

## *Chapter – II*

### **BENGAL RENAISSANCE:**

#### **A. Introduction**

The impact of British rule in India, bourgeois economy and modern Western Culture was felt first in Bengal and produced an awakening known usually as 'the Bengal Renaissance'. It was a sort of socio-cultural movement in Bengal. The Education policy of the East India Company after the Charter Act of 1813 was considerably influenced by this socio-cultural movement. Bengal's awareness of the changing world was more developed than and ahead of that of the rest of India. In the broad family of people, which constitutes India, the recognition of the distinctiveness of the Bengalis has been in modern times bound up with the appreciation of this flowering of social, religious, literary and political activities in Bengal. The appreciation was possible because Bengal witnessed first the socio-cultural throbbing caused by the interaction of the contact of two cultures-the West and the East. This interaction infuses new learnings into the minds of the people towards society, religion, politics and culture. Such a situation of awakening started with Bengal, the centre of the then commerce and culture of the Government of India. Bengal was then extremely influenced by the West in terms of English language and culture, in the main. The last flickering of the Orient culture was still visible. Thus the contact of these two cultures produced a new cultural milieu that signalled a discernible change in almost every aspect of life in Bengal.

Renaissance, a fruit of the union of the two cultures-the West and the East, signalled a sea-change in almost all the spheres of life. The spirit of Renaissance was keenly felt in the rise of nationalism in Bengal, in the interest evoked in Western literature, philosophy and values, in the emergence of secular humanism, in accepting the cult of reason and rationality, in developing an intellectual outlook, in the fight against social

prejudices, superstitions, cant and hypocrisy and acceptance of modern learning and in the quest for Truth. It (Renaissance) is also responsible for creating an urge to rediscover the forgotten cultural treasures of India and to reinterpret the true spirit of her ancient civilization. Renaissance was also marked by attempts to reorient her education through a blending of the old and the new and to renovate her society by the purging of those evils and anomalies which had crept into it and accumulated there under various adverse influences through succeeding ages, particularly in the eighteenth century.

The period of Renaissance that covers in its sweep in Bengal is very broad. It starts from the early part of the nineteenth century and ends in the early part of the twentieth century. The period chosen by the researcher is from 1815 to 1833. This period may be lengthened at both extremes by a few years for maintaining a link with the origin of Renaissance. The year 1815 marks the settlement of Raja Rammohun Roy in Calcutta. Since then he took up seriously his life's work that heralded the dawn of change in the tradition-bound society of Bengal in particular, and India, in general. He died in England in 1833. In the same period Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831) did his revolutionary deeds and published his works and contributed considerably to the growth of Renaissance in the later period with all its splendour and strength.

Derozio was born on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1809. He was admitted to Dharmatala Academy of David Drummond, a noted Scottish teacher under whose dynamic personality his mind was moulded with Western Culture. He studied there up to 1823. Later he joined Hindu College as a teacher in 1827 and served there up to 1831. In class and outside the class he taught the students to think freely and rationally. Derozio attempted to foster in the students a taste in literature, taught the evil effects of idolatry and superstitions and thus formed their moral conceptions. He was ultimately forced to resign from Hindu College on the ground of misguiding the students. Derozio was steeped in the light of new education which shocked the conservatives beyond measure. He made India's aspirations his own and bemoaned its fallen state. Derozio is

called modern India's first patriot who gave expression to the spirit of patriotism in his poetry. For the first time he contemplated an intellectual Renaissance for an ancient civilization through new perception. He exalted reason as an instrument of progress.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Bengal witnessed in her social and cultural history a developing confrontation between the dark nadir of a progressive decline and a gradual blazing forth of a new light from the West. Eighteenth century may be termed as the Dark Age of Bengal. Soumendranth Tagore thus graphically depicts this period of Bengal's history. "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 traditions, fossilized customs and irrational bigotry had choked the life-stream of the nation, knowledge had been lost. It was a period of unrelenting darkness"<sup>1</sup> K. R. Srinivas Iyengar is of the same opinion: "India during the seventeenth and more specially in the eighteenth century presented the spectacle of decay and misery unimaginable..... vitality and the zest for life were at a vanishing point, spirituality glowed, but in fitful embers, and all intellectual activity was nearly at a standstill. By the end of the eighteenth century, India was to all appearance a Wasteland."<sup>2</sup> Nemai Sadhan Bose, likewise, remarks, "Actually the eighteenth century, particularly the later half of it, was one of the darkest ages in the long and eventful history of India."<sup>3</sup> A survey of the socio-economic, religious and political condition of that age is necessary to understand thoroughly the development of the nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance.

### **B. Background**

With the decline of the Mughal Empire India lost her political unity. The later Mughals were weak and unworthy rulers who governed only in name. The actual power was usurped by the nobles who, taking advantage of the weak rulers, had become very powerful. In the words of H. M. Williams, "At the time of the East India Company's incursion, the Mughal Empire was in

disarray and Hindu culture had sunk to a low level. There was not only a vacuum of power but a vacuum of culture."<sup>4</sup> The nobles were engaged in all sorts of conspiracies, intrigues and other nefarious activities. The nobles cared only for self-aggrandizement. The French traveller-Jean Law stated in 1759, "I have travelled everywhere from Bengal to Delhi, but nowhere have I found anything from anyone except oppression of the poor and plundering of wayfarers.... The Indian nobles are a set of disorderly inconsistent blockheads, who exist solely for ruining a world of people."<sup>5</sup>

Such a state of affairs was not perhaps altogether new in the history of India. But there was a new factor that made a great difference between the past and the present situation. This new factor was the presence of the foreign traders, particularly the English, who took full advantage of the internal disunion and disorder to consolidate their authority and influence in the establishment of an empire in India. The Battle of Plassey in 1757 provided the English with an unexpected opportunity to get a firm hold in Bengal. The foundation of the future British Empire India was laid without any opposition worth the name. It is not very difficult to explain this rather strange phenomenon. As Dr. R. C. Majumdar has pointed out, "There was no Indian but only Bengalis, Hindustanis, Sikhs, Rajputs and Marathas. The people did not look beyond the horizon of their province. In those days there was no conception of India as a country."<sup>6</sup>

The outcome of the Battle of Plassey marked the beginning of the economic ruin of Indian industries. The causes of this economic ruin were taking over the Diwani of the Company in 1765: the fortunes acquired by the company's servants, the abuse of Dastaks i.e. the company's permits for external trade, and the virtual monopoly enjoyed by the company in matters of trade and manufacturing etc. To this was added the competition of English traders and manufacturers enjoying the fruits of industrialism and capitalism. They were further aided by British legislations and restriction.

The Permanent Settlement of Bengal (1793) ushered in a new era in the socio-economic history of Bengal. With the disappearance of indigenous

industries the people became interested in acquiring landed property. The administration of Lord Cornwallis gave an impetus to this direction and native capital was henceforth invested in land. Consequently, there grew up a class of Zamindars possessing great wealth and influence. Some of them also began to take interest in commercial enterprises. The land system, however, became very complex and the abuses of the Permanent Settlement made the condition of the ryots miserable. Not only the landed aristocracy but also the company's oppressive system of administration and the activities of the English community were responsible for the decline of agriculture in Bengal.

There was another side of the picture. In Bengal the weaver class, with the disappearance of the weaving industry, was turned into the class of cultivators. This created a problem of unemployment among the landless peasants. Poverty and decadence became widespread. The village money-lenders came to occupy an important position in the rural economy of the country. Increase in population made the situation worse. Famine visited the country frequently. Burglary, robbery and other criminal activities were on the increase. The Government was indifferent to the sad plight of ryots. On the contrary, even the police system, being inadequate, failed utterly to maintain peace and order in the country. Acts of cruelty and violence and the general standard of morality had gone down so much that such acts were neither punished nor even condemned. Lord Cornwallis wrote to one of his friends, "Every native of Hindustan is (I really believe) corrupt."<sup>7</sup> In 1792 Charles Grant described the Bengalis as inferior to the most backward classes in Europe. Even a man like William Carey, who had genuine affection for Bengal, wrote in 1794 that the Hindus were "literally sunk into the dregs of vice."<sup>8</sup> and were immersed in impurity. In spite of this general decay and degeneration that started, the character of the people at large was not totally vitiated. Bishop Heber, fully aware of the general condemnation of the people of Bengal, by his fellow missionaries and other foreigners, had a liking for the Bengalis. He wrote, "On the whole they are a lovely, intelligent and interesting people."<sup>9</sup> R. Richards, who lived in India for a period of twenty three years and knew Indians intimately, wrote that they possessed "the most amiable virtues", and were, "capable of all the qualities that can adorn the human mind."<sup>10</sup> We also

have the testimony of Raja Rammuhan Roy who was of the opinion that the peasants and villagers who lived away from the big towns and urban areas, were "as innocent, temperate and moral in their conduct as the people of any country whatsoever."<sup>11</sup>

Another important result of the East India Company's rule was the birth of a rich trading class in Bengal when the British officers were helped and guided in their works by the Indian, e.g. "Banians", "Sarker", "Munshi" or "Khajanchis". In the absence of a modern banking system the "Banians" played a vital role in the commercial life of the metropolis. The rapid growth of mercantile community, having close link with the European merchants, was a far-reaching phenomenon in the socio-economic history of Bengal. With increasing contact with European merchants as well as Western ideas the need for English Education was being increasingly felt. The Western impact and the new knowledge gave birth to an educated middle class-the intelligentsia, destined to spearhead the Renaissance of the nineteenth century.

The system of education was utterly deplorable. The study of the Sanskrit language, sacred literature or ancient classics had practically become extinct. There were only "Tols", "Maktabs" and "Pathsalas" which taught rudimentary Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and elementary mathematics for practical use in daily life. The vernacular literature had a little progress. Bengali prose was not yet known in the literary circle. The literature was of low standard. However, according to R. K. Datta, it is wrong to condemn the prevailing system of education as "atrocious and abominable."<sup>12</sup> He holds, "It (the prevailing education) inculcated into the minds of the students "the higher virtues of man."<sup>13</sup> But there was no escape from the hard fact that education in India, both in its contents and method, had deteriorated immeasurably from the lofty standard of the past. As Dr. R. C. Mujumdar has observed, "While the world outside had made rapid progress in different branches of secular learning during the preceding two hundred years, India practically stood still where it was six hundred years ago."<sup>14</sup> The "intellectual stagnation"<sup>15</sup> was evident in all spheres of life in India.

Decay of knowledge and learning coupled with social degeneration helped the extensive spread of blind superstition and in human social customs. Polygamy, early marriage, satee-rites, killing of female children, throwing of the first child into the holy rivers etc, were some of the most dreadful and inhuman practices performed in different parts of the country in varying degrees. The degeneration was manifest in the terrible suffering and social fetters tied with the womenfolk. In the name of "Kulinism" thousands of girls' lives were totally blasted. William Ward wrote that Kulinism had degraded into "a state of monstrous polygamy"<sup>16</sup> unparalleled in the history of human depravity. Among other evils was the existence of slavery in various parts of the country. Calcutta was one of the slave-markets till the early period of the nineteenth century and it was one of the sources of revenue of the East India Company in 1752. The British Parliament abolished slave trade in 1807 and the practice gradually declined in the first half of the nineteenth century. Besides government regulations, growth and strengthening of reform and humanitarian movements helped to put an end to slavery.

From the journals of the nineteenth Century we get a sordid picture of the socio-religious condition of Calcutta at the time when Raja Rammohun Roy came to settle down there. Sacrificial rites, outward show, lavishness and exuberance marked religious festivals and the people remained contented with such things. They became intellectually backward. The study of the Vedas and the Upanishads had become almost extinct. Superstition and irrational orthodoxy had taken the place of reasoning. None could even dare to raise a voice against social and religious abuses.

Morality and moral standards reached their lowest ebb. So the evil practices went on unabated. In the name of religion many obnoxious practices and objectionable rites were prevalent in the country. The priestly class had strong hold on the society and to strengthen and perpetuate it they encouraged superstitious and wasteful rites and ceremonies. The Christian missionaries vehemently attacked the Hindu religion in order to prove the superiority of their own faith. These attacks were sometimes motivated and biased but they served a useful purpose. They roused the people from their

slumber and lethargy and stirred them up to thinking and thus helped to end their immobility.

The picture of the political, economic and socio-religious condition of the later part of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth century leaves the impression that Bengal presented a very dismal picture. The decline and degeneration was sadly reflected in every sphere of life. Rabindranath Tagore described the situation in these words. "Her life was dried up, and it showed all those dead and forgotten customs, superstitions and prejudices, all the ignorance and fear, all feuds, all bitterness and separateness, all unreasonable remoteness from the wide world."<sup>17</sup> But it was not an actual death. As another scholar has suggested, "There had been an increase of feebleness, but not absolute inanition."<sup>18</sup> In the midst of general confusion, social and cultural degeneration, a faint but perceptible stream of culture still flowed in certain parts of Bengal, especially in Nadia, patronized by its ruler, Maharaja Krishna Chandra, Nadia, described as the "Oxford of the province"<sup>19\*</sup> was a seat of Sanskrit learning, a centre of intellectual development and an assemblage of men of letters representing various branches of Indian religion and philosophy. Hindu Society, largely dictated and directed by so-called religious injunction and observances, was almost suffocating. Yet it received its sustenance from what little was left of the dominant humanitarian aspect of Hindu religious life. Religion was still the chief source of inspiration to the ordinary Hindus for charities and endowments. The old simple faith had a living "hold on the people and, as N. K. Singha observes", "this simplicity and piety were in rural areas."<sup>20</sup>

### **C. Contributory Factors**

**1. The growth of Calcutta as a metropolis and the rise of the new middle class:** The English educated intelligentsia help to bring about a transformation in Bengal. The introduction and spread of English education was one of the potent contributing factors behind the Indian awakening. A new era began with the establishment of British rule, the introduction of English education and growing contact with the West and Western thought that came through different channels – the teaching of Bacon, Locke, Voltaire,

Newton, Burke, Bentham, Mill and others. With gradual stabilization of the Company rule in Bengal, the early period of hesitancy and vacillation, indifference and non-interference in the internal affairs of the people gave way to a policy of cautious and calculated interest which was backed by the growth of a progressive public opinion in the country. Besides, there was another very important factor-inspiration from true ancient traditions and the country's own glorious past. The impact of the West and the urge from within were compiled to produce startling results. In the words of Jadu Nath Sarkar, "The Indian Renaissance was possible only because a principle was discovered by which India could throw herself into the full current of modern civilization in the outer world without totally discarding her past. She could approach the temple of modern art and science not as a naked beggar, not as an utter alien, but as a backward and present impoverished country."<sup>21</sup>

**2. Revival of Oriental Learning:** Among the most significant developments that took place in the last quarter of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, with a direct bearing on the awakening of the country, were the revival of oriental learning, growth of Bengali Language and increasing urge for English education. Warren Hastings was very interested in the revival of oriental learning and he patronized many men of letters including Nathaniel Brassey Halhed (1750-1836) and Charles Wilkins Halhed (1750-1836), an able scholar who came to Bengal as a civilian and devoted himself to the Bengali language. His most important contribution was his 'Grammar of the Bengali Language in English which was published in 1778. This was one of the earliest efforts to study the language in a scientific way.

Wilkins came to Bengal in 1770 as a writer in the service of the East India Company. He co-operated with Sir William Jones in the foundation of the Asiatic society in 1784 and he made valuable contribution to the Asiatic Researches. The foundation of the Asiatic Society in 1784 was a landmark in the cultural history of the country. From 1839 it became known as the Asiatic Society of Bengal. A revival of interest in Indian culture and tradition and a growing awareness of India's own rich heritage was one of the salient features of the Indian awakening. For an awakening of interest and curiosity in

their own past, the Asiatic Society founded by Sri William Jones played a conspicuous role. The object of the society was to enquire into the history, antiquities, Arts, Science and Literature of Asia. Indians could not become members of the society till 1829. The publications of the Society created a stir in educated circles and helped the birth and growth of Indology, the finest fruit of which was Rajendralal Mitra, 'the man who raised studies in Indian culture to a scientific status.'<sup>22</sup> With great emphasis on rational knowledge the Asiatic Society created all over Europe an interest in the culture and wisdom of the east and in that sense it was "the real mother of all orientalist association which were formed in Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century."<sup>23</sup>

**3. The Activities of the Christian Missionaries:** The Renaissance of the nineteenth century was very closely interlinked with the development of Bengali language and literature and the latter, in turn, was deeply indebted to the Serampore Mission and the Fort William College, both of which were founded in the year 1800.

Missionary activities in Bengal are usually taken to have started from November 1793, with the arrival of the famous missionary William Carey (1761-1834) in Calcutta. Carey along with Marshman and Ward is regarded as the pioneer of the missionary movement in Bengal. On January 10, 1800 the Serampore Mission was founded. This was the beginning of a new era in the history of missionary activities in India which earned for the Serampore Mission of the honorific, "The Cradle of Modern Mission."<sup>24</sup>

The Missionaries were anxious to translate the Christian scriptures into Vernacular languages of India as it was essential to their ultimate goal of converting the vast multitude of people to Christianity. Before he came to Singapore, Carey had also brought with him an old press he had bought and in February 1801 the New Testament was first published in Bengali. By translating the holy Bible, by publishing the books on various subjects, by reprinting old Bengali Verses and by approaching the people in simple language, the missionaries gave an impetus to Bengali, particularly to the growth of its prose literature. They made a systematic study of the subject



and evolved "a colloquial prose style intelligible to the masses."<sup>25</sup>

The Missionaries put emphasis on the study of Sanskrit only to serve their purpose. Their main object was to challenge the very citadel of Hinduism i.e. to study and expose the fallacies of the Sacred Hindu texts all of which were in Sanskrit. They translated, edited and published many Sanskrit books which included Bopdeva's 'Mugdhobodh'. 'The Amar Kosa' (edited by Colebrooke), 'Valmki Ramayana' (In four volumes edited and translated by Marshman and Carey). The publication of such works drew the attention of the people to their ancient culture and heritage and helped the revival of Oriental learning.

Relentless missionary crusade against Hindu religion, Society, Customs and Practices was proving a blessing in disguise. A small section of people began to feel that everything was not right with Hindu religion and Society. Moreover, Missionary publication of books on various topics such as History, Geography, Zoology, General knowledge etc. were creating people's interest in the outer world and were enlarging the horizon of their knowledge. This immensely helped to correct the prevailing exclusiveness and the sense of self-satisfaction. In this sphere an important part was played by the Missionary Journals, viz, the English Monthly, 'Friend of India' (1818), the Bengali monthly 'Digdarshan' (1818), and the Bengali weekly 'Samachar Darpan' (1818). These journals published topics of wide interest and the 'Digdarshan' and 'the Samachar Darpan' produced a new kind of Bengali prose literature, widened the people's knowledge and "helped the diffusion of liberal and modern ideas on a wide basis".<sup>26</sup> 'the Samachar Darpan', in view of its great popularity among the Bengali youth, was described as "an adult school master".<sup>27</sup> The net result of all these missionary activities was that the Bengalis became curious and interested in the wider world. A spirit of self criticism developed and they began to look backward for lessons and inspirations and looked forward to a future of progress and achievement. Existing religion, society, social norms and practices, sense of values were re-examined and re-assured. These were happy indications of a new life in the making.

Besides literature, the missionaries made significant contribution to two other fields—English Education and Social Reform. The pioneering role of the Christian missionaries in the field of education in India was readily and widely acknowledged in contemporary newspapers and journals. In 1816 the Serampore Mission published a document entitled 'Hints Relative to Native Education' which was rightly described as "the first organized plan for the establishment of school ..... devised in India".<sup>28</sup> It was emphasized that imparting efficient instruction to any people in a foreign language was 'completely fallacious'.<sup>29</sup> To materialize the plan, the Serampore mission set up schools in various parts of the state including rural and backward areas.

The contribution of the Missionaries to the growth of women's education was also significant. Long before the establishment of the Hindu College in 1817, a landmark in the history of new Education in Bengal, many missionary institutions laid the foundation of English education in Bengal. They had played a similar role in the field of women's education before the 'Hindu Balika Vidyalaya' was founded in 1849 on the initiative of John Drinkwater Bethune and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar.

The Christian missionaries gave a major impetus to the social reform movements in the nineteenth century. From the very beginning of the nineteenth century the Serampore missionaries led by Carey had made a move against the dreadful practice of Satee and drew the attention of the government to ban it. Since 1804 the missionary papers and journals continued to lend support to the marriage of Widows. Carey also raised his voice against the inhuman treatment of lepers being burnt alive. However, missionaries have credited with the beginning of social wisdom among the Indians in the nineteenth century. They also set up examples in organizing charitable activities in India.

An outcome of administrative necessity, the Fort William College was founded in November 1800. It made an important contribution to the cultural life of Nineteenth century Bengal, especially in the field of literature. The first two decades were the golden years of the college. The Fort William College

was founded in Calcutta for training young English civilians. The Governor General Wellesley himself became the patron and visitor of college and posts of professors were created in different subjects. The Fort William college published books on numerous subjects. The general publications of the college had considerable importance. The college in a way became a centre of Oriental learning and culture and gave stimulus to the production of literature in Bengali. Within a few years of its foundation the Fort William College became 'a veritable laboratory where Europeans and Asians worked out new transliteration schemes, and compiled dictionaries in languages relatively unknown in Europe'.<sup>30</sup> The college also lent financial support for the implementation of some of the original schemes of William Jones and facilitated the revitalization of the Asiatic Society. Dr. David Kopt has asserted that "the close co-operation between the Fort William College and the Asiatic Society and the scholars attached to these two intuitions helped the promotion of orientalism."<sup>31</sup>

The Serampore mission partly owed its prosperity and expansion to the Fort William College. William Carey was the link between the two institutions. In 1801 he was appointed Professor of Bengali and Sanskrit in the Fort William College. As a professor of Bengali Carey made important contribution to Bengali language and literature. In 1802 Carey considered the Fort William College as an institution of "Public Utility" which was "to be of the most essential benefit to the country, by furnishing the company's servants with knowledge of the languages and manners of India".<sup>32</sup> The Fort William College gave Bengali language its grammar and dictionary and also supplied it with book for a preliminary study. Valuable masterpieces of Oriental learning were recovered and preserved in the college library where some of them were edited and published by noted Orientalists. "The college made printing and publishing in the classical and vernacular languages possible in this country in a wide scale. A number of printing press such as the Serampore Mission Press, the Hindustanee Press, the Persian Press and the Sanskrit Press owed their origin and survival to the patronage of the Fort William College".<sup>33</sup>

S. K. De has characterised the Fort William college as a "seminary of Western learning in an Eastern dress",<sup>34</sup> which helped the diffusion of Western ideas through the medium of the Vernacular. Really the college led a major share in the creation of new environment and the transmission of Orientalistic ideals among the intelligentsia.

The Foundation of the Asiatic Society, the Serampore Mission and the Fort William College and the resulting impact prepared the ground for the inauguration of a new epoch. The Indians with their rich heritage had slipped into mire. But they were already showing signs of recovery. They only needed a guiding hand, a man of vision to come back to light and awake the slumbering class:

**4. The Appearance of Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833):** The appearance of Raja Rammohun Roy, a man of vision of New India, was like a silver lining in the dark sky of Bengal. According to Rabindranath, "He was born at a time when our country having lost its link with the inmost truths of its being, struggled under a crushing load of unreason, in abject slavery to circumstance. In social usage, in politics, in the realm of religion and art, we had entered the zone of uncreative habit, of decadent tradition, and ceased to exercise our humanity."<sup>35</sup> Keenly conscious of this degeneration, Rammohun attempted to put an end to the state affairs that was leading the country to total disaster. His activities embraced various spheres of life and everywhere he paved a new way for the future generation of Indians to follow.

The central characteristics in the life and thought of Rammohun Roy were his keen consciousness of the stagnant, degraded and corrupt state into which our society had fallen, his deep love of the people which sought their all-round regeneration, his critical appreciation of the value of modern culture and the ancient wisdom of the East alike, and his untiring many-sided efforts in fighting for improving conditions around him.

In his outlook, Rammohun worked out a synthesis of the best thought of the East and the West. As a young man at Benaras, he had studied the

traditional Sanskrit culture. At Patna he had delved deep in Persian and Arabic lore. During his travels in distant regions, in plains as well as in hilly lands, he had acquainted himself with various provincial cultures and even Tibetan Buddhism and Jainism.

Later in life he mastered English thought and Western Culture. He was quite at home with Christian religious literature and earned the esteem of British and American Unitarians. Western radicals like Bentham and Roscoe greeted him as an equal rally. French savants honoured him. And all the time, Rammohun was no thinker shut up in his own speculations, but a champion of his people, engaged in the daily toil of advancing their conditions with an unflinching vision of their bright modern destiny.

Rammohun Roy protested against the prevalent perversions of the Hindu religion. Between 1815 and 1817, he published the Bengali translation of the authoritative Vedanta together with an abridgement. He also translated five of the principal Upanishads, to demonstrate to the general public that the Hindu-scriptures themselves preached monotheism. He was plunged, in consequence, in a great controversy with the orthodox pandits like Sankar Shastri, Mrityunjay Vidyalkar and Subramanya Shastri, between 1817 and 1820, and published a series of polemical tracts in which he very ably defended his ground. Rammohun pronounced a scathing criticism of priestcraft which inculcated a superstitious idol-workshop for the masses and discouraged translation of the scriptures. He pointed out that unthinking idolatry had brought about degradation in the character of the common people so that he felt it his duty to rescue them from imposition and servitude, and promote their comfort and happiness. He stressed rationality and exposed the logical absurdities of idol worship which destroys the texture of society and hinders moral reformation. Any particular scripture, he thought, was liable to error and there was an inherent human right to depart from tradition, especially if tradition was "leading directly to immorality and destruction of social comforts".<sup>36</sup> Such was the memorable message of the pioneer of the renaissance in India.

**5. Liberal Reinterpretation of Christianity:** The new liberalism of Rammohun was not confined to a reassertion of Hindu theism. It spread also to his examination of the Christian religion and tradition which had begun to penetrate into our country.

In 1820, he published his Precepts of Jesus in which he carefully separated the moral message of Christ from the specific Christian doctrines and the reliance on the miracle stories. The moral teaching of Christianity, he said, had a far greater appeal than its metaphysical theology. The missionaries were at once in arms against the daring heathen. Rammohun protested against the missionary practice of stressing dogmas and mysteries foreign to the people, their habit of dwelling more on the nature of Christ than on his gospel of love which was the main strength of their religion.

In his 'Brahmanical Magazine' (1821-23), he displayed his deep love for the best traditions of India and on behalf of his country protested against encroachment upon the rights of her poor, timid, and humble inhabitants by proselytizing Christian missionaries who instead of relying on reasonable arguments fell back on ridiculing the native religions and on holding out worldly inducements to converts.

Rammohun was no enemy of Christianity in its best sense which he believed to be good influence on his countrymen. He had assisted some of the Serampore Missionaries in the Bengali translations of the Gospel. But his rational modern mind refused to put up with metaphysical subtleties of missionary preaching and the unfairness in their propaganda.

Rammohun was not satisfied with the discussions of the 'Atmiya Sabha' or the occasional Unitarian services. So he and his followers organized new theistic society, the 'Brahma Sabha' on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1828. A regular church was established on January 23, 1830 as the culmination of Rammohun's thought, in the Trust Deed of which were defined the first principles of the famous Brahma movement which worked like a leaven in the life of Bengal for a long time.

Rammohun was not merely a philosopher, critic or religious reformer. He was a stern fighter against social evils. This is illustrated by his historic campaign against the inhuman custom of satee. Rammohun came out in firey denunciation of this murderous practice in Bengal. He quoted the authority of the best religious books against the custom of satee, but coupled this with an appeal to reason and good sense of the community. He combined a spirited defence of the maligned Hindu Womanhood with a tremendous attack on the lack of compassion on the part of the menfolk.

When William Bentinck at last suppressed the rite on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1829 in the teeth of Orthodox protests, it was Rammohun who strengthened the hands of the government by organizing a deputation signed by 300 Hindus and by publishing 'Abstract of Arguments' in 1830. Also a petition to Parliament was arranged by him to prevent any repeal of Bentinck's order.

Rammohun Roy was one of the main advocates of English education in India which caused Renaissance. Rammohun was an active force behind opening Hindu college on 20 January, 1817, but for opposition from influential Orthodox Hindus he was excluded from the college committee. Then he helped to establish Anglo-Hindu school where western science, philosophy and literature were taught. He set up a Vedanta college in 1825 where he tried to combine the teaching of oriental learning with western arts and sciences. He appealed in 1823 to the church of Scotland Assembly to send out competent teachers to spread English education in India. As a result of this move Dr. Alexander Duff, the famous missionary educationist, came forward to open the Scottish educational mission in Bengal in 1830. Duff got the influential backing of Rammohun. In his well-known letter to Lord Amherst on 11 December, 1823 he protested against the proposed foundation of a Sanskrit College and pleaded for a government policy of introducing Western education. This practically touched off the historic controversy between the Anglicists and the Orientalists on the question of educational policy to be roused by the government. The stand taken by Rammohun and his severe criticism of the prevailing system of education caused indignation among the majority of the Hindus. But Rammohun, with his great foresight, was preparing

the path of Western education along modern lines which was accepted by the government in 1835.

Rammohun was also one of the makers of Bengali prose. William Carey had already started work in this field. Rammohun came forward as a major force. From 1815, his translation, introductions and tracts, with their clarity and vigour of expression, gave a new dignity to Bengali prose and established its claim as a vehicle of elegant expression in serious subjects. Rammohun's polemics in Bengali were permeated with his care for the enlightenment of the general public and his newspaper articles had the same educative value. Among the papers that he used for enlightening the people was the Bengali weekly Sambad Koumadi. It ventilated public grievances and supported movers aimed at securing social welfare and progress. In December 1830 a radical London Journal paid glowing compliments to the 'Sambad Koumadi' describing it as "The Morning chronicle of India, advocating freedom, civil and religious, opposed to corruption and tyranny and labouring..... effectively and extensively, to eradicate the idolatrous rites of the Brahmins, and to awaken the Hindoos to a sense of degeneration and misery into which they have plunged".<sup>37</sup>

Inspired with new ideals of life Rammohun was breaking away from the tradition of passivity congenial to feudal times. He held that his movement was reviving public interest in the Vedanta which was prompted by his desire to promote the comfort of the people and to unite the different groups into which society had split up. He considered the forms of direct worship as liberation from priestly tyranny and a means of realization of human brotherhood. He protested against the evil effects of idolatry on the structure of society and against the inconveniences of the caste system, which has been the source of the want of unity among Indian people. He translated the 'Bajra Suchi' in 1827, a text highly critical of the caste system, and in a letter of 1828 he held that caste had deprived people of patriotic feeling and that religious reform was necessary for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort because the present system of religion is not well calculated to promote their political interest.

Rammohun figured in the first constitutional agitations in our country. We find him drawing up a memorial to the Supreme Court and a petition to the King-in-Council against the press conference of 1823 in which he defended liberty of free expression of opinion. He protested against the discrimination involved in the Jury Act of 1827 and against government attempts to tax rent free lands in 1830. He was connected with the agitation on the eve of the revision of the East India Company's trading rights and the removal of heavy export duties. On behalf of the Delhi Emperor during his dispute with the company, he appealed to British national faith and sense of justice and also to world opinion at large.

He was a fearless champion of justice. In a tract on the Ancient of the Females (1822), he denounced the contemporary legal dependence of widowed mother and unmarried or widow daughters on their menfolk and demanded property rights for women. He also attacked the practice of polygamy. We find him defending free alienability of property in another tract 'Rights of Hindus over Ancestral property' in 1813. In England in 1831, he submitted to parliament communications on the revenue and the judicial systems, the condition of the ryots and Indian affairs in general. We find him protesting against miserable condition of the peasants, the misrule of the landlords. He also demanded a fixed rent roll, a permanent settlement for the actual cultivators and a peasant militia. He put forward a programme of administrative reforms which were to become famous in Indian constitutional agitation and included items like Indianisation of the services, separation of the executive from the judiciary and trial by jury.

Rammohun was keenly interested in international affairs and his understanding of and affinity with progressive movements is remarkable. In the twenties of the nineteenth century we find his newspapers regularly discussing current problems like the Chinese question, the struggle in Greece, and the miseries of Ireland under the regime of absentee landlordism. His international links are shown vividly in the fact that a book in Spanish with the new constitution in it was dedicated to him. He could think and talk of nothing else when he heard of the July Revolution in France in

1830. On his way to England at Cape Town, he insisted on visiting French frigates flying the revolutionary tricolour flag though he had been temporarily lamed by an accident.

Rammohun Roy's associates played a pioneering role in bringing about Renaissance in Bengal. David Hare, who came to Calcutta in 1800 as a watchmaker, devoted his life to spread modern education. With the stabilization of British rule in Bengal, a demand for education on western lines was growing up in the country. David Hare thought of organizing a lead on new lines from the Calcutta gentry. He got in touch with Rammohun and moved the chief Justice, Sir Hyde East, to initiate discussions in 1816 which led to the foundation of Hindu College in 1817. He also organized the School Book Society in 1817 to prepare and publish much-needed text books and the School Society in 1818 to establish schools of a new type and grant scholarships to deserving poor boys. The School Society took keen interest in women education in the country and agitated for it. This attracted the attention of the British and Foreign School Society which sent out Miss Cooke in 1821 who organized ten girls' schools with the support of the Church Missionary Society.

Rammohun Roy's another eminent associate was Dwarkanath Tagore who was afterwards called the prince. He represented the new aristocracy linked to business. Dwarkanath was an ally of Rammohun whose associates also included other aristocrats like Prasanna Kumar Tagore who founded the 'Reformer' in 1831 and became an eminent lawyer and also middle class men like Chandra Sekhar Deb and Tarachand Chakraborty, the first secretary of the 'Brahma Sabha'.

Rammohun Roy faced a lot of opposition in his daring steps to reform the Hindu society which paved the path of Renaissance. His heterodoxy aroused vehement protest and a sharp reaction was marked against him. In his own village home he was ostracised by neighbours. The Orthodox group forced him out of the Hindu College Committee. He was thus forced by public opinion to be more cautious.

The Orthodox pandits in their controversy with 'heretic' found their great patron in Radhakanta Deb, the scion of the House of Sobbabazar and the recognised chief of Orthodox society. He was associated with the reactionary petition in 1829 against the suppression of the satee rite in 1830; he was the leader of the Orthodox religious society, the 'Dharma Sabha' which was founded as a counterblast to the Brahma movement. Yet, Radhakanta Deb was not out and out a reactionary. He was a great benefactor of the fountain of Western learning, the Hindu College. He was a member of the school book society and one of the secretaries of the School society. He himself wrote book advocating women's education and was a steady supporter of the movement.

Rammohun Roy's other conservative critics were Gaurikanto Bhattacharya, Bhabani Charan Banerjee, Ramkamal Sen and Mrityunjoy Vidyalkar. Gaurikanto Bhattacharya was the author of a tract, Jnaanjan Sambad Chandrika. The conservative opposition to Rammohun was not blindly reactionary. Yet the conservatives missed the epoch marking significance of the lifework of Rammohun.

In his own life Rammohun Roy experienced the genesis of trend of ultraradicalism which culminated in the name of the 'Young Bengal Movement'. It sprang from the precincts of the Hindu College and created consternation for a period and Rammohun himself was out of sympathy with it. Arising out of the tradition of the French Revolution and English radicalism, this movement had a distinct element of free thought in it which offended Rammohun's sense of decency and theistic idealism. The inspiration of Young Bengal came from one of the important figures in the history of Bengal – an Anglo Indian, Derozio.

Derozio was something of a prodigy. He was educated at one of the private schools of the day, in the Dharmatala section of the city. The school was run by a Scotsman, David Drummond, who had something of a reputation of a poet, scholar and a free thinker. From him apparently the young Derozio got the intoxicating freedom urge of the French revolution, and

a passion for freedom of thought and liberation from the dead weight of all tradition possessed his soul. Even while in his teens, Derozio blossomed out as a poet. Later he composed some sonnets bearing patriotic note. 'The Fakir of Jhungheera' 'the Magnum Opus' of Derozio epitomizes the new perceptions of education and thought that heralded the dawn of Renaissance in Bengal. Appointed as a teacher of the Hindu College in May, 1826, he, like a magnet, at once drew to himself a host of boys in the upper classes who began to adore him and drink deep in the fountain of free thought.

The best boys of the Hindu College rallied round Derozio who encouraged them (the best boys) to debate freely and question all authority. The pupils of the college started ridiculing old traditions, defied the social and religious rites, demanded education for women. In order to flaunt their independence the pupils of the college indulged in wine – drinking and beef taking. The college authorities removed Derozio on 25 April, 1831. Derozio died of cholera before the year was out, but his memory remained green in the hearts of his he loved disciples.

Derozio's followers came to be known as 'Young Bengal'. Some Derozians startled the people of Calcutta by embracing Christianity. Mahesh Chandra Ghosh and Krishna Mohan Banerje announced their conversion in 1832.

The Derozians created a sensation but their stand lacked much positive content. They failed to develop a definite progressive ideology. They were unable to attract new adherents from wider circles. They made some mark in their day which did not leave any lasting impact on the society.

Bengal Renaissance has been essentially a matter of the spirit that produced in its effect remarkable changes in the different spheres of life. This new spirit manifests itself brilliantly in cultural aspect. It vitalized the new spirit of Renaissance in Bengal through the medium of English education.

At the end of the eighteenth century learning and education were in deplorable state. Three types of educational institution --- 'Tols' 'Madrasahs' and 'Pathshalas' and 'Maktabs' --- were in sight. The 'Tols' were the centres of Hindu intellectuals and Hindu learning, the 'Madrasahs' were the centres of Islamic education and the 'Maktabs' emphasized on the teachings of the Holy Koran, completely neglecting the study of arithmetic, the vernacular and any other useful knowledge. Original thinking and aptitude for research were hardly evident in these institutions. Reverence for the past overwhelmed the present outlook and this retarded the growth of education.

Though the English came to India long ago there had been no cultural contact between the Indians and the Englishmen until the last quarter of the eighteenth century, because the East Indian Company was not interested in the case of education in Bengal. Moreover, there was lack of education policy. The Christian missionaries were pioneers in the field of education in Bengal. Their main object was propagation of Christianity and Conversion of the native population. In order to reach that end they were concerned to undertake educational enterprises within the company's territories. But in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the policy of the company's Government was not to meddle in anyway with the social and religious customs of the Indians. Missionary activities were not permitted within the company's jurisdiction for fear of possible adverse consequence. But evangelists in England continued their efforts to effect a change in the attitude and policy of the East India Company towards missionary activities in India and the question of evolving an education policy in general. Wilberforce and Grant had been trying to draw the British Parliament's attention to their cause. In Bengal, the urge for English education was visibly growing and by the beginning of the nineteenth century the study of the English language among the Indians in Bengal ceased to be confined to clerks and interpreters. There was a reason behind this urge for English education on the part of the Indians in Bengal. There was a growing consciousness in Bengal regarding the utility of English education. A section of enlightened Indians while conscious of the value of their own classical knowledge and deeply proficient in it, had also come to realize the need of linking their country men with the progressive cultural forces of the outside

world in a period of immense transition in history owing to new influences generated and transmitted by great Revolutions like the French Revolution of 1789 and the Industrial Revolution. They rightly felt the attitude of isolationism in a changing world. The creation of a new outlook was needed to enable her to meet the challenge of the new age. Sir Hyde East, the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, observed in his letter addressed on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1816, to J. Harrington, a brother Judge then in England; "About the beginning of May, 1816 a Brahmin of Calcutta whom I knew, and who is well known for his intelligence and active interference among the principal Native inhabitants and also intimate with many of our own gentlemen of distinction, called upon me and informed me, that many of the leading Hindus were desirous of forming an establishment for the education of their children in liberal manner".<sup>38</sup> The immediate result of this spirit was the establishment on the 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1817, of the Hindu College of Calcutta, out of the which flowed for some years currents of revolutionary thoughts.

As regards knowledge of English, the students of the Hindu College made brilliant progress. While appearing at the examination held in the Calcutta Government House in January, 1828, the students of the Hindu College not only acquainted themselves creditably in subjects like history, geography, etc, but also recited from English dramatic literature with correct pronunciation to the surprise of all present there including Mr. Ballie, Dr. Wilson and some other eminent European ladies and gentlemen. Commenting on this a contemporary newspaper remarked: "Previously the Englishmen thought the Bengalis only learned a little English for clerkship, but now it was clear that they had begun to learn English like our own language".<sup>39</sup> The foundation of the Hindu College, in a sense, marked the beginning of liberal education in Bengal and of "organised instruction on modern times"<sup>40</sup>. Referring to the spread of English ideas through English education the committee of Public Instruction in Bengal observed in its report for the Month of December, 1831, "The moral effect has been actually remarkable and an impatience of the restrictions of Hinduism and a disregard of its ceremonies are openly avowed by many more who outwardly conform to the practices of their countrymen. Another generation will probably witness a

very material alteration in the notions and feeling of the educated classes of the Hindu community of Calcutta".<sup>41</sup> But in spite of such immediate disintegrating effects of the new learning, it is admitted that it opened before the Indian Youths the Vista of a new world and sowed in their minds the seeds of intellectual revolution pregnant with weighty consequences. English education helped to give access to English literature and philosophical and political thoughts relating to the international matters. It also gave rise to new thoughts and ideas in connection with social, political and economic matters. The Hindu College of Calcutta gave a new twist to the flow of English education in Bengal.

**6. The Hindu College in Calcutta:** The Hindu College played a pioneering role in spreading new idea of education, philosophy, science, history, geography, etc. An institution is very much moulded by the personality of its teachers and some famous teachers of this institution like Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and David Lester Richardson exercised a profound influence on their pupils. "Derozio came to be associated with the Hindu College as a teacher when its location was transferred to site on the north of the Goldighi early in May 1826"<sup>42</sup> Writing in the Calcutta Review of 1881, Mr. Thomas Edward observed significantly, "The teaching of Derozio, the force of his winning manners, his wide knowledge of books, his own youth, which placed him in close sympathy with his pupils, his open, generous, chivalrous nature, his humour and playfulness, his fearless love of truth, his hatred of all that was unmanly and mean, his ardent love of India, evinced in his conversation and recorded in his lines:

My country, in thy day of glory past  
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow

His social intercourse with his pupils produced an intellectual and moral revolution in Hindu Society since unparalleled"<sup>43</sup>

The famous Scottish Missionary, Duff, wrote within a month after his arrival in India, "We fairly came in contact with a rising body of natives, who

had learned to think and discuss all subjects with unshackled freedom"<sup>44</sup>. Owing largely to the effects of Derozio's teaching The 'Samachar Darpan,' a contemporary newspaper of the Christian Missionaries of Serampore, while noticing the premature death of Derozio, observed, "While in the Hindu college he laboured to instil into the minds of the youths under his care the true principles of science and to lead them to think for themselves. The result of his tuition has been that the students brought up under it are vastly superior in acquirements to fellow countrymen; that body of enlightened youths from a monument by which he will long be remembered in Calcutta"<sup>45</sup>

With his pupils, Derozio established the Academic Association, which met for sometime, evening after evening in a garden – house at Manikatala in Calcutta under his chairmanship and with Umacharan Bose as its Secretary was occasionally attended by David Hare. Several debating societies soon sprang up as offshoots of this parent Association. The members of this body had unrestricted and free discussions about literary and philosophical topics and this naturally created in their minds a spirit of challenge to what had been long conventional and static.

It is true that frenzied with the impulse of newness some of the pupils of Derozio attacked Hindu religion virulently, and manifestly expressed hatred of Indian manners and customs and misinterpreted some of the noble fundamentals of Indian civilization. It is recorded in the History of the Hindu College by Harmohan Chatterjee that "the principles and practices of the Hindu Religion were openly ridiculed and condemned, and angry disputes were held on moral subjects; the sentiments of Hume had been widely diffused and warmly patronized. The most glowing harangues were made at debating clubs, then very numerous. The Hindu religion was denounced as vile and corrupt, unworthy of the regards of rational beings".<sup>46</sup> (R. K. Datta). In an issue of the Athenaeum; a monthly English paper started by the pupils of Derozio, one of them, named, Madhab Chandra Mallik, even went so far as to remark, "If there is anything that we hate from the bottom of our heart it is Hinduism"<sup>47</sup>

The contemporary Hindu Society of Calcutta in particular could not reconcile itself to all those strictures and abuses and held Derozio responsible for the irreligious mood of the students of Hindu College. Derozio was removed from the Hindu College staff in April, 1831. No doubt, Derozio's teaching and examples generated a new spark of fire which aimed at burning all that clogged, as his pupils believed, human progress. But he should not be accused of any mischievous design to propagate immoral ideas. He emphasised on love and rational thinking for realization of truth, on a dynamic process of life furthered by the growth of knowledge. In his correspondence with College, regarding his dismissal, Derozio observed on the 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1831: "If the religious opinions have become unhinged in consequence of the course I have pursued, the fault is not mine. To produce conviction was not within my power; and if I am to be condemned for the atheism of some, let me receive credit for the theism of others. Believe me, my dear Sir, I am too thoroughly imbued with a deep sense of human ignorance and of the perpetual vicissitudes of opinion, to speak with confidence even of the most important matters. Doubt and uncertainty besiege us too closely to admit the boldness of dogmatism to enter an enquiring mind, and far be it from me to say, "This is", "and this is not", when after the most extensive acquaintance with researches of science and after the most daring flights of genius. We must confess with sorrow and disappointment that humanity becomes the highest wisdom, for the highest wisdom assures man of his ignorance".<sup>48</sup>

If the leading alumni of the Hindu College grew sceptical about some Hindu beliefs and practices, they also showed no cordial leanings towards Christianity, though one of them, Krishna Mohan Banerjee became subsequently zealous member of the Christian community. They refused to receive instructions from the missionaries whom they regarded either as "ignorant fanatics"<sup>49</sup> as Duff notes. The missionaries naturally deplored this attitude on their part. Duff observes: "About the time already referred to, the Government of Anglo-Indian College of Calcutta had begun to put forth some of its ripest fruits. That institution ..... is the very beau ideal of a system of education without religion. It communicates largely European literature and science: but as far as its regulations extend, neither within nor without its walls

will it tolerate the importation of religious truth. Now the citadel of Hinduism, being from the base to the highest pinnacle, a citadel of error, it can never resist a vigorous onset of true knowledge, however secular. Accordingly, their ancestral faith was completely subverted into the minds of the more advanced *alumni of the Government College, but nothing better was attempted or allowed to be submitted in its room. Many had become or really becoming sceptics; and others direct atheists*<sup>50</sup>. Eager for the propagation of the Christian faith, he left no stone unturned to fill up what he considered to be a "region of vacancy as regards religion"<sup>51</sup>. But efforts for the conversion of those educated youths who had declared themselves to be free enquirers after truth were not crowned with much success, though some others were being gradually attracted towards Christianity.

Because of the virulent attacks directed by the recipients for new English education against some of the prevailing Indian customs and practices, it has been said that the "new wine of West went into the heads of Indians".<sup>52</sup> and made them restless. This was, however, a temporary phase and whatever could be the evil effects of this iconoclastic attitude were ultimately counteracted to a large extent by the Indian reform movements of the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact, some of the activities of a batch of young Indians, known as the 'Young Bengal', imbued with the ideas of a new education, were not path breaking but also of much constructive potentiality. Their indomitable thirst for knowledge, genuine aspiration for reforms and spirit of selfless service for the good of others opened the floodgates of novel thoughts. Which gave new dimension particularly in the fields of education and literature.

**(vii) Contact with English Literature:** English education brought the Bengal poets into contact with the poets of England. Under the influence of Education and Western culture, a sizable number of enlightened Bengalis, particularly from the upper middle class families, felt drawn to English literature. R.C. Majumdar says, "The contact with English literature and through it, with that of other Western countries, may be regarded as one of the greatest contributing factors to the Renaissance in India in the nineteenth century. For it

revolutionized English – knowing Indians' attitude to life and literature and inaugurated an altogether new phase in Indian literature."<sup>53</sup> R.C. Majumdar particularly points to Romantic literature that caused a sea change in Bengali poetry. The comment is no less relevant to the nineteenth century English poetry of Bengal. According to him, "The influence of Romantic literature in Europe changed its (Bengali Poetry's) whole character and individual emotions as well as social and political topics formed its main theme".<sup>54</sup>

Reviewing the impact English literature on the Indians of Renaissance period, K.M. Munshi has remarked. "English literature of the nineteenth century provided new inspiration to the university men in India who took to Shakespeare and Scott, Byron, Shelley and Keats ..... With avid enthusiasm"<sup>55</sup> We also find the trace of the influence of Milton, Moore and Campbell in the nineteenth century English poetry of Bengal.

H. M. Williams has rightly pointed out: "Contact with British life and literature inevitably brought poetry to India, the poetry of Words- Worth, Scott, Shelley, Keats, Byron. In the explosive influence of English culture, romanticism played an important part"<sup>56</sup>.

V.K. Gokak put the same idea metaphorically: "Indo-Anglian Poetry was born under a romantic stir. It learned to lisp in the manner of Byron and Scott in the verse of Derozio, M.M. Dutta and others. It began with verse romances and lyrics written in the Romantic Vein".<sup>57</sup>

Writing specifically about Derozio, K.P. Srinivasa Iyengar observes: "As a poet, Derozio was obviously influenced by the Romantics – notably Byron Scott, Moore, but he knew his Shelley and Keats also very well".<sup>58</sup>

The influence of the Romantic poets is manifest in Derozio's love of Nature. A.N. Dwivedi says that Derozio "wrote mostly under the spell of Lord Byron and Thomas Moore. His published work, 'The Fakir of Jnnghera' and other poems .....is full of Byronic lines".<sup>59</sup>

The knowledge of English language especially through the Hindu College, gave the students an access to modern English literature which produced luminaries like Francis Bacon, known for his scientific and inductive method, Charles Darwin, for his theory of evolution, John Locke, the individualist, J.S. Mill, the best exponent of individual liberty, Adam Smith, the father of modern economic science, Issac Newton, the brilliant physicist, Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin, the ruthless critics of injustice. It also injected a rational outlook into the mind of the people. It not only contributed to the growth of nationalism in the dawn of Renaissance in the first quarter of the nineteenth century by making the Indian people familiar with the ideas of liberty, democracy, self – government but also indirectly by creating discontentment among the educated class who began to aspire for higher position in the services.

**8. The Role of Press:** The Press was a cultural product of the contact of the West and East. In the beginning of the nineteenth century press played a vital role in rousing social, religious, cultural and political consciousness that brought about a striking change in the people's attitude to life. Man began to think of life anew owing to the opinions and expressions concerning different aspects of life. Rammohun wrote and published a number of books and tracts to vindicate his views and principles. Being a man of sharp intellect, he realized the immense value of newspapers and journals. His 'Sambad Koumadi' that first came out in December 4, 1821 deserves special mention. It was to include religious, moral and political matters, domestic occurrences. Public good was the paper's main object. Before Sambad Koumadi, The Bengal Gazette of Gangadhar Bhattacharya, came out in May 1818. The Serampore Missionaries started the publication of the Bengali monthly Digidarshan and the Weekly Samchar Darpan (1818) before the beginning of "Sambad Koumadi".

In April 1822, Rammohan started a weekly paper in Persian named Mirat-Ul-Akhbar. The Sambad Koumadi was primarily intended for the common man, whereas the 'Mirat' was for the educated classes. The 'Mirat' contained articles not only on internal affairs but also on international

problems such as the Irish discontent, the national aspirations of the Greek etc. Rammohun was also associated with the news weekly Bangadut which first appeared on May 10, 1829 under the editorship of Nilratan Halder. Rammohun's name is associated with the struggle for a free press in India. His Memorial against the Press Ordinance of 1823 to the Supreme Court and then to the Privy Council, his closure of the publication of the Mirat-ul-Akhbar as a protest against the repressive Government Ordinance have earned for him an esteemed place in the history of the Indian Press.

H.L.V. Derozio's name is associated with the Press in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Derozio came back from Bhagalpore at the call of John Grant, the Editor of the 'Indian Gazette'. He joined the 'India Gazette' as a sub editor. It is said that in 1826 Derozio started and edited a journal named Indian Magazine. Only five issues of the journal saw the light of the day and received wide appreciation. Derozio had strong connection with Kaleidoscope, a monthly journal which was first published from August, 1829. He had a deep and inspirative connection with 'Parthenon'. One issue of the journal was published but the conservative Hindus restricted the second issue. He began to write in Hesperus but he withdrew himself from the journal as the managers of it would make additions and alteration to his writings. He contributed his writing to Enquirer, edited by one of his illustrious followers, Krishna Mohan Banerjee. Regarding the objective of Enquirer Krishna Mohan Banerjee wrote in the first issue, "Having this launched our bark under the denomination of Enquirer, we set sail in quest of truth and happiness"<sup>60</sup> Derozio published "The East Indian"; a journal that brought to light the problems faced by the European Community in India.

After Derozio the Derozians carried on the publication of journals and organs which threw ample light on the problem of man's life and paved the way for the public good.

The foreign rulers commented on the immense importance of the native newspapers. The native newspapers are humble in appearance yet like the balladers of a nation. They often act where laws fail. In it questions of

Satee, widow remarriage, 'Kulin' polygamy have been argued with great skill and acuteness on both side: they have always opposed having a foreign language as the language of the court: the atrocities of indigo planters and the blunders of young Magistrates have been laid bare, while the correspondence columns open out a view of native society no where else to be found".<sup>61</sup> In 1822 Thomas Munro in his Minute wrote about the native newspapers: "Where the people .....Countrymen, I would prefer the utmost freedom of the press but as they are, nothing would be more dangerous than such freedom. In place of spreading useful knowledge among the people and tending to their better Government it would generate in subordination, insurrection and anarchy".<sup>62</sup>

#### **D. Renaissance in Bengal: The Beginning**

##### **(i) The Arrival of the English with Western culture of English language:**

The Indians have spent a considerable period in slumber. Their knowledge, consciousness, value sense – all these aspects have remained in a state of passivity. No nation can march ahead in this way. The Bengalis must be awakened from within. The new generation has a responsibility in this direction. It must be alive to the new challenges.

The English have awakened the Bengalis from the state of their mental and intellectual lethargy. When the English came to India they brought with them Western culture and English literature. A communication worth the name was established with the outside world in terms of knowledge and culture. The Hindu College, the nursery of English education and Western culture in Bengal came into existence in 1817 in Calcutta. The distinguished teachers like H.L.V. Derozio came forward to educate the students. They found the poetry of Byron, Keats, and Shelley for their study. They studied the philosophy of the European philosophers, acquired knowledge about the French Revolution (1789) and knew about the American Independence. Newspapers in Bengali and in English got printed. English newspaper was first published under the care of Derozio. Then came out 'Hindu Patriot'. During 1820 the Derozians began to write first in English and gradually they

also leaned to write in Bengali. There was no such thing as Bengali prose literature. Bengali epics came to be written. All these emerged in the educational arena centring Hindu college. But later on it was deeply felt that it was a new current of thought. Bengali literature was then no longer a "Panchali" or "rhymes". Many new books on literature were written by those who had profound knowledge of English literature and Western Culture. The wave of the Oriental education and culture also came in with the current of modern thought and culture. A new stream of thought emerged out of the cultural contact of the West and the East.

This awakening was beyond imagination in the absence of arrival of the English with Western culture and English language. With the advent of them the Indians deeply felt that the "Purana" was not history. No native of the country wrote our history, the foreigners wrote history of our country, which gave us an access to our history. There was no trace of science and it came to existence. With the study and research of physics and chemistry a new world was explored. The mystery of lunar eclipse which was unknown before became known to us. The map of the world was beyond our knowledge but a globe came to our hands. Then a series of scientific invention in terms of railway, telegraph were revealed to us. Many changes took place at a time and they made us overwhelmed. There was an urge to make all these things and thoughts our own. This urge led us to evaluate the old culture, tradition, education and history in the light of the new thought of the West. Ramesh Chandra Dutta started translating 'Rigveda'. Common men could not read and grasp the meaning of the Vedas; they were also unable to comprehend Upanishads. The 'Brahma Samaj' took a leading role for the first time to teach Upanishads. The rich store of Sanskrit language and literature was inaccessible to common man and it was open to a select few of the society. In this way man's interest in ancient India gradually grew. An outline of the history of ancient India dawned on those who remained busy with the Western culture and education and the cultivation of the culture and education of the past of our country started in full swing. The European Indologists who came to India devoted their interest and energy to research leading to the discovery of the past history. That there was once a king named Ashoka in the past was

unknown to us. There was Ashokan inscription but it went unnoticed. The credit of exposing the existence of a king named Ashoka goes to James Prinsep.

From Ceylon it was learnt that the King Priyadarshee was no other than king Ahsoka. Later it led to all revelations about Ashoka. A faithful record of Indian history came to our hand. History was written with the help of the account of India of Megasthenes and Fa Hien. Our self - respect dawned. We no longer became desirous of taking knowledge, culture and thought from the west; rather we were interested to contribute something to the store of the knowledge of the West. Vivekananda went to Chikago and preached Vedanta. In this way two streams of culture were operative. One of these two may be called modernization or Westernization. The English brought with them not only the Western education or culture but also modern education or culture. Modern education here means science, technology, politics, democracy and rational thought. These faculties were not possessed by us. We also notice that there were many important and subtle matters about which the people of the west had no profound knowledge. So the detailed analysis of our ancient period was needed. We had a galaxy of sages and seers. Our spiritual treasure counts much to all consideration; hence we should look back and delve deep into the past treasure. The English have Shakespeare but the Indians have Kalidas. Homer may be compared with Valmiki so far as the epics are concerned. Many books were written about the Supremacy of Hindu religion. Many scholars on the contrary were overexcited with the knowledge and science of the modern world.

**ii. Revolt against Social and Religious Orthodoxy:** India came into contact with the western ideas at a most opportune moment. It was the age of French illumination. Then the spirit of rationalism and individualism ruled European thought. It proclaimed the supremacy of reason over faith, of individual conscience over outside authority and brought in its train new conception of social justice and political rites. A new ideology suddenly burst forth upon the static life, moulded for centuries by a fixed set of religion and a spirit of inquiry into the origin of state and society with a view to determining their proper

scope and functions. According to R.C. Majumder; "The most important result of the impact of Western culture on India was the replacement of blind faith in cultural traditions, beliefs and conventions..... Characteristic of medieval ages.....by a spirit of rationalism which seeks to inquire and argue before accepting anything" <sup>63</sup>

The revolt of the mind against the tyranny of dogma and traditional authorities, beliefs and customs, is the first requisite for freedom of thought and conscience which lies at the root of progress in social, religious and political spheres of life. Indeed, this is the reason why progress in all these different spheres is interdependent to a certain extent. In Bengal the rationalizing effect of English education at first manifested itself more in religious and social ideas, but it was not long before it profoundly affected also the political consciousness of the people. The Brahma Samaj was the outcome of the first two, and has contributed largely to the ideals of political freedom. The revolt against the religious, social and political ideas was the result of the rationalistic urge created by Western Culture.

Raja Rammohun Roy was the first and the best representative of this new spirit of rational inquiry into the basis of religion and society. He challenged the current religious beliefs and social practices of the Hindus as they were not in consonance with their own scriptures. He tried to show that the belief in multiplicity and worship of images, which formed the essence of the current and popular religion, were opposed to the teachings of the Vedas. How far his views are historically correct, or morally sound, is of secondary importance. What really matters is his open and public protest against the blind acceptance of the interpretation of scriptures by the priesthood. The standard of revolt he thus raised against medieval tyranny of dogma unleashed forces which created Modern India and made him worthy to rank by the side of Bacon and Luther. His revolt was not a movement B.B. Pal says "He tried really to reconcile individual reason with ancient scriptures and individual conscience with social authority". <sup>64</sup>

The form of community worship which Rammohun enjoyed in the Brahma Samaj failed to capture the imagination of the masses because it appealed only to intellect and not to emotion. Sivnath Shastri says that common people "were roused and agitated but were not drawn into the movement."<sup>65</sup>

Rammohun's religious reform movement had definitely a social purpose. Intellectual honesty compelled him to admit that the worship of idols which he denounced so vehemently had been permitted for the educated and ignorant masses by the original Hindu "Shastras"<sup>66</sup>. But at the same time, Rammohun was quite clear in his mind that the traditional form of Hindu worship encouraged the growth of various superstitions and immoral practices, helped the domination of the priestly class and led to degeneration in the character of the common people. So he wanted that "some change should take place in their religion at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort".<sup>67</sup> Kishori Chand Mirta rightly characterised Rammohan as "a religious Benthamite"<sup>68</sup> who evaluated different religious creeds according to their tendency to "promote the maximization of human happiness and the minimization of human misery".<sup>69</sup>

Rammohun opened an era of social reform, concentrating his attention chiefly on the amelioration of the condition of women. He made a cautious approach, basing his argument on scriptural authority, he had an aversion to legislation for social reform and would rather leave it to the growing good sense of the people themselves. The approach of Rammohun Roy is best illustrated in the matter of the abolition of the Satee. The agitation against it had been going on for some time and Rammohun threw himself heart and soul into it. Among other things he wrote pamphlets to prove that the inhuman rite was not sanctioned by the Hindu Scriptures. But when the Governor – General, Lord William Bentinck decided against overwhelming opposition, to pass legislation abolishing the Satee rite, Rammohun did not support him nor did he approve of his action. He preferred steady pursuit of methods to any sudden change by legislation.

Shortly after the departure of Rammohun for England in 1830, followed by his death in 1833, the 'Brahma Samaj' was in the grip of moribund condition. At this juncture Devendranath infused life into it and framed a regular covenant. 'The Brahma Samaj' under Debendranath's able leadership grew in strength and soon acquired a position of importance in Bengal life. Devendranath and his associates always tried to emphasise upon the special relations of the 'Brahma Samaj' with Hinduism, abolition of idolatry and superstitious rites being described as merely a step towards the purification of the traditional faith. These activities took place between 1843 and 1850. 'The Brahma Samaj' later drifted away from these activities. The period that followed was marked by a tendency amongst the younger section of the Brahmas under the leadership of Akshay Datta "not only to broaden the basis of Brahminism by advocating new social ideals, but also to apply the dry light of reason even to the fundamental articles of religious belief. They advocated female education, supported widow marriage (which was strongly opposed by Rammohun), cried down intemperance, denounced polygamy, tried to rationalise Brahma doctrines and sought to conduct the affairs of the church on strictly constitutional principles".<sup>70</sup>

The religious ferment in Bengal in the first half of the nineteenth century was partly caused by the activities of the Christian missionaries. Modern missionary work in Bengal really started in November 1793, with the arrival of William Carey in Calcutta. Carey and his brethren of the Baptist Mission were at first not allowed to preach the Gospel in the company's territory, and that is why they had to set up their headquarters in the Danish Settlement of Serampore (1799). Lord Wellesley adopted a more sympathetic attitude towards the missionaries and allowed them to travel and preach freely throughout the country. The charter Act of 1813 removed all restrictions on missionary activities in India and provided for the maintenance and support of a church establishment in British India. The primary object of most of missionary societies was religious conversion and they began to preach the Gospel openly among the Indians and to distribute Bibles, tracts, prayer books etc. in hospitals schools and prisons. From the missionary point of view this proselytizing work was, of course, not very successful. It was the poor

and the low-caste people who sometimes felt tempted to embrace Christianity, primarily with a view to procuring a comfortable subsistence by their conversion. The number of proselytization from the upper-caste people was not considerable. The progressive section of the Bengali society supported the educational activities of the missionaries; still it caused a great alarm in the Hindu Society as many students of the upper-caste of the Hindu Society showed aversion to the beliefs and customs of the Hindu religions. These students came under the banner of the young Bengal. It promulgated the new concepts and values of religions and social ideas into its depth. The reaction of the orthodox Hindu Society to the Brahma Movement, the Christian onslaught and the young Bengal agitation manifested itself through the Dharma Sabha founded in 1830 under the leadership of Raja Radhakanta Deb. The Sabha opposed the Act for the abolition of Satee, tried to prevent the conversion of Hindu students by Christian missionaries and generally defended age-old Hindu rites and usages. But the Sabha failed to stem the tide of social change which came as a result of the new education and contact with the West.

**iii. The Origin of Indo-English Poetry:** According to French literary historian, Pain literature is the creation of three factors: the race, the milieu, the moment. K.R. Srivniasa Lyengar's remark is worth quoting here. He says, "As regards Indo-Anglian literature, the race is the mixed Indian race, a resultant of invasions, conquests and occupations extending over a period of four or five thousand years; the milieu, the variegated Indian subcontinent, comprising extremes of every kind, heir to a geography and cultural heritage all its own: and the moment, the meeting of the West and India".<sup>71</sup>

The Western impact in India is marked. The west in India was no single entity and really meant sundry Portuguese, Dutch, British and French-with a few Danes, Germans and Italians thrown in-who came in different waves, as merchants, as missionaries as soldiers, as adventurers or administrators, and often worked at crosspurposes. The merchants came to make quick money, the missionaries came to save pagan souls, and the soldier-administrator came to achieve the conquest of the country. But the West in India was a self-

divided world – the Portuguese gave no quarter to the Dutch, nor the French to the British, and the Catholic looked askance at the Protestant and his sub-varieties. India too was monstrously self-divided after Aurangzeb's death. The Moghal Empire began to crack visibly and the process went on untouched. As a result, India during the 17<sup>th</sup> and more specially the 18<sup>th</sup> century presented the spectacle of decay and misery unimaginable. Vitality and zest for life were at vanishing point, spirituality glowed but in fitful embers, and all intellectual activity was nearly at a standstill. Decadence was found every where but decadence was not death. And there was even a burst of a new flowering in some places. There were Urdu poets at Lucknow and Delhi; there were Sanskrit scholars at Benaras and Nadia. In this and other ways, Mr. Malley observes, "an ethos was maintained which was free from the subversive forces of new ideas and alien systems, and continuity with the past was maintained."<sup>72</sup>

Apart from the exploitation of the East India Company and others over the years there is an inherent weakness behind the dismal picture of India. India was betrayed by what was false or weak within her. India had become diseased and self-divided. The division and disease had started even before the West turned to the East, perhaps even before Islam came to India in wave after wave of invasion. The real roots of ancient India's greatness were in Aurobindo's words, "an ingrained and dominant spirituality, an inexhaustible vital creativeness and gust of life and mediating between them, a powerful, penetrating and scrupulous intelligence combined of the rational, ethical and aesthetic mind each at a high intensity of action"<sup>73</sup>. In other words, the spirit the intellect and the life-impulse, all functioning at the highest pitch and yet working in the closest collaboration. Then came the ages of complacency and superficial advance and inner stagnation and decay. The spirit's light receded, the intellect dissipated itself in grandiose nothings and the will to live suffered a strange attenuation. The ascetic, the illusionist, the hedonist all contributed to the havoc. And the series of disasters on the political and economic fronts only hastened the process and completed the natural catastrophe.

By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain or the East India Company, was more or less, master of the situation in India. At last, in 1813, the commercial monopoly of the company was ended, and the British in India assumed besides police functions, educative and civilizing functions as well. Missionaries were permitted to enter the country freely and a token of Rs.1 lakh per year was made for education. The missionaries had already helped to establish printing press in different parts of the country. Books in the vernacular, as well as in English were coming out. Dictionaries, grammars and translations were among the first fruits of such missionary enterprise and formal prose in the vernaculars was attempted. The printing press inevitably led to the newspapers and Hick's Bengal Gazette (India's first newspaper) came out in 1780 and others followed in due course. Last came the private schools imparting English education culminating in the establishment in 1817, of the Hindu College at Calcutta. Meanwhile the Serampore College was founded in 1818 by Carey, Ward and Marshman, the missionaries. The colleges imparting Western education were obviously flourishing and the demand was for more and more. Rammohun Roy in his plea for English instead of oriental education, asked Lord Amherst in 1823 to compare the state of science and literature in Europe before the time of Lord Bacon with the progress made since. Rammohun Ray not only wanted English in India; he also wanted more Englishmen in India. Although the orientalist and the Anglicists continued to wrangle, it was clear that the former were steadily losing ground; and Maculay's celebrated Minute clinched the issue at last. He declared that it was both necessary and possible "to make natives of this country good English scholars and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed".<sup>74</sup> The die was cast, and on 7 March, 1835, Lord William Bentinck resolved that "the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India, and all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone".<sup>75</sup> Prof. M.M. Bhattacharjee has shown that not the British rulers, but the earnest desire and repeated representations of Indians were responsible for the introduction of English and Western culture in India.

English education got patronization from the rulers and the ruled. The introduction of Western culture, the study of English literature, the adoption of Western scientific techniques, although they gave a jolt to India's traditional life, served the Indian's nobly by shocking them into a new awareness and alertness in thought and action. The long dormant intellectual and critical impulse was quickened into sudden life—a new efflorescence was visible everywhere and the reawakening Indian Spirit went forth to meet the violent challenge of the value of modern science and the civilization of the West. "Under English rule in India", Writes Mr. Arthur Mayhew, "The impact of two civilizations may have produced unrest. But it has also sustained and stimulated life".<sup>76</sup> It is an extraordinary story of endurance, assimilation and integral transformation.

Such was the moment that bred Indo-Anglian literature. Indians learned at first to read and speak and comprehend English and they soon started writing also. Indian writing in English was but one manifestation of the new creative urge in India - What is often referred to as the literary renaissance in India. The exhausted, almost sapless, native soil received the new rich fertilizer from the west and out of this fruitful union, a new literature was born. This new literature is Indo—Anglian literature.

Literature evolves through a process of tradition, convention and revolt. The story of the growth and development of Indo-Anglian poetry is also one of tradition and experiment, imitation and innovation. The pioneers of Indo-Anglian literature were men of education who assumed the role of interpreting the ethos and culture of India to West through imaginative literature.

Poetry naturally came first and it was associated with the cultural Renaissance in Bengal where the assault of English on the citadel of Indian culture first took place. In this connection the Hindu College played a pioneering role. It soon proved to be a dynamic of revolutionary thought currents that energized into impetuous movement the youthful minds nurtured by it. "It was a nursery of geniuses", says Aurobindo, "Where the brain of the new Age had worked most powerfully and the heart of the New Age had beat

with the mightiest Vehemence".<sup>77</sup> That is why in Bengal Indo-Anglian poetry underwent the period of gestation and pangs of birth. Incidentally, a very significant feature of Indo-Anglian poetry is that many early middle masters of Indian poetry in English hailed from Bengal e.g. Kashiprasad Ghosh, Toru Datta, Monmohan Ghosh, Aurobinda Ghosh, Sorojini Naidu and Harendranath Chattopadhyay. They are Bengali poets who wrote poetry in English in early stage of the journey of Indo-Anglian poetry. They were all Bengalis with a difference. Toru Datta spent her formative years in France and England and so did Manmohan and Sri Aurobinda. Sarojini and Harendra were born and grew up in the Deccan. Thus although they were Bengalis, they had grown up in a wider cosmopolitan world and eminently suited to the task of composing poetry. Thus Bengal was the birth place of Indo-Anglian poetry and early Indo-Anglian poetry hailed from this province.

The history of Indo-Anglian poetry began with Derozio, who as a teacher of English in the Hindu College, Calcutta inspired a number of young Indians with a love of the English language and literature Derozio occupies a special position not only for the sake of his historicity but also for the significant verses that he wrote.

The literary influence of Derozio meant much for the growth of Indo-Anglian verse Prof. V. K. Gokak rightly says "The first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was one period of incubation for Indo-Anglian poetry and Derozio was the moving spirit then".<sup>78</sup>

He exerted much influence on later Indo-Anglican poets Toru Datta wrote an article about him in the Bengal Magazine of December 1874. However, his immediate influence also produced positive results. Kashiprasad Ghosh who was an eminent Derozian became the first Bengali to have published a collection of his English poems entitled 'The Shair and other poems' in 1830. D. L. Richardson, Principal of Hindu college, himself a poet-critic, wrote about Kashi Prasad Ghose's poems in his famous 'Selections from British Poets' which included a poem of Kasi prasad: "Let some of those narrow-minded persons who are in the habit of looking down upon the natives

of India with an arrangement and vulgar contempt read this with attention and ask themselves if they could write better verse not in a foreign language but even in their own".<sup>79</sup> Though Kashiprasad was a minor versifier, he is still notable for his historicity in the infancy of Indo-Anglan poetry.

**iv) Nationalism:** It is well known that there can be no nationalism with out a nation. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century and in the beginning of the nineteenth century there was hardly any sign of political consciousness in the country. There was no sense of unity, no conception of India as a nation or of Indians as a race. Sir John Strachey in 1884 observed: "The first and the most essential thing to learn about India is that there is not and never was India".<sup>80</sup> Endorsing Strachey's viewpoint John Seeley also denied that India was a nation and described it as "Geographical expression"<sup>81</sup> as Indian people did not look beyond the geographical limits of their province. Dr. R. C. Majumdar writes, "There were Bengalis, Hindustanis, Sikhs, Rajputs and Marathas, but no Indian".<sup>82</sup> It is generally acknowledged that even before the British Conquest, India was not a nation but a country of continental dimension, composed of various tribes, castes and classes differing in language, race, religion, customs and culture. Common intellectual heritage, tradition and social life created the idea of nationality. It is true that India, before the advent of Islam was one culture, one religion and philosophy, with the same scriptures and Varna Ashrama, the same manners and customs, common civic institutions and social laws and a common historical tradition. Considering these aspects it may be said that nationalism was always a phenomenon of Indian life. Even a Western authority on nationality, Hans John observed: "A true basis of unity-the modern national sentiments-was to be found in a common intellectual heritage persisting through an unbroken tradition and moulding and permeating India's whole social life."<sup>83</sup> K. K. Panikkar also maintains that sense of unity existed before the advent of Islam and that it was based on the universal culture of the Hinduism. But after the advent of Islam this sense of unity underlying a common cultural tradition was affected. In Pre-British India there was neither a sense of national identity nor national pride.

Like all social phenomena, nationalism is a historical category. It emerges at a certain stage when conditions, both objective and subjective, attain maturity. In other words, a nation is a product of concrete historical process. E. H Carr is of the opinion that "nation in the modern sense of the word did not emerge until the close of the Middle Ages".<sup>84</sup> Dr. Tarachand observes that until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century no entity existed which socially, politically or even geographically corresponded to the name 'India'. In fact, before the foreigners had given the name 'Hind to our country, there was no term in the subcontinent to designate it. To quote A. R. Desai, "Indian nationalism is a modern phenomenon; it came into being during the British period as a result of the action and interaction of numerous subjective and objective forces which developed within the Indian Society under the conditions of the British rule and the impact of world Forces"<sup>85</sup>. Nationalism in India drew its first breath and grew in the cradle of the British Raj.

The Process of the growth of Indian Nationalism, however, has been very complex and many sided. The national consciousness in India was the cumulative effect of the operation of a number of factors and elements over a long period of time. Some of these factors are religious awakening, Western Education, the rapid improvement in the means of communication, the rise of Indian press, social consciousness and political consciousness.

Among the factors responsible for the growth of nationalism, religious awakening was the most important. The first phase of national awakening expressed itself in the form of a series of religious reform movements. In other words, the growth of Indian Nationalism started with religious renaissance. To quote Dr. Zacharias, "The Indian National Movement was a part of the Renaissance which manifested itself in the form of a general reform movement and produced striking religious and social reforms long before it issued in a movement for political emancipation"<sup>86</sup>. Some of these movements aimed at revising the traditional religions in the spirit of the principles of liberalism. Others, however, aimed at reforming the pure form in which it existed in earlier times. Further, religious reform movement was national in

content but religious in form. It is only in the later stages that the national awakening deepened and broadened and found increasingly secular forums.

**v) Liberty and Patriotism:** India's contact with the western ideas and education was found at a most opportune moment. It was the age of French illumination when the spirit of rationalism and individualism dominated European thought. Western education brought in its wake the ideas of liberty, and patriotic feelings English education only accelerated this process quickly among the Indians who wanted to be free from the British yoke. Rammohun Roy played the pioneering role in instilling the ideas of freedom and patriotism into the minds of the Indians. The Young Bengal under the guidance, teaching and inspiration of H.L.V. Derozio started crying for liberty which was the spontaneous outburst of patriotic feelings in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

Raja Rammohun Roy started political movements on constitutional lines for the first time. In 1823 the acting Governor-General Adam issued a press ordinance taking away the liberty of the Press. Rammohun with a few of his associates submitted a memorandum to the Supreme Court against the Ordinance and sent a petition to the king-in-council. The Memorandum is described as the "Areopagitica of Indian History"<sup>85</sup> by Collet.

Again as a protest against the press Ordinance Rammohun discontinued the publication of the *Mirat – Ul – Akhbar* in the last editorial of which he made a scathing criticism of the objectionable decree.

In 1826 a jury Act was passed which introduced religious discrimination in the law courts. The Act declared that henceforward any Hindu or Mohammedan could be tried by either European or native Christians, but no Christian either European or native was to be tried either by a Hindu or a Muslim Juror. Rammohun opposed this Act. Through one of his English friends J. Crawford, he submitted petitions against the Act signed by Hindus and Muslims to both the houses of the parliament. The protest against the

Jury Act proved fruitful when the parliament amended Indian Jury Act discriminating cause of the old Jury act of 1826.

Rammohun Roy was against the monopoly rights enjoyed by the East Indian Company and one of his objects of his journey to England was to demand more rights and privileges for the Indians at the time of the renewal of the Charter in 1833. His writings relating to liberty bear to the stamp of his patriotism. His views were influenced by the political thought of Montesquieu, Blackstone, Bentham and other Western thinkers. In his paper 'Sambad Koumudi' public grievances found a place for expression for the first time. Rammohun of course looked upon the British rule in India as a necessary and beneficial period of political tutelage. But at the same time he had the vision of a free India in the distant future, as he said to Victor Jacquemont, the French traveller, "India requires many more years of English domination so that she might not have many things to lose while she is reclaiming her political independence"<sup>88</sup>. "The spirit in which he thought of India's nationalism is different from the spirit of the nationalism and urge for freedom that may be justly regarded as the most characteristic feature of the Modern Age in India. For this type of nationalism we must think of Young Bengal under the leadership of Derozio.

Young Bengal continued the political agitations that started from the time of Rammohun. They were known for their patriotism and advanced political thinking. Among them the most politically minded were Tarachand Chakraborty, Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee, Rasik Krishna Mallik, Ramgopal Ghosh and Pearychand Mitra. These young men were greatly influenced by the revolutionary doctrines of natural rights and 'equality'. It was Derozio who infused in them the spirit of patriotism. Himself intensely patriotic, he was inspired by the ideas of Tom Paine, Hume, Gibbon, Bacon and others. French Revolutionary ideas had made impressions on his mind and he was in favour of liberty in every sphere of life. He had joined the movement for equal rights that was started in his community and said, "I love my country and I love justice and there, I ought to be here"<sup>89</sup>. He identified himself with the Indian ethos and felt acutely about the miserable plight under a foreign rule and

Indian nationalism was still unborn, Derozio sang about India's glory and grandeur with a perfect authenticity of patriotic fervour. 'To India – My Native Land', 'The Harp of India', 'The Golden vase', 'The Fakeer of Jungheera' and many other poems express patriotic passions. We find an echo of the patriotism of Derozio in a poem written by Kashi Prasad Ghosh, a Derozian.

"But woe me! I never shall live to behold  
That day of thy triumph, when firmly and bold".  
"Thou shall mount on the wings of an eagle on High"  
To the region of Knowledge and blest Liberty".<sup>90</sup>

Of the political and economic views of Young Bengal, the 'Englishman' wrote in May 1835. "In matters of politics, they are all radicals and are followers of Benthamite principles..... They think that toleration ought to be practiced by every government..... with respect to the question relating to Political Economy, they all belong to the School of Adam Smith".<sup>91</sup>

They were so excited and elated by the July Revolution of 1830 that some of them even hoped for the outbreak of a similar revolution in India. Rammohun's fight for a free press was continued by the Derozians and the movement bore fruit in 1836 when Charles Metcalfe removed the restrictions imposed on the Press. Another campaign of Rammohun continued by the Derozians was the demand for opening high Government posts to Indians. The Charter Act of 1833 had made provisions for it, but the clause had not been made operative. The Derozians reopened the issue and asked for its implementation. Consequently, English educated youths were appointed as Deputy Collectors and from 1843 the post of Deputy Magistrate was also offered to Indians. From 1830 to 1843 the political, social and other progress made in the country owed much to the Young Bengal associations, papers and journals. In subsequent years, political agitation did not remain confined to any particular group or school of thought and people belonging to all groups and shades of opinion joined hands in the freedom movement.

### **E. Summing – up**

The history of the early English domination of the country is a sordid story of exploitation resulting in the economic ruin of the country. Bengal renaissance manifests itself brilliantly in cultural aspects. Learning and education were in deplorable state at end of the eighteenth century. A change was, however, discernible in the domain of education which vitalised the new spirit of Renaissance in Bengal through the medium of English education. Two great figures played the pioneering role in this respect – Raja Rammohun Roy and Henry Louis Vivian Derozio.