

## The Influence of Hindu Tantrism on Rammohun Roy's Ideas

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### 1

Rammohun Roy (1774-1833) <sup>1)</sup>, often called the father of modern India, is one of the pioneers of socio-religious reform movements in India in the nineteenth century and the first great thinker that should be mentioned when we discuss the formation of the Indian modern ideas. Although he was born in a well-to-do family belonging to the *Vaiṣṇava* sect and the *brāhmaṇa* class in the Bengal district, he shaped his own monotheistic belief under the influences of Islamism, Sufism, Classical Hinduism, Christianity and so on through the learning of Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit and English since his young age. Then, after his settlement in Calcutta in 1815, he vigorously developed his socio-religious reform movement.

Roy left considerable writings mainly in Bengali and English, in which we can find many quotations from what is called Tantric literature <sup>2)</sup>. He regarded Tantric works as the sacred books of Hinduism as well as Puranic ones and asserted that their quintessence was not contradictory to the Vedas <sup>3)</sup>. Among a large number of Hindu Tantric works, he referred to the *Kulārṇavatantra* and the *Mahānirvāṇatantra* (=Mnt) with remarkable frequency <sup>4)</sup>. One of the reasons for this is that Roy was influenced by the doctrine of Hindu Tantrism through his friendly terms with Hariharānanda Bhārati (1762-1832), a *Śākta* anchorite (*avadhūta*) and spiritual preceptor (*guru*). It was he that published the first edition of the *Kulārṇavatantra* and that wrote the only extant Sanskrit commentary on Mnt <sup>5)</sup>.

Each of Hindu Tantric works, the number of which is enormous, includes various ideas or thoughts. We can sometimes find contradictory ones even in a single text. Then the present paper makes an attempt to find another reason why Roy favoured Mnt in particular among them. For this purpose we focus the actual way in which Mnt makes the practice of worship open to all people.

## 2

The one and only God for Roy is Brahman of the neuter gender and the singular. It seems that he established his theory of worship of Brahman under the influence of the Tantric Literature<sup>6)</sup>. He uses Mnt, III. 59-63 as the hymn of Brahman<sup>7)</sup>. The verse of III. 65 prescribes that the practitioner (*sādhaka*) should recite the hymn of Brahman and teach its meanings to his friends devoted to Brahman<sup>8)</sup>. According to Jaganmohana Tarkālaṅkāra, a commentator in Bengali to Mnt, Roy, under instructions from Hariharānanda Bhārati, used to worship of Brahman with that hymn every day in a lonely place and explain it once a week to his friends and relatives following the prescription of III.65<sup>9)</sup>.

This verse of Mnt shows one of its aspects which are not Tantric. It is well known indeed that Hindu Tantrism denies class and sexual discrimination and opens the practice of its doctrine to people of all castes and that it reveals a new and easy way<sup>10)</sup>. Whereas, however, most of Hindu Tantric works preach that mantras and hymns to be recited in the practices of worship should be esoterically given from a spiritual preceptor (*guru*) to his disciples (*śiṣya*)<sup>11)</sup>.

Here is another example. Mnt, III. 146 stipulates that a father should initiate his sons into the Brahmamantra, a brother his other brothers, a husband his wife, a maternal uncle his nephews and a maternal grandfather his grandsons<sup>12)</sup>. The *Rudrayāmala-Uttaratantra* (=Ry-Ut), II. 86 is the exact opposite of Mnt, III. 146. It states that a husband should not initiate his wife, a father should not initiate his daughter or his son and no man should initiate his brother<sup>13)</sup>. Mnt abolishes the prohibitions in Ry-Ut. In other words, Mnt relaxes in the case of the Brahmamantra the rules laid down in other Tantric texts<sup>14)</sup>.

These verses of Mnt shows aspects that are still newer as compared with those of Tantric tradition concerning the hymn of Brahman and the initiation (*dikṣā*) into the Brahmamantra.

## 3

It has been pointed out that Roy distinguished two methods of worship between the individual (*sādhana*) and the collective (*upāsana*) ones<sup>15)</sup>. The collective method of worship was very important for him, because he thought that the individual method of worship had been broadly performed in the Hindu society and that it caused the discrimination and the hostile relationship among castes and therefore the society had been weakened. He tried to introduce the collective method of worship to the Hindu society<sup>16)</sup>.

It was one of Roy's most important goals to circumvent and ultimately abolish the restrictions of *adhikāra*, namely, the caste-based hereditary qualification especially for studying the Vedas. Moreover he tried to promote religious and soteriological egalitarianism and sought sanction for it in the authoritative texts of Hinduism in Mnt<sup>17</sup>.

Thus we can say with fair certainty that those verses of Mnt were very appropriate to his purpose.

#### 4

Mnt includes elements which are still newer as compared with those of Tantric tradition. It seems reasonable to suppose that Roy could get some ideas for his socio-religious reform movement from Mnt and that he sought the grounds in Mnt as one of the sacred books of Hinduism. We may, therefore, reasonably conclude that this is another reason why Mnt was one of Roy's favorite texts among enormous Tantric literature.

#### Abbreviations and Texts

Eworks=*The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, ed. J. C. Ghosh with an English Translation of Tuhfatul Muwahhiddin, Vol. I-IV, New Delhi : Cosmo Publication, 1982 (1st pub., 1906).  
Granth=*Rāmamohana-Granthābali* (Jhāgrām-Granthprakāś-Tahriler Arthe Mudrit), ed., Śrī-Brajendranāth Bandyopādhyāy and Śrisajanikānta Dās, Calcutta : Baṅgiy Sāhitya Pariṣat (7 Vols.), 1943-1952.

Mnt=*Mahānirvāṇatantra* (Arthur Avalon (ed.), *Mahānirvāṇatantra with the Commentary of Harīharānanda Bhārati*, Tāntrik Texts Vol. 13, rpt., Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1989 (1st ed., Madras, 1929)).

Ry-Ut=*Rudrayāmala-Uttaratantra* (Ram Kukmar Rai (ed.), *Rrudrayāmalam (Uttaratantram)* (Krishnadas Sanskrit Series 86), Varanasi : Krishnadas Academy, 1986).

- 1) There is another opinioin that the year of his birth is 1772. On this subject, see De [1962] 500 (fn. 1).
- 2) Biśbās [1983] 181 lists the names of Tantric works that Roy quoted passages from or referred to with the numbers of time.
- 3) See, e. g., "Īsopaniṣat," Granth, Vol. I, pp. 194-196 (EWorks, Vol. I, pp. 63-65). See also Takeuchi [1991] 114-115 and Halbfass [1988] 204-206.
- 4) The *Kulārṇavatatantra* is the most important text of the *Kaula* sect. An estimation of its date is between AD 1000 and 1400 (see Goudriaan [1981] 93ff. and Carlstedt [1974] 15). Mnt is one of the texts considered to belong to the Left-hand *Śākta* (*Vāmācāraśākta*) and presumably written in the late eighteenth century (see Goudriaan [1981] 98ff., Woodroffe [1918] 79-80, 378).

- and Derrett [1968] 147-168). Roy referred to the former thirty-four times and to the latter twenty-two times, whereas seventeen other texts were referred to just several times respectively (Bisbās [1983] 181).
- 5) See, on the relationship between Rammohun Roy and Hariharānanda Bhārati, Collet [1962] 68-69 and 101-102. See also De [1962] 512 and Derrett [1968] 169.
- 6) See Bisbās [1983] 186-187.
- 7) "Brahmopāsanā," Granth, Vol. IV, pp. 52-53.
- 8) Mnt, III. 65 :  
*pradoṣe 'daḥ paṭhen nityam somavāre viśeṣataḥ /*  
*śrāvayed bodhayet prājño brahmaniṣṭhān svabāndhavān //*
- 9) *Mahānirbbhātantram* (with Hariharānanda Bhārati's Sanskrit commentary and Jaganmohana Tarkālankāra's Bengali translation and notes) [comp. with additional notes Jñānedranātha Tarkaratna and ed. Mihirakiraṇa Bhaṭṭācārya], 6th ed., Vol. 1, 1961, p. 89. See Woodroffe [1913] 48 (fn. 6).
- 10) See, e. g., Goudriaan [1979] 31-34.
- 11) See, e. g., Hikita [1997] 24.
- 12) Mnt, III. 146 :  
*pitāpi dīkṣayet putrān bhrātā bhrātṛṇ paṭiḥ striyam/*  
*mātulo bhāḡineyāms ca naptṛṇ mātāmaho 'pi ca//*  
 The Brahmamantra is 'oṃ saccidekam brahma' (see Mnt, III. 12ff).
- 13) Ry-Ut. 86 :  
*na patnīm dīkṣayed bhartā na pitā dīkṣayet sutām/*  
*na putrān ca tathā bhrātā bhrātaram naiva dīkṣayet//*  
 Ry-Ut is one of the Hindu Tantric texts which is earlier than Mnt (the exact date has been unknown) and had the great influence on later Tantrism widely (see Goudriaan [1981] 47ff).
- 14) Woodroffe [1913] 61 (fn. 1) shows other instances of such prohibitions.
- 15) Cf. "Anuṣṭhā," Granth, Vol. IV, p. 69 and "Brahmopāsanā," Granth, Vol. IV, p. 51. See Takeuchi [1991] 172-175.
- 16) See also Collet [1962] 213.
- 17) See Habfass [1988] 193ff. and 204-205.

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〈Key Words〉 Rammohun Roy, Hariharānanda Bhārati, Hindu Tantrism, the *Mahānirvāṇatantra*  
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