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CONTENTS

	Page No.
Invocation	50
Editorial	51
Undaunted Rammohun - Dr. Saroj Mohan Mitra	53
Failed Enterprise, Incomplete Mission: The Brahma Samaj in Cooch Behar State - Enakshi Mazumder	56
Theism as Universal Religion - Sivanath Sastri	68
P. NARASIMHAM - A Dedicated Soul -K. Sarojinidevi & P. Sesharao	74
Acknowledgement	76
Subscription Form	79
Advertisement Form	80

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INVOCATION

If thou wouldst attain to thy highest, go look
Upon a flower; what that does willessly,
that do thou willingly

- *Schiller*

* * * * *

Let us be silent,
that we may hear the whisper of God.

..

- *Emerson*

* * * * *

All that is true, all that is seemly, all that is just,
all that is pure, all that is lovable, all that is
winning – whatever is virtuous or praiseworthy
- let such things fill your thoughts.

- *Phillipians 4:8*

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Editorial

The path of any human endeavour is never smooth or straight. It is all the more true for any spiritual or social activity. The journey of The Indian Messenger, the English mouthpiece of Sadharan Brahma Samaj is no exception. Since its inception 130 years back it had its pitfalls. It stumbled, fell on its face and again recovered. The Messenger moves on. These words are being said not as an apology. Let us recall the words of Upanishad about spiritual path. It is perilous and as sharp as a razor's edge. But the traveller does not give up. So does our Indian Messenger.

We are coming out with the issue covering a period of three months- May, June and July, '13. These months are marked by more than one event which the Samaj observes every year. The 25th of Baisakh was observed with prayers and devotional songs of Tagore on 9th May with due reverence and solemnity. It was followed by the memorable occasion of Rammohun's birth anniversary starting with floral tributes and prayer and song in front of the statue of Rajah in Maidan followed by 'Upasana ' in the Samaj Mandir. This year's birth anniversary was particularly memorable. In the evening a documentary film on Rammohun was screened in the library hall of the Samaj. The film was directed by the famous director Gautam Ghosh. It was an unforgettable spiritual journey for the viewers. The director, though not a Brahma himself, highlighted the life and teachings of the great spiritual leader in a brief span with rare clarity, insight and reverence. It is never to be forgotten. Earlier in the month of May (2nd Jaisthe) the foundation day of Sadharan Brahma Samaj was celebrated with due warmth and sobriety. Floral decoration and illumination of the Samaj building in the evening followed by prayer and devotional songs gladdened the hearts of the devotees. Besides the above, the Samaj carried out its usual social and spiritual activities during these three months.

Before we end we may draw the attention of our readers and admirers of this journey to some disturbing traits of events those are taking place around us. Brahma Samaj specially Sadharan Brahma Samaj, always abhor any kind of exploitation, humiliation or oppression based on religion, caste or creed. It makes no distinction between men and women and ensures equal freedom and dignity for both. Any contrary social behaviour or distortion is an anathema to the Samaj.

The depressing events taking place around us make us sit up and recall the above ideas and spread the above message anew.

Let us end with the immortal lines of Cardinal Newman

“Lead kindly light
amidst the encircling gloom,
The night is dark and I am
far from home
Lead thou me on”

An Appeal

The Sadharan Brahma Samaj mandir is situated in an area of the city which is notorious for waterlogging. In the 135 years of its life the structure of the Mandir had to fight against this yearly hazard, suffering damages to its foundation and flooring. As most members visit the Mandir in January the damage to the plinth and the flooring escapes their notice.

It is urgently necessary to relay the flooring and strengthen the structure of the Mandir building. The estimate made by an engineer for the necessary work has come to 6 Lakhs.

We appeal to all Brahma friends and well wishers to contribute liberally so that this necessary work may be taken up as early as possible.

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Secretary

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Samir Das
Treasurer

Sadharan Brahma Samaj

Undaunted Rammohun

Dr. Saroj Mohan Mitra

Rammohun wished for a long time to visit France. He greatly enjoyed the liberal ideas of French thinkers. He went ahead to salute the French tricolour at Cape of Good-Hope even with a broken leg. The French citizens also had great respect for the genius and humanity of this man from the East. Rammohun deeply rejoiced the termination of the despotic ‘Bourgeois’ authority in France. That is why he made preparations for a visit to that country immediately on his arrival to England. He became active for this visit towards the end of 1831 but he was told that he would require a passport for his visit of France. Then on one hand he wrote to Board of Control for assistance and on the other hand he sent his historic letter to the Foreign Secretary of France. In this letter he noted his dissent to the practice of passport. This letter was extremely important from an international angle. Here he even made a proposal for an organisation like the League of Nations. He wrote that the entire human race was one family. French nation and community was just one of the branches of this family. There should be no bar on person to person meeting except in times of warfare. This letter is a remarkable document highlighting the liberal thoughts of Rammohun.

His single minded aspiration was world peace. He wanted the Rule of Law and was against any kind of dictatorial rule. Any bilateral dispute between nations could be resolved through the intervention of League of Nations. We should note that Rammohun proposed a League of Nations long before the formal League of Nations was created after the first world-war. Though himself a citizen of a country under foreign rule his thoughts were always on the side of truth and justice.

At last Rammohun crossed the English channel in the autumn of 1832 and reached France. He spent a few months there and returned to England in January 1833. He got a warm and cordial reception in France. He met the French Emperor Louise Phillippe and was invited to the royal dinner party more than once. The French politicians and intellectuals were amazed at the extraordinary learning and knowledge of this man. The Asiatic Society of France elected him as respected member as did so the British Asiatic Society. But he was never considered for the membership of Indian Asiatic Society. While in France Rammohun had dinner

with the famous poet Thomas Moore as mentioned in the diary maintained by Moore.

Moore wrote that Rammohun was a famous personality and spoke chaste English. He kept inside information of different institutions. He was monotheistic. He has established a 'Samaj' (society) in Kolkata where men from all countries and of all faiths can congregate. Here they worship One who is not known as Jesus Christ or Mohhamad. Moore was overwhelmed by the liberal and secular ideas. People from all walks in France, be they men of letters or of politics, came forward to offer him hospitality. Here he met the learned French personality Garcy de Tassi. Rammohun made great efforts to be proficient in French language.

The British Society:-

On return from Paris Rammohun busied himself in numerous affairs in England. The appeal of the Moghul emperor was still pending the appeal against the abolition of 'Suttedaha' was yet to be disposed off. He was extremely tired. He was eager to go to Bristol for some rest.

At last the Directors of East India Company agreed to raise the allowance for the emperor at Delhi. The report of the House of Commons Select Committee was placed before the parliament in August, 1832. Its recommendations were accepted in April, 1933. Debate on various amendments of the constitution were on Rammohun was greatly involved in all these matters.

The Privy Council took up the appeal against the enactment abolishing 'Suttee' immolation and rejected it. Rammohun heaved a sigh of relief. The East India bill was also finally accepted in the month of August. That way all the purpose for which Rammohun came to England was satisfactorily resolved. Now Rammohun was ready to move down to Bristol for rest and recuperation.

Rammohun occupied a seat of great affection and reverence among the elites of England. All were amazed at his intellectual powers. What an intellect and what a gentleman. One day he also met the famous socialist Robert Owen. Rammohun was quite conversant in the matter. Mr. Owen tried to indoctrinate Rammohun in socialistic ideas. Rammohun engaged himself in a debate with him with great skill on the issue.

Mary Carpenter in her book “ Last days of Rajah Rammohun Roy” has given detailed description of last days of Rammohun in England and Bristol. From there we learn that people there accepted Rammohun as a friend and not a mere respectable guest. So much when Rammohun was passing his lonely last days his admirers thronged around him. They nursed him tirelessly and were overwhelmed with grief when he departed.

Immediately after he reached Liverpool William Rathbone requested him to be his guest but Rammohun was on his own. Many men were eager to meet him. This let us know that his name spread there with great reverence even before he reached there. His meeting with Roscoe has already been mentioned. His stay at Liverpool was brief. His mind was set for a visit to London where discussions on Reform Bill were going on. The bill included many points of reform in India. With a letter of introduction from Roscoe, Lord Brooham he left for London. There was great excitement in the country.

Mr. David Hare, a close friend of Rammohun in Kolkata had written to his brothers to look after Rammohun in England. But Rajah at first started living as a middle class gentleman. Later, as advised by his secretary Sanford Arnot and others started living in style. This would help him to move into the aristocrat society and facilitate his activities. As advised he moved into Cumberland Terrace, a palatial building and started living as a prosperous personality. At last he realised his mistake and moved in the house of David Hare’s brothers in Bedford Square and stayed with him.

We learn from a number of letters from Mary Ekin the fine reception he had in London. These letters were written by Mary Ekin to the reputed doctor Channing. Mary writes that all described Rammohun Roy as a person of extraordinary qualities. His modesty and simplicity coupled with his great mendacity endeared him to everyone. His grasp of English language and political situation in Europe was remarkable. He was always for freedom and progress. Rammohun says Mary helped me to make my mind more liberal and mass-oriented. I am paying great attention to the affairs of Asia which occupies one third of the world.

Failed Enterprise, Incomplete Mission The Brahma Samaj in Cooch Behar State

Enakshi Majumdar

1. Foreword

Anyone familiar with the history of the Brahma movement of the nineteenth century can hardly be unaware of the ‘Cooch Behar Marriage’ controversy and its implications. It meant the parting of ways for Keshab Chandra Sen and his friends and disciples. It also meant an irreparable crack in the solidarity and cohesiveness, hence in the organizational strength of the Brahma Samaj. Keshab Chandra’s Nababidhan and the radical Sadharan Brahma Samaj maintain separate existences till today but, my readers would agree, the vitality and popularity of the socio-religious movement, under Keshab Chandra’s leadership was gone with the schism of 1879. Much has been written on the subject. Indeed it is so much discussed that the facts scarcely bear repetition. Instead, this essay focuses on Cooch Behar and seeks to examine the impact of the tumultuous marriage if any, on the erstwhile princely state. This is an aspect which has hardly been

addressed by the historians of the Brahma movement. It is generally held, and that is the fact, that Brahmaism had no practical effect on the society of Cooch Behar. Cooch Behar population remained ritual Hindus, completely uninfluenced by and rather hostile to the Brahma Samaj. A historian would be interested to enquire why it was so.

This marriage brought about an era of modern reforms, argues David Kopf, and the backward princely state was transformed beyond recognition.¹ This was certainly true. Cooch Behar since the closing decades of the nineteenth century came to be counted among the more advanced and well-administered princely states of India. But it is not that the state’s modernization resulted from the young Maharaja’s marriage with Keshab Chandra Sen’s minor daughter. An elaborate plan for the modernization of the state was initiated much earlier when Col. J. C. Haughton, on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal took

Cooch-Bihar administration and the infant Maharaja under his wings. The Maharaja's British mentors, particularly the-then Deputy Commissioner of the state G. T. Dalton, insisted on royal marriage with a bride of their choice because of their anxiety to ensure that the modernization plan went unhindered. Why this anxiety, why so much caution about the future of Cooch-Bihar is a different question (not addressed in this essay) and there could be a quite an interesting answer to that, if one cares to enquire. However, it could hardly have been a conspiracy on the part of the British to curb, to break up the Brahmo movement, as was suggested by Jogananda Das.²

However, Kopf's argument that the development of the state ought to be given more importance than the issue of the marriage and the controversy it generated, is questioned by Gautam Neogy.³ He asks whether the development influenced the betterment of the lives of the common people of Cooch Bihar. He also wonders to what extent the development awakened awareness of the people. Now, when has any programme improved the lives of all sections of a society uniformly? Or

could there be anything like collective awareness to be awakened at a touch? What has been the effect of the famed Bengal Renaissance on the people of Bengal, taken collectively?

This essay attempts to present a sketch of Cooch Bihar's Brahmo past and seeks to provide a plausible answer to why the Brahmo Samaj failed to make an impact on the people of Cooch Bihar. No easy task, though, in view of frequent obscurity and lack of material. It is, as if, Cooch Bihar's Brahmo past has been relegated to a dark corner of collective amnesia. Given the scanty nature of data one hardly expects to grasp and record the past as one should. Yet an attempt to recapture the story of the Failed Enterprise Incomplete Mission of Brahmo Samaj could be useful. It might inspire more resolute researchers to take up an intensive academic enquiry. It may be noted here that the present author's family has some connection with Cooch Bihar's Brahmo past, however slight, and some useful information has come by way of oral evidence from her family elders.

2. Cooch-Behar's Brahma Past

Some sources indicate Brahma Samaj existed in Cooch-Behar even before the 'Cooch-Behar Marriage'. Sivanath Sastri gives 1873/1875 as the year of foundation of the Brahma Samaj in Cooch-Behar. There is a little confusion as to the exact date because in Sastri's authoritative account two different dates occur under two different heads.⁴ A local chronicler claims Brahma Samaj was established even earlier, in 1868.⁵ Hunter's Statistical Account published in 1876, however, denies that there was a Brahma Samaj in Cooch Behar. Hunter quotes the Deputy Commissioner's report: "there are a few followers of the Brahma Samaj, although no regular Samaj has been established in Kuch Behar."⁶ It is reasonable to hold that the British official made proper enquiries before forwarding his report. So much for the date of establishment of the Brahma Samaj in Cooch-Behar.

One name associated with the genesis of Brahma Samaj in Cooch Behar is Kalikadas Dutt. He was the Dewan of the state for more than half a century. Dutt as a young man- it is generally known - was one of the enterprising Brahma crusaders of

East Bengal. It would have been natural for him to try to organize like-minded people into a cohesive group of monotheists. But it must be acknowledged that scarcely any detail of their activities is forthcoming. Cooch Behar's miniscule Brahma population consisted of the non-indigenous Bengali officials of the state (Bhatias, meaning non-Cooch Behari, in local parlance), teachers of local schools and the college, medical appointees and bureaucrats. Majority of these gentlemen belonged to the upper strata of Hindu caste society and were university educated. The same class of people formed the backbone of the new socio-religious movement of nineteenth century Bengal.

There were two Brahma Samaj establishments in the state: Nababidhan and the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. It is a reasonable guess that since the schism of 1878-79 Cooch-Behar's small community of Brahma believers were divided according to their convictions, and two Brahma Samajes took institutionalized shape in the 1880s. Later a separate Mandir of the Sadharan Samajists also sprang up. However, one draws a blank as to the

role and activities of this group. When the Brahma Samaj in the state is mentioned it alludes to the Nababidhan Samaj, to which the Cooch-Bihar royal family belonged.

In a sense it would have been expected that Sunity Devi's marriage with the Maharaja would open up new horizons for the Brahma movement. The Maharaja in 1877, a minor at that time, wrote to Keshab Chandra stating his belief in 'one true God'. It did not seem convincing to all, particularly to the critics of this alliance. Perhaps this letter was dictated by the Maharaja's British mentors to influence Keshab Chandra's opinion! But even a die-hard critic of the 'Cooch-Bihar Marriage' would but agree that the Maharaja's future conduct proved how sincerely he served the cause of Brahmaism. It would not do to count the number of times the Maharaja joined the congregation at the Cooch-Bihar Mandir. It would also not help much to enquire how he performed his daily prayers, if ever. Ritual manifestations may not be the best evidence of one's religious conviction.

The Maharaja declared Brahmaism as state religion and built a magnificent Nababidhan temple in

the capital town, 'the largest in south Asia' (1888).⁷ Keshabashram was built next year for meditation and religious deliberations, on the east bank of the river Torsha. Ministers and missionaries, singers and caretakers, all associated with the Samaj in various capacities, were supported by the state. The Maharaja generously granted money for Brahma causes even outside his state. No mean feat, that. No organized religious movement in history survived without financial backing. True, the highly westernized ruler of this small state was not a rajarshi, or a priestly ruler. It is also true that he never directly associated himself with Brahma missionary work. Within the state it was entrusted to Kumar Gajendra Narayan (Sr.), the Maharaja's cousin, who too was a son-in-law of Keshab Chandra. Gajendra Narayan was married to Savitri, the leader's second daughter, and initiated into the new religion by him.

The official chronicler of the state noted that Maharaja Nripendra Narayan "belongs to the New Dispensation Church of the Brahma Samaj and all domestic ceremonies in his family, such as Nama-karana, Diksha, marriage & c., are regulated

by the tenets of that creed",⁸ although there is no mention of his initiation. It is on record that the Maharaja's sons were initiated at Cooch-Bihar Nababidhan Mandir. He was present at the ceremony.⁸ Kopf mentions that the Maharaja remained true to his conviction: he 'left three wishes behind him'. He asked that he be cremated according to New Dispensation Brahma rites, his ashes be put to the garden of the old palace and 'his casket be placed in a monument of stone similar to the one over the ashes of the late Keshab Chandra Sen'.¹⁰ His last wishes definitely signify his faith and belief in Brahmoism. However, it may be mentioned here, that in a book published four years after Nripendra Narayan's demise a royal acquaintance claimed that the deceased ruler contemplated, no, actually resolved, to revert back to ritual Hinduism.¹¹ The author does not mention when this conversation took place, how long before the Maharaja's sudden death. This, however, cannot be regarded as of any significance unless corroborated by other evidence.

Raj Rajendra Narayan, Nripendra Narayan's son, who succeeded his father in 1911, seems to have

possessed a missionary zeal. There are indications that he wanted to bring about certain significant changes from the beginning of his reign. He insisted his mother Sunity acted as his priest in his abhishek (Installation ceremony). That she did according to the tenets of Nababidhan.¹² (To the eyes of Cooch Bihar's overwhelmingly Hindu population, particularly the priestly class, a woman and a widow at that was undoubtedly the most unsuitable to act as a priest.) Coins were struck to commemorate the beginning of Raj Rajendra Narayan's reign. Old legend was discarded, which alluded to the Cooch-Bihar royals as Siva-charana-kamalamadhukara. Instead, Yato dharmmostato jayah was inscribed, which was also the state's motto.¹³ This can be interpreted as one symbolic act of the young Maharaja's rejection of Hindu idolater's identity.

But more ambitious was his plan to cut down endowments to the Hindu temple establishments. Perhaps he thought such a step would reduce the zeal of practicing Hindus. Or, did he regard it as unbecoming of a Brahma ruler to contribute to the cause of Hindu ritual worship? It may be

noted that the Maharaja's father proclaimed Brahmoism as the state religion but never sought to restrict or in any way interfere with the religious beliefs and persuasions of his subjects. (He even allowed lecture tours of firebrand Hindu missionaries like Krishna Prasanna Sen and Sasadhar Tarkachuramoni in his state.¹⁴ Maharaja Raj Rajendra Narayan would not do anything of the kind.) According to one local informant, protest from the Hindus, especially the Brahman scholars and priests, made Raj Rajendra Narayan abandon his plan.¹⁵ What other measures he adopted to extirpate idolatry, we are not to know,. Not that he got enough time to proceed with his plans, if there was any. He died in 1913 leaving the gaddi to his younger brother Jitendra Narayan, another initiated Brahmo.

Maharaja Jitendra Narayan's reign (1913-22) followed by his wife's Regency rule (1923-1936) proved far from conducive to the propagation of Brahmoism. One very significant occurrence in the early years of Jitendra Narayan's reign was an allegedly graft theft case brought against the eldest son of Kumar Gajendra Narayan, the secretary of the Nababidhan Samaj. Kumar

Gajendra Narayan was disgraced and banished from the state, his hereditary and personal properties confiscated. Savitri Devi states, it was a conspiracy hatched by some court officials (no name is mentioned) in order to arrest the spread of Brahmoism in the state, and also to stall career advancement of her boys. She also indicates Maharaja Jitendra Narayan's involvement in all this.¹⁶ One wonders who would be those officials given the fact that the majority of state officials in those days happened to be Brahmo or Brahmo sympathizers. But, of course, Brahmos too were susceptible to human weaknesses. There could be vested interest, jealousy and rivalry. (Or, one can say that faith and profession are two different things. Had not Kalika Das Dutt, a practicing Brahmo, 'planned out very carefully that it was most necessary' for Maharaja Nripendra Narayan to marry again because in four years Maharani Sunity gave birth to only one male child?¹⁷ As the Dewan of the state he had to think about royal succession, one could argue, of course.) Undoubtedly, officials, whoever they were, could hardly afford to take such steps without the tacit support

of the Maharaja. However, the mystery about the Maharaja's motives does not go away. The Maharaja was an initiated Brahma and Kumar Gajendra Narayan, the standard bearer of Nababidhan in Cooch Behar was his father's cousin and husband of his mother's doting sister. Was it then fallout of a kind of kinship jealousy, a kind of family quarrel? There were members of other branches of the royal family, who might have felt uneasy with the preponderance of one family, the family of Kumar Gajendra Narayan. Or, there was a change of heart of the Maharaja under the influence of his wife Maharani Indira, the daughter of the powerful Hindu ruler of Baroda? There are reasons to believe that the new Maharani nurtured a kind of animosity towards Brahmoism and perhaps she later patronized the powerful priestly class and the anti-Brahmo Hindu subjects, who did not take kindly to the advent of Brahmoism in Cooch Behar. This author's great-grandmother Kumudendu Devi (a poet, an acclaimed contributor to Paricharika, a member of Cooch Behar Arya Nari Samaj, and a singer of Brahmosangeet in religious assemblies) was a witness to young

Maharani Indira's disregard for Brahma sentiments and belief.

It is hardly possible that the anecdote that follows will ever find mention in any record of history. But there is no reason to dismiss it as a piece of old gossip. Dowager Maharani Sunity once invited her Arya Nari Samaj sisters to the palace to introduce her newly wed daughter-in-law to them. Maharani Indira entered into her illustrious mother-in-law's parlour carrying a Ganesha idol. She placed the idol at the centre of the room, and then courteously saluted the Arya Nari Samaj ladies. A symbolic act indeed! This author's grandmother, Kumudendu's daughter, could never hide her indignation at what she thought an outrageous behaviour of the Maharani, whenever she related to this incident. This author's mother, with her apparent dislike of the Brahmos, seemed rather amused whenever she repeated this old story heard from her mother-in-law. Perhaps this was exactly how Cooch Behar's Hindu populace reacted at that time. They were amused and then they found they had a strong ally within the royal family in their anti-Brahmo crusade.

Was there then a link between Maharani Indira's apparent anti-Brahmo stance and Sunity Devi's departure from Cooch Behar? Sunity Devi became an occasional visitor in her own state since the untimely demise of Raj Rajendra Narayan, her first-born (1911). Finally, in 1928 she left for England. She did return to India, not to Cooch-Bihar, and died at a Railway hotel in Ranchi in 1932. From England she used to write to Kumudendu (as she did whenever she was out of Cooch-Bihar). Two of such letters survive and will be published shortly in a Bengali journal. Here is an extract (done into English by the present author): "Your letter like a painting brought before my eyes the happy scenes of the past. The black of grief and pain doesn't touch it, joy and smile light up every face. What happiness filled my days in Cooch Behar! Bliss of heaven and high happiness of this world gave completion to my life. The sittings of Arya Nari Samaj in the Ashram were full of joy. Why this had to happen – such terrible changes in such short a time?" What were those 'terrible changes', one wonders. Was Sunity Devi referring to the sad demises of her husband and three of her sons? Was she referring to the disgrace her

sister Savitri's family had to suffer? Or, was she referring to the very fact of her forced self-exile from her state, which meant the end of Brahmo enterprise in the state?

To go back to Cooch-Bihar Brahmo Samaj. Presumably, the Nababidhan Samaj suffered a huge setback at the exile of Kumar Gajendra Narayan. But it is not to suggest that it was closed down. The leadership was now assumed by Sunity Devi's third son Maharajkumar 'Victor' Nityendra Narayan, another initiated Brahmo. He became the secretary of the Nababidhan Samaj. Nityendra Narayan was a man of many qualities. But unfortunately some aspects of his character rendered him most unsuitable as a leader of the Brahmo Samaj, even if he was a true believer. A mishap in his personal life soon proved detrimental to the Samaj. It discredited the Brahmos. Nityendra Narayan's wife Nirupama Devi, a poet and the editor of *Paricharika* (New Series) walked out of the marriage. It can be conjectured (Nirupama Devi does not provide details in her autobiographical sketch¹⁸) that she, a daughter of a Brahmo gentleman, could not compromise with what can be called moral deviations of her princely

husband. The conservative Hindu society of Cooch Behar was not shocked. Had not they always known that the Brahmos were the destroyer of sanatan dharma? Who else, if not a woman of the mlechcha Brahmo community, could desert her husband and secure divorce? Not that the Brahmo and Brahmo Sympathizers took kindly to the fact, to be fair. Desertion and seeking divorce were certainly not what was expected of an Arya Nari. Nirupama's conduct attracted criticism of the Arya Nari Samaj ladies. Kumudendu attended a meeting where the ladies commented: Rani Nirupama Bharatnari mukh hasalen - Rani Nirupama has brought disgrace to Indian womanhood. (It is a pity Kumudendu did not write her autobiography.)

Sometimes after the divorce (c. 1924-25) Nityendra Narayan left Cooch Behar for good and settled down in England. He had resigned from the Regency Council. It cannot be ascertained why he left Cooch Behar. Did it have something to do with the Dowager Maharani Indira and her policies? There are indications that the Maharani had already started to Hinduise the royal family. When Maharaja Jitendra

Narayan died in London his ashes were brought to India and immersed in the Ganga at Benaras. Jitendra Narayan's mortal remains were not buried at the palace ground, where the samadhis of Maharaja Nripendra Narayan and his two sons, Maharaja Raj Rajendra Narayan and Maharajkumar Hitendra Narayan (d. 1920) existed. The sraddha ceremony of the late ruler was performed according to strict Hindu shastric rules. And finally in 1924 the samadhis of the Cooch Behar royals were removed from the palace ground and relocated at Keshabashram, originally planned as a meditation centre.¹⁹ With the departure of Nityendra Narayan, Cooch Behar Nababidhan Samaj lost the last of its royal patrons. Sunity Devi had left Cooch-Bihar even earlier, Maharaja Raj Rajendra Narayan and Maharajkumar Hitendra Narayan, two Brahmo believers were dead. Now the last link between the Nababidhan Samaj and Cooch-Bihar royal family was severed. From this point of time the Samaj continued to exist among an apathetic mass of orthodox Hindu population and an indifferent, if not hostile, durbar. And by the next decade it became history.

Not that the Regency Council discontinued endowments to the Nababidhan Mandir. Nor did it ban Brahma congregation. Cooch Behar continued to remain, officially at least, a Brahma state till the end (1949), when it was merged with the Indian Union. Maharani Indira's much too anglicized son, the future Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan of Cooch Behar perhaps remained a Brahma, if only in name. When Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan's earthly body was laid in the Durbar Hall at Cooch Behar palace (1970), relates Asim Amed, Binit Kumar Mukhopadhyaya conducted a ritual Brahma service.²⁰ (Mukhopadhyaya was the resident acharya of Nababidhan Mandir..) One finds Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan's samadhi at Keshabashram, as well as the samadhi of his nephew and successor Maharaja Virajendra Narayan (died 1992) along with Maharaja Nripendra Narayan, Raj Rajendra Narayan, Maharajkumar Hitendra Narayan and Maharajkumari Prativa Devi. Brahma Maharaja Jitendra Narayan's ashes were immersed in the Ganga, we know. What happened after Nityendra Narayan's death?

The Nababidhan Mandir continued to exist, prayers were held, Maghotsab was celebrated, till the late 1970s. But the number of Brahma believers continued to decrease. (Of course, that was not unique to Cooch Behar. The number of Brahmans dwindled everywhere since the beginning of the last century.) What happened to the residents of Bidhanpalli (the name originated from Nababidhan), the small colony of the practicing Brahmans of the town? Why not even a single Brahma family settled down in Cooch Behar? The miniscule Brahma population of the state almost invariably belonged to the non-indigenous Bengali community, who came because the place offered opportunities for jobs. They, it may be conjectured, left Cooch Behar when the period of service ended. But how come not a single person chose to stay back? Does it have a connection with Cooch Behar's general apathy to Brahma Samaj? (Usha Kumar Das, an illustrious teacher of Jenkins School and an archetypal Brahma lived in the town till the 1960s. He was probably an adherent of Sadharan Brahma Samaj. Did he leave Cooch Behar at some point of time or lived there till his end? This author regrets that she had

not kept notes of those events which happened before the eyes of her elders and were often recounted by them.)

Came a time, in the 1970s, when Mukhopadhyaya's family was the only initiated Brahma family in Cooch Behar. Anusthanik, uninitiated, (of course they could be called Brahma only because of their cultural moulding), like this author's grandmother and her son, would sometimes join prayers. Then it stopped. One hardly knows when and why Mukhopadhyaya left Cooch Behar and how Cooch Behar's Brahma past was obliterated from collective memory.

Mukhopadhyaya's memoirs, if recorded, could have been an important source of history because in Cooch Behar his father Kedarnath was the priest of the Nababidhan Samaj before him and his mother Monorama was an active member of the Arya Nari Samaj. Kedarnath Mukhopadhyaya was one person who witnessed some of the most glorious time of Brahma activities in the state. How indifferent we are when it comes to taking note of history in the making.

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Notes and references:

¹. David Kopf, *The Brahma Samaj and the Shaping of modern Indian Mind*, Princeton, 1979, pp. 327-28

². See Jogananda Das's article in *Studies in Bengal Renaissance*, 2002 edition, p. 430. It would be an exaggeration that the Brahma movement in the late 1870s was perceived as a threat to the British Indian Empire.

³. Gautam Neogy's Editorial Notes in *Sivanath Sastri, Atmcharit*, Calcutta, 1982 (rep. 1991), p.519

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Savitri Devi, *Swargiya Kumar Gajendra Narayan*, Calcutta, 1928, pp. 62-63

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Dindayal Chaudhuri, *Nripendrasmriti*, Calcutta, 1915 (rep.1990), p. 68

Sunity Devi, *Autobiography of an Indian Princess*, London, 1921 (rep.1995), p. 180-181

Khan Chaudhuri Amanatullah Ahmed, *Kochbiharer Itihas Pratham khanda*, Cooch Behar, 1936 (rep. 1990), p. 289

Interview with Himadri Shankar Bhattarcharya, Cooch-Bihar 2003. Also indicated in Savitri Devi, p. 96

Interview with Himadri Shankar Bhattarcharya, Cooch-Bihar 2003. It would be useful to enquire if such royal proclamation was ever issued.

See Savitri Devi, pp.107-117

Sunity Devi, p. 90

See Ekshan Sharodiya Number 1401 (B.S.)

Roy, op. cit. p.296,

Interview with Asim Amed, Kolkata, 2008

Theism as Universal Religion

Sivanath Sastri

Ours is Universal Religion. But the question that will naturally occur to a thoughtful mind is, can there be such a thing as Universal Religion? Religion by its very nature is local, national and traditional. We are all familiar with the local and national aspects of religion; but Universal Religion is yet a dream and an idea. But is there any likelihood of that dream being ever realized? That is the question. In order to understand that question well, it is necessary to enter into a discussion of the main characteristics of religion, and into the consideration whether those characteristics can ever appertain to a universal faith like theism.

In the first place religion must be distinguished from theology. Religion like language comes first; and theology like grammar comes afterwards. Men are religious before they know what laws of intellectual life they are fulfilling thereby. Religious phenomena, like every other phenomenon in nature happen without the least reference to their science; which comes afterwards and tries by processes of analysis and synthesis to discover certain

fundamental laws, that govern them and interpret them. Secondly, it is necessary to distinguish between the essentials and non-essentials in religion. The forms and rituals of religion, however important in the eyes of men, are non-essential to it, in this sense that they are different in different races, and change with the progress of time. But yet it must be acknowledged that religion, at least in its social aspect, cannot exist without some forms. Why religion alone? It is in the nature of the instinctive impulses of the human mind to symbolize themselves in external acts. For an example we may refer to the sexual instinct in man, which has symbolized itself into different forms of matrimony in different communities. Or I may mention man's aesthetic faculty or his love of harmony which are equally instinctive and which in society have organized themselves into schools of painting and music, into art galleries and musical concerts. As men crystallize into settled societies the external acts of religion, by reason of social imitation and adoption become usages and customs. Thus the form of religion

become national and traditional. At this stage men are born in them and grow with them. To them religion becomes associated with some or other current forms, and it becomes hard for them, afterwards, to believe that it can ever exist apart from these forms. Thus the Hindus believe that it cannot exist apart from image worship, the Christians believe it cannot exist without baptism and the sacrament, the Mohammedans believe it cannot live without the five nomazes, the utterance of the formula of worship, and the roja and other festivals. From these popular convictions there have sprung endless polemical contests, and even sanguinary wars, whenever some existing forms of religion have been assailed by a new generation of daring reformers. It is an old old story which has been repeated in every land and amongst all settled communities of men. Yet in spite of that polemical conflict the forms of religion have gone on changing, all the same, till no two ages have worn the same aspects.

This shifting character of the forms of religion is nowhere more manifest than in this country. The Hindus of India, of all races, have been most conservative. This is perhaps due to

their habitual ancestor-worship and corresponding undue regard for the past. Whatever the reason may be we, as a nation, are very loath to change. Our systems of caste and of the joint family, our social usages, the very constitution of our tribal brotherhoods, tend to deprecate change. Ours is a social machine that crushes all individualism and makes conformity the highest of virtues; - yet this solid rock-like conservatism of the people has not been able to prevent altogether great changes in their religious form. The current forms are not those that obtained in ancient times. How many waves of new ideas have passed over the land. Since the days of Buddhism, almost innumerable sects have been formed in the bosom of the national faith. The non-Aryan aborigines, the neighboring races drawn into commercial intercourse with us, the conquering nations who have found a home in this country, all have contributed something which has altered the character of the national faith.

This tendency of the forms of religion to change is remarkable even in faiths guarded by infallible authority. Even sects who have earnestly contended for the infallible

literary inspiration of a book, or a synod of men, have not been able to escape it. God has endowed the mind of man with the right of private judgment, and no fetters invented by churches, or synods, or books have been found to be equal to the task of altogether restraining it.

This leads us to the consideration of another significant fact that religion, though associated in almost every instance with infallible authority, is not necessarily dependent upon it. Men, by a natural mistake, are led to suppose that religion cannot exist without authority. In ancient India the definition of infidelity was this—an infidel is he who does not believe in the Vedas. Similarly in the West it is still believed by good Christians that an infidel is he who does not believe in the Bible. Yet during recent years, Biblical criticism has considerably shaken men a belied in the literary inspiration of the book, and the conviction is dawning upon the minds of men, that, religion has a far more substantial and lasting basis than a book compiled from records of different periods of history. Instead of the Bible explaining religion the true view is that religion explains the Bible. A parallel case is to be found in men's notions about

Government. Up to a very recent period of history men had the notion that anything like government could not exist without a divinely authorized monarch to rule over a nation. But modern democracies have proved, and will still more satisfactorily prove in the future, that all real government is self-government; and that people themselves are the proper trustees of their political interests. Similarly, a day is coming when there will come the conviction that men can be religious, virtuous and true without any infallible authority to regulate their conduct. Nay the new conviction that is taking possession of the minds of thoughtful men is that spiritual liberty alone is the essential condition of all real spiritual progress. Without it there may be outward conformity, or external discipline and regulation conduct but no true spiritual life. As flight for a bird is of impossible without the space to receive that flight, so the exercise of true love of God is impossible without spiritual freedom. Accordingly we must get religion free of all infallible authority whether vested in bodies of men or books, considering it as a chain forged for enslaving the human soul

and making it unfit for the exercise of true love of God.

But some doubting critics would perhaps ask, whether by removing authority we are not throwing the soul open to harassing doubts, and insuperable difficulties. In the absence of some guidance to go by men will be thrown broadcast on spiritual uncertainties and will have no better resources left them for their salvation than the different conjugations of the verb 'to think', as it was once observed by a Christian writer. It may be pointed out however, that believers in infallible books are no less harassed by doubts and difficulties relating to different interpretations of their texts. It is no good to have an infallible book unless we have an infallible interpreter also.

Those who reason in this way, forget that the Supreme Being is enthroned in the human soul, that through all his doubts and difficulties men is truly searching for him, that the spiritually good and great will surely and necessarily attract him, and that however setting aside external authority, man will not and cannot, lay aside his old reverences that have made hero-worship natural and

habitual with him. Men in their doubts and difficulties will ever turn to those who are spiritually advanced for lessons from the lives of saints and sages gone before ; - lessons of self-renunciation for instance from the life of Buddha, of filial trust from that of Christ, of ardent love from that of Chaitanya and so forth. Let us thank this our modern theism for extending the sphere of spiritual inspiration. Whilst sectarian religions moving in special grooves, have shut up the Supreme Being's revelation in accredited channels, this theism of ours teaches us to see the operation of the Divine spirit everywhere, wherever man has truly sought him and has tried to told communion with him.

Let it be understood clearly, that in saying all this we are not fighting against the authority of books or of sages and saints; far from it. In every department of our life, our convictions are being daily strengthened by the experience of those who have gone before us. But there authority means the tallying of two experiences, the individual experience first and the voice, yes, coming from the remote ages afterwards. In religion it is something more ; it is the inspiration

and the communication of light which enables the individual soul to apprehend truth. But everywhere it is the light of the individual soul on which it is to stand; - a truth beautifully represented in a passage of the *Yogbhashita*, where it is said, "Proper authority lies in the harmony between individual conviction, good scripture, and a spiritual guide". Mark here the author lays down - Individual conviction first, by which he judges the other two. But it is sad, very sad, to reflect how the sanctity of spiritual freedom, in matters of faith and religious life, has been often and often invaded by the sectarian religions of the world.

Here I am incidentally drawn into the consideration of certain fatally erroneous characteristics of all sectarian religions. As their first characteristic they begin by denying the Universality of Divine revelation. They say God has mysteriously and miraculously revealed His will to a particular man, or set of men, and it is by following him or them alone that men can find the right path. Even in those cases where other participators of revelation are admitted, as in Manommedanism, which accords that privilege to some other

recognized prophets revelation in some special manner is confined to one man and he is set up as ideal for whole humanity. The argument is put forward, that in an important matter like man's spiritual progress and salvation how can men go on without a divinely appointed ideal before them. Those who advance that argument forget for the moment that the Supreme Being has placed before men not one but many ideals; and they have to choose there, from according to their spiritual needs and endowments. Nowhere, in the domains of knowledge and of human endeavour, there is such a fixity of one ideal and one path; why should this department of human progress alone be singled out as the one, where universal conformity is wanted? All men have not the same spiritual gifts, some are meditative, some critical, some emotional, some secretive, some gregarious some full of love of man, and so forth. Why should they all be cast into the same mould, and be asked to curb and curtail themselves to suit one ideal. Will any sane person ever propose to transplant a man like the late Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore and one like the late George Muller of Bristol to each other's places? No, no! men will have different spheres

and will follow different ideals according to the difference of their spiritual gifts. Religion should be broad and catholic enough to include all and to give countenance to all. In these matters its conduct should be guided by the old familiar Roman Catholic principle, - in things essential unity, in things non-essential liberty, in all things charity.

To set up only channel of Divine communication and to call it the expression of the whole mind of God is something like the people living in a lower deck of a steamer considering the draught to air coming of them through a particular funnel as the whole atmosphere! The Supreme Being has chosen many channels of communication for the moral and spiritual education of mankind. The Bhagabat says "innumerable are the incarnations of the Supreme Being, immanent in matter and mind." Each great man who has earnestly sought and found Him, is a fragment of that Divine incarnation and is thereby a channel of Divine communication.

The common error of all sectarian faiths arose from the fact, that they had their origin in the old tribal jealousies of the primitive times. The

tribes of men in ancient times were so much apart from each other and so ignorant about each other's ways that each naturally considered its own good things as a special possession, denied to other races. Thus arose the sectarian distinctions between Aryans and non-Aryans, Jews and Gentiles, Christian and Heathen, Moslem and Kafirs etc. But the progress of civilization, and of international studies have brought into the field new forces, which inevitably tend to alter that sectarian view of Divine things. The sacred literature of different nations has been studied and the course of development of religious ideas amongst all races, has been marked, and the conviction is daily strengthening in the minds of men, that "of a truth God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him." With this dawning of the great truth of the universality of Divine revelation will be laid the foundations of Universal Religion. But I must hasten to note some characteristics of sectarian religion.

To be continued ...

P. NARASIMHAM - A Dedicated Soul

K.Sarojinidevi & P. Sesharao

Sri Palaparti Narasimham born on October 10 1885 at Bapatala in Andhra Pradesh was attracted to the Brahma Samaj very early in life and having once embraced the faith of his choice, he stood firm by its principles, in thought word and deed. Severe and painful as it had been, social ostracism did not deter him from the pursuit of his firm resolve. Undaunted by the severe tests of poverty and privation it entailed, he chose the life of a Brahma Missionary, in preference to a lucrative job in the Revenue Department which he resigned with no regrets as a young man. Even the teacher's life had no attraction for him, though he could earn a very good reputation as an impressive teacher, in which capacity he served but for a few years, before he finally responded to the call of Brahma Mission.

As one of the founder members of the Andhra Brahma Sadhan Asram at Kakinada, as the Editor of "Dharma Sadhani" a religious journal dedicated to the service of the Brahma Samaj for over half a century, and as the prime moving force behind the Prarthana Samaj at Guntur, which owes its very existence and even its present building to his untiring efforts in no small measure, he left an indelible and lasting impression on the

progressive social and religious movements in Andhra Pradesh.

He had the good fortune of receiving training in Sadhan Asram, Calcutta for a period of one year, during which he studied Bengali and Brahma literature in Bengali. This enabled him later to render into Telugu, such monumental religious works as Brahma Dharma of Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore and other books. During his stay at Calcutta he made a through study of the main religious of the world, which not only helped him to the develop a universal and catholic outlook, but also enabled him to present the Brahma Samaj as a universal religion to the public. Sri P. Narasimham had the unique distinction of being the accredited Brahma Missionary of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, allotted to Andhra Pradesh.

'Brahma Matamu', 'Uttama Vuvahamu Bhaktanjali', 'Bhagavatkadha', 'Brahmadharmanushtan Paddhati', and 'Matamu-Viswasamu' are some of his other important religious works in Telugu, besides his translation into Telugu of Maharshi Devendranath Tagore's Brahma Dharma.

Andrapradesh lost this devout worker who dedicated his life for the propagation of the principles of the Brahma Samaj on 27th April 1965.

Blessed is the life of this servant of God.

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Religion has its truth in its moral significance, not in external practices of imaginary value; its value is in upholding man in his life of good thoughts, good words and good deeds.

- Rabindra Nath Tagore

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