



## "From India to Bristol: The Grave of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Its Historical Significance"

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the significance of Raja Ram Mohan Roy's grave in Bristol and to examine the architectural design of the tomb. By shedding light on this historical site, the paper aims to explore how the grave's architecture reflects Roy's monumental contributions to social reform and his enduring legacy.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a pivotal figure in the Indian Renaissance, is renowned for his transformative role in addressing societal injustices. His most significant achievement, the abolition of sati-immolation in 1829, marked a critical shift in Indian social reforms. This landmark decision not only abolished a brutal and oppressive practice but also highlighted the important role of women in India's journey toward freedom and equality.

The movement against sati began earlier, rooted in a personal tragedy in 1811, when Raja Ram Mohan Roy's sister-in-law, Alak Manjari Devi, self-immolated on her husband's funeral pyre in the Khanakul police station area of Arambagh. Although Roy was not present at the time, this event deeply affected him and fueled his determination to eradicate the practice of sati. His commitment to this cause set the stage for a broader societal transformation that would redefine women's roles and rights in India.

**Keywords-Sati, Grave, Cemetery, Movement, Monumental**

### **I. Introduction**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy<sup>1</sup>, the founder of the Brahma Samaj<sup>2</sup>—one of the pioneering socio-religious reform movements in India—was a distinguished scholar and a visionary thinker. Renowned for his efforts in religious and social reform, he is often hailed as the 'Father of Modern India' or the 'Father of the Bengal Renaissance<sup>3</sup>.'

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a highly influential religious and political thinker who

championed the importance of education, advocated for women's rights, and worked to abolish the practice of Sati<sup>4</sup>, which involved burning widows on their husband's funeral pyres. Fluent in several languages, including Urdu, Bengali, and Persian<sup>5</sup>, he was actively involved in publishing newspapers and authored several books. Additionally, he had a deep knowledge of Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit.

In 1831, Raja Ram Mohan Roy arrived in London<sup>6</sup>, where he successfully countered an orthodox Hindu appeal to reinstate sati, presented written evidence to Parliament advocating for improved governance in India, and reclaimed some funds owed to his Mughal Emperor from the East India Company<sup>7</sup>. He actively engaged with various circles of London society to achieve these objectives and even contemplated the possibility of becoming a British Member of Parliament.

In 1833, Raja Ram Mohan Roy arrived in Bristol<sup>8</sup> with his adopted son Rajaram to visit the Unitarians and reconnect with old friends, including Rev. Lant Carpenter<sup>9</sup> and his daughter Mary. Unfortunately, he developed meningitis<sup>10</sup> and passed away at Beech House, Stapleton, on September 27th. Initially buried in the garden in a quiet service as per his wishes, his remains were moved to Arnos Vale Cemetery eight years later. A monument, or chattri, was erected two years after his reinterment with funds provided by Dwarkanath Tagore<sup>11</sup>, quickly becoming a site of pilgrimage for Indians, particularly those from West Bengal. The cemetery continues to commemorate his death each September.

Although Arnos Vale Cemetery<sup>12</sup> did not exist at the time of Roy's death, he was reburied there on May 29, 1843. His remains were placed in a wooden and lead coffin within a deep brick vault, over seven feet underground, in a large plot purchased by William Carr and William Prinsep<sup>13</sup>, who recognized that the original burial site was unsuitable. Two years later, Dwarkanath Tagore contributed to the construction of the chattri, designed by the artist William Prinsep.



## Architecture



The structure is constructed from limestone and features a roof with a delicate dome adorned with intricately carved stone leaves and a stylized water lily pinnacle. This dome is supported by twelve ornately carved columns, which are fluted at the top and extend above the roof as pinnacles encircling the dome. The columns are topped with finely carved capitals that display ovolo carvings across three layers. Each column includes a central square stone block with quatrefoil carvings and rectangular blocks at the base, situated above a molded foot. The entire structure rests on a tall plinth.

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