety had more significant implications for theology and the

religious life than Rammohun was prepared to grant. This difference

in orientation, as much as anything else, was the basis for the criti-

cisms of Rammohun. The theological debates provided the context from

which this difference emerged.

These debates between Rammohun and his opponents have some

significant implications for our understanding of the Hindu religious

tradition. In the first place they indicate the importance of the

concept of adhikāra-bheda. We noted earlier that the word 'darśana'

is used by the tradition both in a philosophical and a devotional

context. In the philosophical sense it suggests that all ways of conceptualizing Reality are only partial, although all of these partial explanations help to point out some significant aspects of Reality. In the devotional sense it suggests that all encounters with God are essentially personal and private, and that they are determined by what we are interested in and capable of knowing. Both uses of the word emphasize that any individual understanding is limited, but both also emphasize that each individual's understanding is unique.

This suggests that the Hindu religious tradition includes a very profound and substantial awareness of the individual. It is easy to over-emphasize that the ultimate aim of Hindu religious thought and practice is the negation of individuality, without acknowledging that until the self is negated it is taken very seriously. It is assumed that the path to the negation of self is unique for each individual. Thus in practical religious life, just as there are an infinite number of people, so there are an infinite number of gods and goddesses for them to identify with and an infinite number of spiritual paths to follow. This variety of individuals, gods, and spiritual paths is not insignificant just because it is ultimately negated.

These debates also point to the important relationship between theology and social life. It has long been recognized that social factors are highly important in India. Rammohun's life emphasizes one aspect of that importance. We see in the criticisms of his life a

concern that there should be a lifestyle which was consistent with a theological vocation. Our discussion of Manu indicated what this life-style should be. It should be dispassionate and free of worldly concerns. Rammohun not only lived another lifestyle, he consciously defended it. Arabinda Poddar calls Rammohun's lifestyle hedonism, and says that it more than anything else was the challenge which provoked his contemporaries.[1] Poddar is correct in drawing attention to the significance of Rammohun's lifestyle, for it is clear that the life of a religious leader in the Indian context is expected to be detached from many of the earthly pleasures which Rammohun seemed to enjoy so heartily. Both in his practice and in his defence of his practice Rammohun challenged the relationship between theology and social life.

In challenging the relationship between theology and social life Rammohun questioned the context in which theology takes place. He raised the same issue from another perspective when he questioned the usual interpretation of adhikāra. He felt that theological discussion could take place publicly and that it could be engaged in by people from all walks of life. He did not feel that theological issues should be debated only in scholastic groups or only by scholars and religious leaders. Just as he was interested in a theology which was universally valid, so he wanted that theology to take place in the

---

[1] Arabinda Poddar, Renaissance in Bengal: Quests and Confrontations 1800-1860. (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970), pp. 48, 55, 71-72.

widest possible forum.  The opposition which this encountered demon-
strated the importance of the relationship between theology and the
context in which that theology is debated.  The concept of adhikāra
implies that there may be some people who are not competent to hear
or participate in certain theological discussions, and this has always
been taken seriously in Hindu religious thought.  Only certain
classes of men may hear the Vedas, and only some of these have the right
to be publicly involved in discussions of the Vedas.  When people come
to the guru they are taught only what he feels they are capable of
benefiting from.  What the guru teaches one person in private he would
not necessarily announce in public.  These are all indications of the
relevance of the context in which theology takes place.  It is impossible
to account for the vehemence of the opposition to Rammohun without
acknowledging that the opposition was largely caused by the threat that
he posed to the relationship between theology and the context in which
it is done.

These issues are relevant for the study of religion in general.
In most traditions we find that it is assumed that people have different
capacities and that what is appropriate for one person may not be
very helpful for another.  In some traditions the differences between
people are understood in a very general way.  In other traditions these
differences are more precisely defined and the definitions account for
even very slight variations.  In the Pali canon of Theravada Buddhism,
for example, there is a text entitled Designation of Human Types

(Puggala-Paññatti), in which various kinds of character types are minutely distinguished from each other.[2] The reason that such a painstaking description is considered worthwhile is because it is assumed that these character types are relevant for determining what unique religious capacities each person has. Even in the Christian tradition, which has by and large made little formal allowance for human variation in its theology, there are some concessions made to human variation. The Roman Catholic concept of purgatory is one example. Another example, this one very much like the Hindu concept of polytheism and image worship, is briefly referred to by Thomas Merton in his autobiography The Seven Storey Mountain. He speaks there of his fascination with the Byzantine mosaics in many of the Roman churches, and he recalls that in his hunt for these mosaics he visited all the great shrines of Rome in the same way that a pilgrim would, although for the wrong reason. "And yet" he says,

> it was not for the wrong reason either. For these mosaics
> and frescos and all the ancient altars and thrones and sanc-
> tuaries were designed and built for the instruction of people
> who were not capable of immediately understanding anything
> higher.[3]

In Protestantism there are few formal acknowledgements of the relevance of human variation, although the proliferation of denominations indicates

---

[2]Designation of Human Types (Puggala-Paññatti), trans. Bimala Charan Law. Pali Text Society Translation Series, No. 12. (London: Luzac and Co. Ltd., 1924).

[3]Thomas Merton, The Seven Storey Mountain. (New York: Garden City Books, 1951), p. 108.

that such variation has great practical consequences.

The implications of adhikāra-bheda in religious traditions seem to suggest some provocative insights which have as yet been largely unexplored. What, for example is the relationship between an acceptance of adhikāra-bheda and religious tolerance? Specifically, is there a significant difference between the dogmatic position of Hindu and Christian sectarian groups? What is the relationship between the concept of the sacred and profane and the attitude toward adhikāra-bheda? These questions and others like them seem to suggest a possible relationship between a view of truth, an understanding of the cosmos, and a concept of human capacity.

Another issue which this study suggests is the importance of the distinction between higher and lower knowledge, or scholarly and popular understanding. Rammohun insisted that people should be encouraged to improve their understanding of Reality, and he conceived this improved understanding in scholastic terms. The questions which was raised by some of his opponents was "Why should people be stimulated to another way of understanding Reality when their present understanding seems quite adequate to them?" In other words, if people have a certain understanding of Reality which allows them to live quite contentedly, why should they change that form of understanding for another? In the Christian tradition the answer has often seemed obvious: proper belief is necessary to avoid eternal damnation. But in the Hindu tradition the reason is not so clear. Why should religious understanding be altered if the practical results of such a change are not evident?

A final issue which this study suggests is another perspective on the relationship between religion and culture. Rammohun has often been credited with establishing the basis for a universal religion,[4] but those who credit him with that accomplishment often neglect to mention that it was this accomplishment which was at least in part responsible for the criticism which he encountered. In his own life the issue which became most contentious was his lifestyle. In attempting to create a lifestyle which would be less restrictive for the religious man Rammohun challenged his own culture's expectations of behaviour. He lived as a cosmopolitan man, and while that was remarkable for a man of his time, it was not what was expected of a religious leader within the Hindu tradition. During the last years of the nineteenth century Swámi Vivekanada also lived a very cosmopolitan life, but he never lost his identity as a monk, and that identity kept him firmly rooted in the Hindu tradition.

From the vantage point of the scholar religious universalism may seem to present no insurmountable problems. Theology and ethics can be rationalized quite easily. But all religious traditions have some boundaries which are inviolable, and these boundaries are not identical in each tradition. For the Christian these boundaries may be historical and doctrinal. For the Hindu these boundaries

---

[4]See, for example, Brajendranath Seal, Rammohun: The Universal Man (Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, n. d.).

may involve issues of authority and social behaviour. It is often assumed that religious universalism is possible because the essence of all religions is the same. But it is important to note that religious traditions define themselves in terms of essentials which often constitute their boundaries, rather than in terms of essences. The Hindu who says that the Veda is authoritative is not merely saying that he feels the need for some authority. He is saying that another person who does not accept the Veda as authority, even if he accepts some other authority, is not a Hindu.

A careful study of the relationship between religion and culture will show that each religious tradition has a different relationship to its cultural milieu. This is one of the factors which makes it so difficult for one religious tradition to be transposed into the cultural milieu of another. People learn to make certain assumptions about culture because of their indigenous religious tradition. The new religious tradition cannot but seem counter-cultural, even though its stance within its own indigenous setting may not have been counter-cultural at all. Those who try to participate in two religious traditions simultaneously often find themselves rejected by many members of both traditions. Those who, like Rammohun, identify with one religious tradition, but try to incorporate elements of other cultures into their religious lifestyle, often find their attempts rejected by members of their own tradition who sense, in this attack on the relationship of religion and culture, an attack on the defining framework of their own tradition.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

# Bibliography

Materials in this bibliography are arranged under the following headings:

1. Writings of Rammohun Roy,       4. Religion and Philosophy,
2. Dictionaries and Encyclopedias,  5. Social Life,
3. History,                        6. Periodicals.

## 1. Writings of Rammohun Roy

### a. Bengali

Rāy, Rāmmohan. *Rāmmohan Granthābalī.* compiled and ed. Brajendranath
    Bandyopadhyay and Sajanikanta Das. Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya
    Parishat, n.d.

### b. English

Roy, Rammohun. *Dialogue Between a Theist and an Idolater.* ed. Stephen
    N. Hay. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1963. This work has
    not definitely been identifed as Rammohun's.

--------. *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy.* ed. Kalidas Nag
    and Debajyoti Burman, 6 pts. in 6 vols. Calcutta: Sadharan
    Brahmo Samaj, 1945-1951.

--------. *Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin or A Gift to Deists.* trans.
    Moulavi Obaidullah el Obaide. Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj,
    1949.

## 2. Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

Dowson, John. *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion,
    Geography, History, and Literature.* 11th ed. London: Routledge
    and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1968.

*The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics.* eds James Hastings, n.d.

*A Sanskrit-English Dictionary.* Monier Monier-Williams. Indian ed.,
    1970.

*Sanskrit-Wörterbuch.* Otto Böthlingk und Rudolph Roth, 1966.

Walker, Benjamin. The Hindu World: An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism.
    2 vols. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968.

3. History

    a. Bengali

Bagal, Jogesh Chandra. Rājā Rādhākānta Deb. 4th ed. Calcutta; Bangiya
    Sahitya Parishat, 1951.

--------. Unabimsa Satābdir Bānglā. Calcutta: Ranjan
    Publishing House, 1942.

Bandyopadhyay, Brajendranath. compiler and ed. Sangbād Patre Sekāler
    Kathā. 2nd ed. 2 vols. Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1949-
    1950.

--------. Banglā Samayik Patra, 1818-1868. new ed.
    Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1948.

Chattopadhyay, Nagendranath. Mahātmā Rājā Rāmmohan Rāyer Jiban Charit.
    5th ed. Allahabad: Indian Press Ltd., 1928.

Gangopadhyay, Prabhatchandra. Rāmmohana Prasanga. Calcutta: Sadharan
    Brahmo Samaj, 1947.

Ghosh, Benoy. ed. Samaikpatre Bānglār Samājchitra. 3 vols. Calcutta:
    Bengal Publishers Private Ltd., 1963-1964.

Gupta, Bipin Behari. Purātan Prasanga. 2 vols. Calcutta: Paragon Press,
    1913.

Gupta, Sushil Kumar. Unabimsa Satābdite Bānglār Navajāgaram. Calcutta:
    A. Mukherjee and Co. (Pvt) Limited, 1959.

Majundar, Mohitlal. Bānglār Navajug. Calcutta: Vidyodaya Library,
    1965.

Mukhopadhyay, Amitabha. Unish Sataker Samāj O Samskriti. Calcutta:
    General Printers and Publishers, Private, Ltd., 1971.

Obud, Kazi Abdul. Bāngalār Jāgaron. Calcutta: Visva Bharati Granthalaya,
    1956.

Pal, Bipin Chandra. Naba Yuger Bāngla. Calcutta: Jugajatri Prakashak
    Ltd., 1953.

Raychaudhury, Girija Sankar. Rājā Rāmmohan Rāy: Jiban Chariter Nutan
    Khasra. Calcutta: the author, n.d.

Shastri, Sivanath. _Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Banga Samāj_. 2nd ed.
Calcutta: New Age Publishers, Private, Ltd., 1957.

Sinha, Kaliprasanna. _Hutom Penchar Naksha_. Calcutta: Kavyprakash
Jantro, 1861.

  b. English

Basham, A. L. _The Wonder That was India_, Evergreen ed. New York:
Grove Press, 1959.

Bose, Nemai Sadhan. _The Indian Awakening and Bengal_. Calcutta:
Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969.

Chakravarty, Satis Chandra ed. _The Father of Modern India: Commemora-
tion Volume of the Rammohun Roy Centenary Celebrations, 1933,
Calcutta_: n. pub., 1935.

Collett, Sophia Dobson. _The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy_.
ed. Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli. Calcutta:
Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1962..

Das, Piyus Kanti. _Rajah Rammohun Roy and Brahmoism_. Calcutta: Firma
K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1970.

Das, Satyajit. ed. _Selections From the Indian Journals_. 2 vols.
Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1963, 1965.

Datta, Kalikinkar. _Renaissance, Nationalism, and Social Change in
Modern India_. Calcutta: Bookland Private Ltd., 1965.

————————. _Survey of India's Social Life and Economic Condition
in the Eighteenth Century (1707-1813)_. Calcutta: Firma K. L.
Mukhopadhyay, 1961.

De, Sushil Kumar. _Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century_.
Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962.

Farquhar, J. N. _Modern Religious Movements in India_. Delhi: Munshiram
Manoharlal, 1967. This was first published in 1914.

Gupta, A. ed. _Studies in the Bengal Renaissance_. Calcutta: National
Council of Education, Bengal, 1958.

Home, Amal. ed. _Rammohun Roy: The Man and His Work_. Centenary Publi-
city Booklet No. 1. Calcutta: Rammohun Centenary Committee,
1933.

Kopf, David. British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969.

Majumdar, Bimanbehari. History of Indian Social and Political Ideas from Rammohun to Dayananda. Calcutta: Bookland Private Ltd., 1967.

Majumdar, Jatindra Kumar, ed. Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India: A Selection From Records, 1775-1845, with an Historical Introduction. Calcutta: Art Press, 1941.

Majumdar, R.C. ed. British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance. Vol. X, Pt. II of The History and Culture of the Indian People. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965.

--------. Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1960.

--------. On Rammohun Roy. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1972.

Moore, Adrienne. Rammohun Roy and America. Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1942.

Mukherjee, Amitabha. Reform and Regeneration in Bengal (1774-1823). Calcutta: Rabindra Bharati University, 1968.

Mukherjee, Haridass and Uma Mukherjee. The Growth of Nationalism in India (1857-1905). Calcutta: Presidency Library, 1957.

Müller, F. Max. Rammohun to Ramakrishna. Calcutta: Sushil Gupta (India) Ltd., 1952. This is an adaptation based on several works by Müller published during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Nag, Jamuna. India's Great Social Reformer: Raja Rammohun Roy. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers (P) Ltd., 1972.

O'Malley, L. S. S. ed. Modern India and the West. London: Oxford University Press, 1941.

Oman, John Campbell. The Brahmans, Theists, and Muslims of India. London: T. Fischer Unwin, 1907.

Poddar, Arabinda. Renaissance in Bengal: Quests and Confrontations (1800-1860). Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1970.

Ray, Benoy Gopal. Religious Movements in Modern Bengal. Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 1965.

Renascent Bengal (1817-1857). The Asiatic Society Seminar Series -.
I. Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1972.

Roy, Samaren. The Roots of Bengali Culture and Other Essays. Calcutta:
Eureka Publishers, 1966.

Rudolph, Lloyd I. and Susan Hoeber Rudolph. The Modernity of Tradition.
Bombay: Orient Longmans Ltd., 1969.

Sarma, D. S. Renascent Hinduism. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1966.

--------. Studies in the Renaissance of Hinduism in the Nineteenth
and Twentieth Centuries. Benares: Benares Hindu University,
1944.

Sastri, Sivanath. The Brahmo Samaj: Religious Principles and Brief
History. abridged ed. Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1958.

--------. History of the Brahmo Samaj. Calcutta: R. Chatterji,
1911.

--------. Theistic Church in India. Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo
Samaj, 1966.

Seal, Brajendranath. Rammohun Roy: The Universal Man. Calcutta: Sadharan
Brahmo Samaj, n.d.

Sen, Prosanto Kumar. Biography of a New Faith. Vol. I. Calcutta:
Thacker, Spink and Co. (1933) Ltd., 1950.

Sen Gupta, K. P. The Christian Missionaries in Bengal (1793-1833).
Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1971.

Singh, Iqbal. Rammohun Roy. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1958.

Sinha, Narendra Krishna. ed. The History of Bengal (1757-1905).
Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1967.

Sinha, Pradip. Nineteenth Century Bengal: Aspects of Social History.
Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1965.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. Modernization of a Traditional Society.
Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965.

The Students' Rammohun Centenary Volume. Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar &
Sons Ltd., (1934).

Tagore, Saumyendranath. Rajah Rammohun Roy. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1966.

Winternitz, Maurice. A History of Indian Literature. trans. S. Ketkar. 3rd ed. Vol. I. Pt. 1. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1962.

3. Religion and Philosophy

a. Bengali

Basu, Chandra Sekhar. Vedānta Pravesa. Calcutta: Gupta Press, 1875.

Bhattacharya, Gaurikanta. Jñānānjan (A Treatise Against Hindu Apostacy and Denial of the Authority of the Vedas). 2nd ed. Calcutta: no pub., 1838.

Chaudhury, Dhirendranath. Dharmer Tattva O Sadhan. Patna: Author, n.d.

Mukhopadhyay, Bhudev. Vividha Prabandha. Chinsura: Budhodaya Jantra, 1905.

b. English

Aurobindo, Sri. The Foundations of Indian Culture. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1959.

The Bhagavad Gītā. Trans. Franklin Edgerton. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964. First published in two volumes in 1944 as Volume XXXVIII in the Harvard Oriental Series.

Bhandarkar, Sir R. G. Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, and Minor Religious Systems. 1913 rpt. Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1965.

Bharati, Agehananda. The Tantric Tradition. London: Rider and Co., 1965.

Bhattacharya, Bholanath. The Deified Saints of Bengal: A Profile. Calcutta: Indian Publications, 1972.

Bhattacarya, Siddhesvara. The Philosophy of the Srimad-Bhagavata. Vol. II. Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 1962.

Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya of Sri Śaṅkarācārya. trans. Swami Gambhirananda. 2nd ed. Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1972.

The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya. trans. Swami Madhavananda. 4th ed. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965.

Carmen, John Braisted. The Theology of Rāmānuja: An Essay in Interreligious Understanding. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

Chakravarti, Chintaharan. Tantras: Studies on their Religion and Literature. Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1963.

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad. trans. Swami Swahananda. 2nd ed. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1965.

Chatterjee, Satischandra and Dhirendramohan Datta. An Introduction to Indian Philosophy. 7th ed. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1968.

Chattopadhyay, Debiprasad. Lokāyata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism. 2nd ed. New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1968.

Chattopadhyaya, Sudhakar. Evolution of Hindu Sects. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970.

Collected Lectures on Śaiva Siddhānta 1946-1954. Annamalainagar: The Annamalai University, 1965.

Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. The Dance of Siva. rev. ed. New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1968.

The Cultural Heritage of India. 2nd ed. rpt. 4 vols. Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1969-1970.

Daniélou, Alain. Hindu Polytheism. Bollingen Series LXXIII. New York: Pantheon Books, 1964.

Das, Piyus Kanti. Raja Rammohun Roy and Brahmoism. Kakdwip Bengal: author, 1970.

Dasgupta, Shashibhusan. Obscure Religious Cults. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969.

Dasgupta, Surendranath. A History of Indian Philosophy. 1922-1955 rpt. 5 vols. Cambridge: University Press, 1969.

De, Sushil Kumar. Aspects of Sanskrit Literature. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1959.

--------. The Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1961.

Designation of Human Types (Puggala-Paññatti). trans. Bimala Charan Law. Pali Text Society Translation Series, No. 12. London: Luzac and Co. Ltd., 1924.

Dhavamony, Mariasusai. Love of God According to Śaiva Siddhānta. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

Eight Upaniṣads with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya. trans. Swami Gambhirananda. rpt. Vol. I. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972.

Eight Upaniṣads with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya. trans. Swami Gambhirananda. 2nd ed. Vol. II. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1966.

Farquhar, J. N. The Crown of Hinduism. London: Oxford University Press, 1915.

The Garuḍa Purāṇam. trans. Manmatha Nath Dutt. 2nd ed. The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies Vol. LXVII. Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1968.

Ghate, V. S. The Vedanta. ed. C. R. Devadhar. 2nd ed. Poona: The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1960.

Glasenapp, H. Immortality and Salvation in Indian Religions. trans. E. F. J. Payne. Calcutta: Sushil Gupta (Private) Ltd., 1963.

Gonda, J. Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism. 2nd ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969.

The Great Liberation (Mahānirvāṇa Tantra). trans. Sir John Woodroffe. 5th ed. Madras: Ganesh and Co. (Madras) Ltd., 1971.

Hiriyanna, M. Outlines of Indian Philosophy. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932.

Hume, Robert Ernest. The Thirteen Principal Upanishads. 2nd ed. Madras: Oxford University Press, 1931.

The Hymns of the Ṛg Veda. trans. Ralph T. H. Griffith. 5th ed. The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies Vol. XXXV. 2 vols. Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1971.

Jaiswal, Suvira. The Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967.

Keith, Arthur Berriedale. The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads. 1925 rpt. Harvard Oriental Series Vols. XXXI and XXXII. 2 vols. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970.

Kulārṇava Tantra. intro. Arthur Avalon. trans. M. P. Pandit. Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1965.

Kumarappa, Bharatan. The Hindu Conception of the Deity as Culminating in Rāmānuja. London: Luzac and Co. 1934.

Macnicol, Nicol. Indian Theism from the Vedic to the Muhammadan Period. 2nd ed. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1968.

Majumdar, A. K. Caitanya: His Life and Doctrine. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1969.

The Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa. trans. and ed. F. E. Pargiter. 1904 rpt. Delhi: Indological Book House, 1969.

Merton, Thomas. The Seven Storey Mountain. New York: Garden City Books, 1951.

Müller, F. Max. Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion. 2nd ed. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1878.

--------. Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy. 2nd ed. The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies. Vol. LVII. Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1967.

Nirvedananda, Swami. Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance. Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1940.

Pal, Bipin Chandra. Bengal Vaishnavism. Calcutta: Modern Book Agency, 1933.

Pandit, M. P. Studies in the Tantras and the Veda. Madras: Ganesh and Co. (Madras) Private, Ltd., 1964.

Paramasaṁhitā (of the Pāñcharātra). trans. and ed. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1940.

Potter, Karl H. Presuppositions of India's Philosophies. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India (Private) Ltd., 1965.

The Principal Upaniṣads. trans. and ed. S. Radhakrishnan. 1953. rpt. The Muirhead Library of Philosophy. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968.

The Purāṇa Text of the Kali Age. trans. and ed. F. E. Pargiter. 2nd ed. The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies Vol. XIX. Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1962.

Pusalker, A. D. Studies in the Epics and Puranas. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1963.

Radhakrishnan, S. The Hindu View of Life. paperback edition. London: Unwin Books, 1960.

--------. Religion and Culture. Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 1968.

--------. Religion and Society. 2nd ed. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956.

Ranade, R. D. A Constructive Survey of Upanishadic Philosophy. 2nd ed. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1968.

Ranganathananda, Swami. The Essense of Indian Culture. Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1965.

Renou, Louis. The Civilization of Ancient India. trans. Philip Spratt. 2nd ed. Calcutta: Sushil Gupta (India) Private Ltd., 1959.

Renou, Louis. The Destiny of the Veda in India. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965.

Sama Veda. trans. Devi Chand. New Delhi: S. Paul and Co., 1963.

Sarkar, Hem Chandra. The Religion of the Brahmo Samaj. 3rd ed. Calcutta: Classic Press, 1931.

Sarva-Darsana-Samgraha or Review of the Different Systems of Hindu Philosophy by Madhava Acharya. trans. E. B. Cowell and A. E. Gough. rpt. The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Studies. Vol. X. Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1961.

Sastri, S. Kuppuswami. Compromises in the History of Advaitic Thought. Madras: The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, 1946.

Sharma, B. N. K. The Brahmasutras and their Principal Commentaries. Vol. I. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1971.

Sharma, Chandradhar. A Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964.

The Srimad Bhagavatam of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa. trans. J. M. Sanyal. 2nd ed. Vol. IV. Calcutta: Oriental Publishing House, n.d.

Tattvabhushan, Sitanath. A Manual of Brahma Rituals and Devotions. 2nd. ed. Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1971.

--------. Brahmaism: Principles and Practice. Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, n.d.

--------. Brahma Sadhan or Endeavour after the Life Divine. 2nd ed. Calcutta: Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, 1971.

--------. The Philosophy of Brahmaism. Madras: Higginbotham and Co., 1909.

Tattwananda, Swami. The Vaiṣṇava Sects, The Śaiva Sects, Mother Worship. Calcutta: Nirmalendu Bikash Sen Gupta, n.d.

Tyagisananda, Swami. trans. and ed. Aphorisms on the Gospel of Divine Love or Nārada Bhakti Sūtras. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1972.

Vedānta-Paribhāṣa of Dharmarāja Adhvarīndra. trans. and ed. Swami Madhavananda. rpt. Howrah: The Ramakrishna Mission, 1972.

Vedāntasara, or The Essence of Vedānta of Sadānanda Yogīndra. trans. Swami Nikhilananda. 4th ed. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1959.

The Vedānta-Sūtras with the Commentary of Śaṅkarācārya. trans. George Thibaut. rpt. The Sacred Books of the East. Vols. XXXIV and XXXVIII. 2 vols. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968.

The Vedānta-Sūtras with the Commentary by Rāmānuja. trans. George Thibaut. rpt. The Sacred Books of the East. Vol. XLVIII. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1971.

The Vishnu Purana. trans. H. H. Wilson. 3rd ed. Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1961.

Viṣṇudharmottara-Purāṇa. Third Khanda. trans. Priyabala Shah. Vol. II. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1961.

Woodroffe, Sir John. Introduction to Tantra Śāstra. 5th ed. Madras: Ganesh and Co. 1969.

Zaehner, R. C. The Bhagavad-Gītā. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969.

Zimmer, Heinrich. Philosophies of India. ed. Joseph Campbell. Bollingen paperback ed. Bollingen Series Vol. XXVI. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.

    c. German

Glasenapp, Helmuth von. Die Religionen Indiens. Stuttgart: Alfred Kroner, 1943.

5. Social Life

Bharati, Swami Agehananda. A Functional Analysis of Indian Thought and
its Social Margins. The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies Series. Vol.
XXXVII. Varanasi: The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1964.

Bhattacharyya, Bhabatosh. Studies in Dharma-sastra. Calcutta: Indian
Studies Past and Present, 1964.

Dubois, Abbe J. A. Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies. trans. and
ed. Henry K. Beauchamp. 3rd ed. 1906 rpt. Oxford: Clarendon
Press, 1968.

Gharpure, J. R. Teachings of Dharmasastra. Lucknow: Lucknow University,
1956.

Ghoshal, U. N. A History of Indian Political Ideas. rpt. London:
Oxford University Press, 1966.

The Grihya-Sutras. trans. Hermann Oldenberg. 1886 rpt. The Sacred
Books of the East Vols. XXIX, XXX. 2 vols. New Delhi: Motilal
Banarsidass, 1970.

Heimsath, Charles, Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform. Princeton:
Princeton University Press, 1965.

Kane, Pandurang Vaman. History of Dharmaśāstra. Vol. I. Pt. 1 2nd ed.,
Vol. II. Pt. 1, and Vol. III. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental
Research Institute, 1968, 1941, 1946.

Karve, Irawati. Hindu Society: An Interpretation. 2nd ed. Poona:
S. R. Desmukh, 1968.

The Laws of Manu. trans. G. Bühler. 1886 rpt. The Sacred Books of the
East. Vol. XXV. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970.

Pandey, Raj Bali. Hindu Samskāras: Socio-Religious Study of the Hindu
Sacraments. 2nd rev. ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1969.

The Sacred Laws of the Aryas. trans. G. Buhler 1879 rpt. The Sacred
Books of the East Vols. II, XIV. 2 vols. New Delhi: Motilal
Banarsidass, 1965.

Srinivas, M. N. Social Change in Modern India. Indian ed. Bombay:
Orient Longman, 1972.

Sastri, Heramba Chatterjee. Studies in Some Aspects of Hindu Samskāras
in Ancient India in the Light of Samskāratattva of Raghunandana.
Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1967.

Weber, Max. The Religion of India. trans. Hans L. Gerth and Don Martin-
    dale. paperback ed. New York: The Free Press, 1967.

Yājñavalkya Smriti. trans. Srisa Chandra Vidyarnava. The Sacred Books
    of the Hindus Vol. XXI. Allahabad: The Panini Office, 1918.

6. Periodicals

    a. Bengali

Biswas, Dilipkumar. "Rāmmohan Rāyer Dharmamot O Tantrasástra". Visva
    Bharati Patrika XVI (1959-1961), 225-248.

Tattvabodhini Patrika. Calcutta. 1767 Saka (1845 A.D.), and 1794 Saka
    (1872 A.D.)

    b. English

Asiatic Society: Monthly Bulletin. Calcutta. 1972.

Banerjee, Romesh Chandra. "State Patronage to Hindu and Muslim Religions
    during the East India Company's Rule", Bengal Past and Present,
    LVI (Jan.-June 1939), 23-36.

Bengal Past and Present, Diamond Jubilee Number (1967).

Bishop, Donald H. "Religious Pluralism and the Indian Renaissance".
    Indo-Asian Culture, XVIII No. 1 (January 1968), 1-11.

Chatterji, Nandalal. "Raja Ram Mohan Roy, The First Modern Man in Asia".
    Indo-Asian Culture, II No. 4 (April 1954), 360-367.

Datta, Kali Kinkar. "Relations between the Hindus and the Muhammadans
    of Bengal in the Middle of the Eighteenth Century (1740-1765)",
    Journal of Indian History, VIII (1929), 328-35.

--------. "Trends of Religious Thought in Pre-Nineteenth
    Century India", Indo-Asian Culture, I (Oct. 1952), 153-64.

Hazra, Rajendra Chandra. "The Sources of Dharma". Our Heritage.
    Bulletin of the Department of Postgraduate Training and
    Research, Sanskrit College, Calcutta. II No. 4 (1955), 65-88.

Indian Messanger. Calcutta. 1971-1972.

Majumdar, A. K. "Impact of Samkaracarya on Indian Thought". The
    Visvabharati Quarterly, XXXVII No. 1 (1971-72), 1-51.

Mitra, Kissory Chand. "Rammohan Roy". Calcutta Review, IV No. 8 (July-December 1845), 355-392.

Nakamura, Hajime. "The Concept of Brahman in the Brahma-Sutras". Indo-Asian Culture IX No. 2 (October 1960), 176-186.

"Puranism; or, the Popular Religion of India". Calcutta Review, XXIV No. 48 (1855), 189-233.

"Radhakant Deb", Calcutta Review, XLV (August 1867), 317-26.

"The Shaktas - Their Characteristics, and Practical Influence in Society", Calcutta Review, XXIV No. 47 (1855), 31-67.

The Statesman, Calcutta. 1971-1972.