

RAMMOHUN ROY AND THE BRAHMO SAMAJ

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The word *Brahmo* literally means one who worships Brahma or the Supreme Spirit of the Universe, while the word *Samaj* is interpreted as a community of men. The meaning of the combination of these two words means 'the Society of the Worshippers of the One True God'.¹ Therefore, *The Brahmo Samaj* is a religious organisation founded "to establish the worship of the Supreme Being in spirit as opposed to the prevailing idolatry of the land."²

The Brahmo Samaj is a direct result and the climax of Rammohun Roy's long theological polemics with Hindu *pandits*. He was an outstanding religious, social and political figure to whom the Bengal Renaissance is much indebted. His position in the Bengal Renaissance in particular and the history of India in general is a starting point and from it many historians divide Indian history from mediaeval to modern period. Rammohun strongly believe that Hinduism as believed and practised by his people had been corrupted and deviated from the pure teachings in the Hindu sacred books.

The Brahmo Samaj is a religious manifestation of its founding father, Rammohun Roy which expresses his strong opposition to the corrupted Hinduism, as he claims, and it also manifests the dissatisfaction of its Western educated intellectuals with the failure of their society and culture in relation to the West.³

Rammohun founded The Brahmo Samaj on the 20th of August, 1828, thirteen or fourteen years after he settled in Calcutta, the capital of British administration in India as well as the centre of intellectual and missionary activities. Before that, in 1815, the *Atmiya Sabha* or 'Friendly Association' was established by Rammohun in order to propagate his religious convictions of the worship of One True God. The *Atmiya Sabha* or 'Spiritual Society' as Lillingston calls it, was formed by Rammohun and his friends for the purpose of spiritual improvement.⁴ It was a religious society established for the spread and wide distribution of ideas and doctrines of religious truth as well as the encouragement of 'free discussions of theological subjects'.⁵

The *Atmiya Sabha* was the first step taken by Rammohun to propagate his conviction of the Unity of God. It was the foundation-

stone for the establishment of the Brahmo Samaj by the same man and it played a very remarkable role in the history of religious movements in India. Before 1820, Rammohun was engaged in theological writings on Hindu principles which led him to be involved in religious controversy with Hindu pandits. Therefore, the Atmiya Sabha was his early religious response to Hindu idolatry in the form of 'society' or 'movement' instead of writing such as *the Tuhfat-ul-muwahhiddin* in which he criticised idol worship in all religions, or translating scriptures which prove that God is One.

According to Sastri, many rich and influential figures in and outside Calcutta gave their strong support to Rammohun in the establishment of the Atmiya Sabha. Among them were Babu Dwaraka Nath Tagore of Jorasanko, Babu Prosanna Kumar Tagore of Pathariaghata, Babus Kali Nath and Baikunta Nath Munshi of Taki, Babu Brindaban Mitra, grandfather of Dr. Rajendra Lala Mitra, Babu Kasi Nath Mullick of Calcutta, Raja Kali Sankar Ghosal of Bhukailash, Babu Annada Prosad Bannerji of Telinipara, and Babu Baidya Nath Mukerji, the grand father of Justice Anukul Mukerji, Brojo Mohun Mozumdar, Haladhar Bose, Nanda Kishore Bose, the father of Raj Narain Bose (subsequently, President of the *Adi Brahmo Samaj*) and many others.⁶

They frequently attended religious meetings of the Atmiya Sabha. Rammohun's house at Maniktolah became the headquarters of this association and in this house indeed, it was founded. Two years later, the centre of this movement was removed to Rammohun's house at Simla and then Shashtitolah and again back to his house at Maniktolah in the following year.

In those meetings, texts from Hindu scriptures were recited especially from the Vedas and these recitations were followed by hymns. The service was conducted once a week in the evening. There were two outstanding Sanskrit scholars - besides his other learned friends - who helped him in explaining ancient Sanskrit texts and made him fully understand them: *Pandit* Sivaprasad Misra and Hariharananda Tirthaswami.

The first reciter of the Atmiya Sabha was Siva Prasad Misra and a well-known musician named Govinda Mala was chosen as its first chanter saying hymns composed by Rammohun Roy and his colleagues.⁷

The Atmiya Sabha faced some difficulties in organising its meetings as a result of legal disputes between Rammohun and the Maharaja of Burdwan. Consequently, the meetings were moved to several houses; at Brindaban Mitra's, Raja Kali Sankar Ghosal's and finally at the house of Beharilal Chaubey at Barabazar until 1819.

In Chaubey's house, a great debate concerning the worship of idols had taken place between Rammohun and a Madras Bahmin

called Subrahmanya Sastri. The meeting was first held with the purpose of religious discussion between Rammohun and Raja Radha Kant Dev. But the meeting changed to a religious debate between Rammohun on one side and Subrahmanya Sastri on the other, after the latter expressed disapproval of "the recital of the Vedas, on account of the absence of pure Brahmans in Bengal."⁸ It means that the main point of the controversy between Rammohun and Subrahmanya Sastri was that Subrahmanya Sastri wanted the pure Brahmans attending religious meetings while the passages from the Vedas were recited to people in the meetings. But Rammohun believed that those Brahmans preached idol worship and therefore it is not wrong to recite Vedic texts in their absence. Rammohun, then, stood up opposing Subrahmanya Sastri's view while the rest of the people who attended that meeting just kept silent.⁹

Religious activities of the Atmiya Sabha stopped for a few years after 1819 due to several reasons. At that time, Rammohun was in trouble after his nephew, Govindaprasad Roy, son of Rammohun Roy's eldest brother, Jagamohun Roy brought legal summons against him.¹⁰ The Raja of Burdwan also took the same action against him. On the other hand, at that time also, Rammohun was engaged in helping William Adam and the activity of the Unitarian congregation.¹¹

Amidst the above mentioned problems, Rammohun still managed to publish several tracts regarding the subject of Hindu theology, conducted religious lectures to his students and involved himself in theological disputes with Christian scholars such as the Baptist missionaries of Serampore. At this time, William Adam embraced the Unitarian faith after being convinced by Rammohun of the insufficiency of Christian orthodoxy.

Rammohun was able fully to engage in writing after the law-suits brought by his nephew and the Raja of Burdwan were dismissed by the court. He continued giving lectures on theological subjects and also joining William Adam's Unitarian congregation. Among those who attended those lectures were his disciples, Tarachand Chukerburty and Chunder Sekhar Dev. These two disciples of Rammohun suggested to him the importance of the establishment of a Hindu monotheistic church, instead of joining the Unitarian congregation.

The suggestion of these two men attracted Rammohun and he, therefore, consulted his friends, Dwarkanath Thakur and Roy Kalinath Munshi to get their opinion on the above suggestion.

In a meeting called by Rammohun at his house to discuss the proposal, an agreement was reached to support the idea of the establishment of the Hindu Theistic or Monotheistic Church.

The meeting also was attended by Prasanna Kumar Thakur and

Mothuranath Mullick. The Brahma Samaj of Calcutta was formally established on the 20th of August, 1828, and a house which belonged to Kamal Lochan Bose at Jorasanko on the Chitpore Road was hired to be its office. The establishment of The Brahma Samaj marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Indian religious movements.

The Brahma Samaj which is also known as *The Brahma Sabha*, had the same basic religious principles to that of The Atmiya Sabha. Both organisations were established by Rammohun and had the same purpose: the propagation and the spread of the monotheistic belief among Hindus. It is also correct to say that The Brahma Samaj was only a new name for The Atmiya Sabha, for it had the same spirit as that of the latter. Rammohun Roy played a notable part in both.

The Brahma Samaj which had its weekly service every Saturday evening between 7 and 9 pm.¹² was a religious reform movement which strived to bring Hinduism back to what Rammohun Roy considered its original and pure doctrine of monotheism.

The Brahma Samaj claimed not to offer something new to Hindu peoples but something which had already been narrated in their sacred scriptures. Monier Williams is right when he says that it is wrong to consider that "the first introduction of Theism into India was due to the founders of the *Brahma-Samaj* (in Bengal written *Brahmo-Samaj*), or modern Theistic Churches of Bengal." He goes on to say that "some of the oldest hymns of the Rig-Veda are monotheistic" and the principal doctrine of the Unity of God becomes the basis of all the most declaring forms of pantheism in India. In fact, ancient Hindu scholars pronounced the Hindu theological doctrine that "There is one Being without a second," and "Nothing really exists but the one eternal omnipresent Spirit."¹³ This is, in fact, what Rammohun tried to prove to his own peoples including the Brahmans that pure Hinduism had nothing to do with idol worship as widely practised by them. To further the purpose of returning to pure Hindu monotheism, texts from the Vedas and the Upanishads were recited and explained in The Brahma Samaj's meetings. In those meetings, two Telugu Brahmans recited texts from the Vedas while the texts of the Upanishads were read by Utsayananda Vidyavagisa. The explanation of those texts in Bengali were given by Ram Chandra Vidyavagisa.

People increasingly supported The Brahma Samaj. It is reported that on the day of the foundation of The Samaj, many Hindus in Calcutta, attended that meeting. Three leading figures of The Samaj: Dwarkanath Thakur of Calcutta, Kalinath Roy Munshi of Taki in Jessore and Mothuranath Mullick of Howra gave rewards to pandits who joined The Samaj's celebration of its anniversary in order to encourage them. Many peoples outside Calcutta also supported and joined The Samaj. The influence of this triumvirate

attracted many Hindus inside and outside Calcutta to embrace the faith of The Samaj.¹⁴ But although The Samaj received encouraging support, it still faced a great challenge from the orthodox Hindu pandits or “the older generation of the intelligentsia” as Kopf calls them.¹⁵

The relationship between Rammohun and his members in The Brahma Samaj with those people became increasingly critical. In response to the establishment of The Brahma Samaj and its strong anti *Sati* practice, the orthodox Hindu pandits, along with other non Brahmins who were in favour of defending Hindu culture and way of life established *The Dharma Sabha*. From the cultural point of view, the formation of The Dharma Sabha can be defined as an organisation which attempted to defend ‘the Hindu way of life or culture.’¹⁶ The organisation was established soon after the new British Governor-General Lord William Bentinck, who succeeded Lord Amherst, at that time passed a regulation for the abolition of Sati practice on the 4th of December, 1829.¹⁷

On the 1st of December, 1830, The Dharma Sabha asked “for an Indianization of the civil service, a hands-off policy on the Permanent Settlement, a warning about the evil effects of colonization, a defence of Sati, a plan for aiding the rural poor, and a proposal for aiding Calcutta’s poor by building a charitable institution and a hospital.”¹⁸

Considering all these demands, it is clear that the establishment of The Dharma Sabha was not only to defend Sati practice and to compete with its rival, The Brahma Samaj but went beyond.

Looking at this organisation in its wider perspective, The Dharma Sabha appeared as an early Hindu religious, cultural and political organisation which acted as a watch-dog for the survival of Indian Hindu culture and tradition.

With all these factors, it is clear why The Dharma Sabha and its leaders, among them were Radhakant Deb, Ramcamul Sen and Bhabanicharan, struggled to defend Sati practice and why it was very much against The Brahma Samaj and its leaders, especially Rammohun Roy.

The declaration made by Lord Bentinck for the abolition of Sati was in fact a moral victory for The Brahma Samaj and it was also a personal victory for Rammohun. On the other hand, this declaration was a blow to the the defenders of Hindu culture and tradition and consequently The Dharma Sabha was formed.

In this critical period of the history of Hindu movements as represented by The Brahma Samaj and The Dharma Sabha, the leaders were also involved in polemical writings defending their own views. Rammohun Roy, for example, published his weekly periodical called *Sambad Kaumudi*, meaning ‘The moon of

Intelligence' in Bengali in order to support Brahmaism and anti-Sati practice. The Sambat Kaumudi was published especially for the common peoples and it dealt with "religious, moral and political matters; domestic occurrences; foreign as well as local intelligence."¹⁹ Rammohun also published Brahmanical magazine in 1821 and in 1822 he began publication of the weekly newspaper in Persian called *The Mirat-ul-Akbar* (Mirror of Intelligence) in order to give 'information and guidance' to educated people. *The Sambat Kaumudi* and *The Mirat-ul-Akbar* were published weekly on Tuesdays and Fridays respectively. They became 'voices' of Rammohun Roy and The Brahmo Samaj for his social reform. Rammohun also published *The Banga Doot* as another organ of The Samaj.

In response to this, orthodox Hindus published *The Samachar Chandrika* (*Chundrika*) and the *Indian Gazette* in order to fight for the cause of the restoration of Sati practice. They also appealed to the British government to review and withdraw its decision of the abolition of Sati. Therefore, they formed a religious pressure group called The Dharma Sabha or 'Religious society' for their struggle against Government's decision. It is easy to understand why The Dharma Sabha became the bitter enemy of the Brahmo Samaj.

Amidst this critical period of The Brahmo Samaj, again we see Rammohun was engaged in a religious controversy with Hindu pandits who supported The Dharma Sabha. This led him to publish a tract in 1830 concerning the above issue called *The Abstract of the Arguments regarding the burning of Widows considered as a Religious Rite*. It was Rammohun's reply to Hindu pandits who regarded Sati as a religious practice. In the same year, Rammohun published another tract called *The Rights of Hindus over Ancestral Property according to the Law of Bengal*.

Although Rammohun Roy, the leader of The Brahmo Samaj, had no warm relationship with Christian missionaries after his controversy with them, he still hoped that the relationship between his people and Europeans would benefit his people in all aspects of life. In respect to this hope, Rammohun had no prejudice against or pessimistic view of British colonisation of India. He says:

I am impressed with the conviction that the greater our intercourse with European gentlemen, the greater will be our improvement in literary, social and political affairs.²⁰

Based on this conviction, Rammohun helped Alexander Duff, the Scottish missionary who arrived in Calcutta in 1830 and then opened his first missionary school. The national feeling among Hindus against the missionaries was great, as Sastri points out. Therefore, Rammohun used all his influence to help Duff and "to secure the first batch of half a dozen students with whom to open the school."²¹

Rammohun had his own way in order to serve his countrymen. Although he was not too radical in comparison with the leaders of The Dharma Sabha in their struggle for the survival of Hindu culture and way of life, but strongly believed that his policy of co-operation with the British government would benefit his people. He welcomed any contact between India and Britain but India as he said, must remain Indian.²² He admired English education and hoped that through this medium of instruction, subjects such as Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy and other Science subjects could be introduced to his countrymen.

On this ground, he opened his own school and college — The Anglo-Hindu School and Vedanta College — in order to introduce religious and secular subjects to them. He was in favour of introducing both religious subjects and secular education to his people. He believed both could make them progress. This is the reason why he was against the establishment of the Sanskrit College just for the purpose of Oriental Studies. This is what he really hoped for through keeping a close contact with the British government, English education and European friends. But did his opponents understand his position?

Numerous disagreements which arose between the Brahma Samaj and The Dharma Sabha especially on theological issues reflect that leaders of those organisations not only hold different views on social and political affairs but also had different interpretations in understanding their own scriptures. Rammohun's theological controversy with Hindu pandits concerning Hindu theological doctrines and the practice of Sati was due to their different views in interpreting Hindu sacred scriptures on those subjects.

On the 8th of January, 1830, Rammohun along with Dwarakanath Tagore, Kalinath Roy, Prasannakumar Tagore and Ramchandra Vidyavagis formed a Trust Deed of The Brahma Samaj where they appointed Baikunthanath Roy, Radhaprasad Roy and Ramanath Tagore as its three trustees.²³ These three trustees were responsible for looking after The Brahma Samaj's properties.

Rammohun's involvement in The Brahma Samaj was not long, for in November, 1830 he left Calcutta for England and died there in 1833. The death of Rammohun in Bristol ended the first era in the history of The Brahma Samaj. As the founder of The Samaj, Rammohun had developed it until it became a strong religious reform movement which had a great effect in Hindu culture and tradition especially in respect to the practice of Sati. Although we cannot say that the progress of The Brahma Samaj was totally dependent of the personal leadership of Rammohun, it is clear that as the founding father of The Brahma Samaj, he directly became a symbol of the strength of the Brahma Samaj. His popularity

strengthened the image of The Samaj.

Calcutta at that time was not only the capital of British government in India but it also became the centre of movements between two rival organisations: The Brahmo Samaj and The Dharma Sabha. Both competed with each other in gaining support from the people. Supported by rich and influential figures such as Babus Dwarka Nath Tagore of Jorasanko, Kali Nath Munshi of Taki and Mathuranath Mullick of Howrah, Rammohun was able to face strong opposition from The Dharma Sabha led by its leaders such as its learned Brahmin President, Bhowanicharan Banerji and its secretary Radha Kanta Deb.

After his departure for England, the above three friends of Rammohun formed a sort of collective leadership or *Samaj triumvirate*, as Sastri calls it, in order to continue Samaj's activities.²⁴

According to Basham, The Brahmo Samaj was closer to Christianity than to Hinduism in many aspects. Although it did not have many followers, its influence was spread over a large area²⁵ inside and outside Calcutta.

The experiences of The Brahmo Samaj during Rammohun's period suggest that the above statement is right. For example, the establishment of The Samaj, although in principle directed to bring a religious reformation in Hindu society and culture, and despite its commitment and conviction to the teaching of the Vedanta, the Christian influence within The Samaj cannot be denied. Rammohun Roy and Keshub Chunder Sen were among its leading figures who not only explored Hindu dogmas but also extended their knowledge and study of Christian teachings and principles.

Despite his cool relationship with the Baptist missionaries of Serampore, Rammohun, in fact, had maintained his good relation with other missionaries including Alexander Duff and of course, William Adam, who still considered himself a Christian.

The Brahmo Samaj in its early days, had no clear model for organising worship or appointing officiants. Therefore, the way it conducted the service and appointed the minister followed a Christian example. More than that, its leaders such as Rammohun Roy paid a great respect to the teachings of Christ. All these factors helped The Samaj to come closer to Christianity than to Hinduism as Basham already pointed out.

After the death of Rammohun Roy, the administration and management of The Brahmo Samaj fell upon several persons. Among them were Maharaja Rama Nath Thakur (Tagore), Prasanna Kumar Thakur (Tagore) and Rammohun's eldest son, Radha Prasad Roy, and Tarachand Chukerburty, The Samaj's secretary appointed by Rammohun.

For several reasons, the Brahmo Samaj was not as active as it was

during the life time of Rammohun. The first three gentlemen had been appointed trustees of The Brahmo Samaj by the trust deed of the founder. Rama Nath Thakur and Prasanna Kumar Thakur were "too much occupied with their worldly concerns," Tarachand Chukerburty left The Samaj "for secular employment" while Radha Prasad Roy was unable to participate actively in The Samaj due to his personal problems.²⁶

With the support and encouragement of Dwarkanath Tagore, Ram Chandra Ganguli was chosen to succeed Radha Prasad in 1833. The former was among the great supporters of The Samaj who subscribed and spent a lot of money for The Samaj. The latter also paid his subscription to the Samaj. It was Pandit Ram Chandra Vidyavagish who was appointed *Pradhana Acharya* or principal minister of the Samaj "kept the lamp burning"²⁷ for The Samaj. Dwarkanath Tagore, due to his health, was later unable to join actively The Samaj. He was a loyal disciple of Rammohun Roy throughout his career in The Brahmo Samaj's movement. In the last days of his life, he went to England and proceeded on his 'pious pilgrimage' to Rammohun's grave and there he 'erected a tomb of stone.'²⁸ He died in England, to be "laid beside the friend he had loved so well in life."²⁹

Almost a decade after the death of Rammohun, the Brahmo Samaj did not show any remarkable progress from being a Hindu reform organisation. The Samaj at this time did not appear as a pressure group in bringing Hindu society into a new era after its remarkable period during Rammohun's life. The weekly service of The Samaj conducted by Ramchandra Vedantavagis was 'in the old accustomed manner.' This service included readings from the Vedas by Brahmins in the private room, this followed with the ministers explaining and interpreting the texts in the public room. As usual, singing of hymns also was conducted in the service.³⁰ Sen continues:

there was no congregation, no regular body of worshippers, no covenant or creed that could hold them together.

Many of those who attended the service of The Samaj at that time were 'passers-by' who attended the service just to see what was going on in the service.³¹

Although Dwarkanath Tagore was unable to lead The Samaj as Rammohun did, it was his son, Devendranath Tagore who successfully fulfilled a leadership vacuum in The Brahmo Samaj. That the Samaj faced the leadership crisis after Rammohun's death in which no one could restore the image of The Samaj as a strong religious and social reform movement shows clearly the dependence of The Samaj on Rammohun's leadership and his popularity. It was more than a decade after his death that the young Tagore appeared as a remarkable leader of The Samaj.

Devendranath Tagore had established *The Tattvabodhini Sabha* or 'Society for the communication of Truth' before he joined The Brahmo Samaj and then became its leader.³²

The religious purpose behind the establishment of The Tattvabodhini Sabha was to maintain the works of Rammohun Roy and to help in reintroducing monotheism in divine worship as prescribed by the original Hindu sacred books.³³ The establishment of The Tattvabodhini Sabha for the propagation of monotheism clearly proves that The Brahmo Samaj was not strong enough to influence people to leave the idol worship. It is also a proof that people at that time, especially in Calcutta and its surroundings, returned to the worship of idols. An interesting question arose in respect of the foundation of the Tattvabodhini Sabha: why Devendranath Tagore did not immediately join The Brahmo Samaj instead of establishing a new society which had similar religious purposes to that of the Samaj? This is the question which Tagore himself did not fully answer. But according to Leonard again, "the avowed object of The Tattvabodhini Sabha was not so much to follow in the very footsteps of Rammohun Roy as to make deeper investigations of divine knowledge from the Sastras than Rammohun Roy had done."³⁴

The Tattvabodhini Sabha held its weekly meetings for religious discussions and also a monthly worship.³⁵ The above society attracted several leading, rich and influential figures in Hindu society at that time to join it, among them Maharaja Mahtaba Chandra Bahadur of Burdwan, Raja Srisa Chandra Roy of Nuddea, Raja Satyacharan Ghosal of Bhakailas, Jayakrishnag Mukerji, Mahesh Chandra Sing and many other Rajas and Zemindars.³⁶

The success of Devendranath Tagore in getting support from those people is very important. First, their support directly strengthened The Tattvabodhini Sabha and, more than that, they reflected their willingness and acknowledgment to the leadership of Devendranath. This is very important because later on Devendranath joined the Samaj and eventually led it. These people along with other members of The Brahmo Samaj gave a new spirit to it. About 1840 and 1841, Devendranath Tagore formally joined The Samaj and his Tattvabodhini Sabha was united with it. The Samaj soon appeared as a strong reform movement as it had been in the time of Rammohun Roy. During the time of his leadership of The Brahmo Samaj, Devendranath Tagore reorganised the administration of the Samaj. By the end of 1843, he introduced so called *The Brahma Covenant* being made up of seven solemn promises or undertakings. Among those declarations in which all candidates who were admitted by The Samaj as its members had to take part were that every member of The Samaj was obliged to keep away from

idolatry and to worship God through loving Him and doing good deeds as He loves.³⁷

The whole contents of the *Brahma Covenant* are not something new, for the same doctrine had been preached by Rammohun during his life. But this Covenant is very important for The Brahmo Samaj in which it reminds its members of its religious motto as contained in the Covenant.

Devendranath Tagore, Chunder Sekhar Dev and Nanda Kishore Bose and twenty other members of The Tattvabodhini Sabha took the Brahma covenant in which in the first vow they confessed: "I embrace the Vedantic Faith." Suggested by Rajnarain Bose and seconded by Akkhaya Kumar Datta, the phrase 'Vedantic Faith' was changed to *Brahma Dharma* at Tattvabodhini Sabha's meeting in 1846.³⁸

Based on the above declaration, it is clear that The Tattvabodhini Sabha which became 'a propagandistic association'³⁹ of the Brahmo Samaj and The Samaj itself under the leadership of Devendranath Tagore appeared as Vedantic movements in the sense that Vedantic teachings were widely studied and propagated by members of those associations. What Devendranath Tagore did was in fact in line with that of Rammohun in spreading the teachings of Vedanta.

Under the leadership of Devendranath, The Samaj was driven to become 'a Vedic Sect.' To achieve this purpose, in 1845, *The Tattvabodhini Patrika*, the organ of The Tattvabodhini Sabha made known clearly that "the Vedas were the sole foundation of their belief."⁴⁰ Before that, while defending Vedantic teachings, Devendranath Tagore and his friends in The Samaj were involved in a theological debate with Alexander Duff, a Church of Scotland's missionary, relating to the subject of Hindu scriptures and theology. Duff wrote a book called *India and Indian Mission*, in 1844, in which he criticised The Samaj "for holding the plenary inspiration" of the Vedas.⁴¹ Consequently, once again we see in the history of religious movements in India a debate took place between The Samaj as represented by Rajnarain Bose and his close friends on one side, and Duff on the other side. The Samaj, then, published in 1844, *The Refutation in Defence of the Real Doctrines of Hinduism* and this was replied by missionaries in four articles published in *The Calcutta Christian Herald*, *The Calcutta Review* and *Friend of India*.⁴² In response to these articles, The Samaj published *Vedantic Doctrines vindicated* in February, 1845 in order to defend Vedantic teachings. Devendranath Tagore said in 1846; "We consider the Vedas, and the Vedas alone, as the standard of our faith."⁴³

The Brahmo Samaj under the management of Devendranath Tagore showed a remarkable progress. Between 1850 - 1855, the Samaj spoke publicly against intemperance and polygamy and it also

strongly supported widow remarriage and female education.⁴⁴ Between 1856-1858, Devendranath spent two years in the Himalayas studying and meditating. Soon after his return from the Himalayas, he learned that The Samaj was joined by a young man named Keshub Chunder See who later on would lead The Samaj to enter the third period of its history.

After a few years in The Samaj, Keshub Chunder Sen then began to participate actively in The Samaj's activities. In 1860, he established *The Sangat Sabha* meaning 'Believers' Association' for the purpose of devotion and discussing religious and social issues.⁴⁵ The establishment of The Sangat Sabha also was described as "a testing ground for his ideals"⁴⁶ in which this association took a strong stand in renouncing the caste system, the practice of idolatrous rites by Brahman and it also introduced the practice of widow marriage as well as inter-marriage of different castes.⁴⁷

This is an interesting episode in The Samaj's history. Rammohun Roy and Devendranath Tagore did not propose such actions especially the abolition of caste system and the practice of inter-marriage among people from different castes. These remarkable steps taken by Keshub Chunder Sen through The Sangat Sabha in fact strengthened his position in The Samaj. But the relationship between Keshub and Devendranath became distant and worse after Keshub declared his stand of the matters of inter-marriage between different castes and the marriage of widows.

The conflict between them became serious and led to the establishment of the new break away theistic Church when Keshub openly criticised Devendranath relating to the wearing of the *poita* or sacred thread by those who led divine services of The Samaj.⁴⁸

At last, a final break took place. At a meeting held on the 11th of November, 1866, The Brahma Samaj of India was formally established where Keshub became its secretary⁴⁹ ending the internal crisis in Devendranath's Calcutta Brahma Samaj. (The Calcutta Brahma Samaj is known later on as the *Adi Brahma Samaj* or 'Original Society').

Analysing the developments of the whole *Brahmo Samajees* beginning from Rammohun down to Devendranath and Keshub and their colleagues, one can see the effects of the *Samajees* on religious, social and cultural life of people in India.

The Brahma Samaj is proud to have a figure such as Rammohun Roy as its founding father. He played a remarkable role in bringing a progress to his countrymen especially in education and politics. Some people trace the root of the early Indian nationalism beginning from Rammohun. D.S. Sarma says: "Politics, public administration and education claimed his attention as well as social and religious reform."⁵⁰ In fact, as Sarma adds, in those first three fields,

Rammohun displays “the remarkable powers of his mind.” But, he says, “unfortunately, in the circumstances of his time, there was not much scope for the exercise of his power in those fields.”⁵¹

It was Rammohun who realised that idolatry widely spread among his people and therefore he began reinterpreting Hindu theology. It was Rammohun also who strongly opposed the practice of Sati among defenceless Hindu ladies who became the victims of that tradition. Therefore, we see the main purposes of the establishment of the Brahma Samaj were to return to pure Hindu monotheism as reflected in Hindu sacred books as well as to abolish Sati practice. Rammohun also was responsible for the development of Western education in India and the Brahma Samaj had a right to claim a share in spreading Western education among people in India as we see during Rammohun’s life and his successors.

In discussing all these contributions made by The Brahma Samaj to India, one cannot deny the remarkable roles played by Christian missionaries and some British officials in introducing English education to India. One also cannot deny the contribution made by Duff for the progress of English education. Many leaders of The Brahma Samaj were ‘products’ of English education in India such as Keshub Chunder Sen, P.C. Mozoomdar and many others. Rammohun himself, although he did not enter an English school, had an intellectual intercourse with some Europeans and Christian missionaries like John Digby and William Adam. He also worked with the East India Company and gradually he began to realise the importance of English education and science subjects to be introduced to his people. All these are valuable contributions of Rammohun to his people and his country. One might disagree with him over his religious and social reformation, particularly in regard to his struggle against idol worship and Sati practice in India. But one also cannot deny the importance of the spirit of the reformation brought by Rammohun as reflected in his writings and the activities of The Brahma Samaj itself. This is what Indians should remember of him.

NOTES

¹Sivanath Sastri. 1911. *History of the Brahma Samaj*, vol. 1. Calcutta: R. Chatterji, p. 1.

²*Ibid.*

³David Kopf says: “The Brahma Samaj (Society for the Worship of the One True God) was perhaps the most representative institutional expression of the Bengal renaissance. This movement, made up for the most part of a Western-educated professional elite dissatisfied with the shortcomings of their own society and culture, visa-vis the West, sought to modernize their religious and social traditions.” See Kopf, “The Universal man and the yellow Dog: The Orientalist Legacy and the

Problem of Brahmo Identity in the Bengal Renaissance," in Rachel van M. Baumer (ed.). 1975. *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*. Asian Studies at Hawaii, no 12. University of Hawaii: The University Press of Hawaii, p. 44.

⁴Frank Lillingston. 1901. *The Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj in their bearing upon Christianity. A Study in Indian Theism*. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., p. 48.

⁵Sastri, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

⁸G.S. Leonard. 1879. *A History of the Brahma Samaj, from its-rise to the present day*. Calcutta: Newman & Co., p. 35.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰After the death of Ramkanta Roy, the father of Rammohun and Jagamohun in 1803, Rammohun's eldest brother, Jagamohun was responsible for managing the family estate. Jagamohun died in 1812. Miss Collet said that she did not know who inherited that estate after Jagamohun's death but it was certainly not Rammohun. A few years later, as Miss Collet added again, Rammohun was in possession of that estate and consequently his mother, Tarini Devi brought suits against him in order to deprive him of that family estate due to his religious disagreement with Hinduism. One of Rammohun's descendants told Miss Collet that Rammohun bought that estate as the result of the failure of his nephew, Govindaprasad to pay the land tax. Rammohun did not take over instantly the running of the estate but left it to his mother to look after. But, according to Biswas and Ganguli, the editors of Miss Collet's book - *The Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* -, based on the records of the law-suits which are available now, Govindaprasad Roy brought a suit against Rammohun in the Equity Division of the Supreme Court on the 23rd June, 1817, on the ground that because of his position as the "only son, heir and legal personal representative of Jagamohun Roy," he was entitled to have "to half-share of the joint estate of which Rammohun was seeking to deprive him." See S.D. Collet. 1962. *The life and letters of Raja Rammohun Roy*. Eds. Dilip Kumar Biswas and Prabhat Chandra Ganguli. Calcutta; Sadharan Brahma Samaj, 3rd, ed., pp. 28-29. See also pp. 42 - 54.

¹¹Sastri, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹²Leonard, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹³Sir Monier Monier-Williams. 1891. *Brahmanism and Hinduism; or, religious thought and life in India, as based on the Veda and other sacred books of the Hindus*. London: John Murray, fourth edition, p. 475.

¹⁴Leonard, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁵David Kopf. 1969. *British orientalism and the Bengal renaissance. The Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773-1835*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 270.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 271.

¹⁷Collet, *The life and letters of Raja Rammohun Roy, op. cit.*, p. 251.

¹⁸Samachar Chandrika's article quoted in B.B. Majumdar's *History of political thought from Rammohun to Dayananda, 1821-1884*. Quoted in Kopf, *British orientalism, op. cit.*, p. 272.

¹⁹Miss Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

²⁰*Asiatic Journal*, June, 1830. Quoted in Bimanbehari Majumdar, *History of political thought from Rammohun to Dayananda (1821-1884)*. vol. 1. Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1934, p. 72. The above speech was delivered by Rammohun in the Town Hall on the 15th December, 1829, supporting the proposal for colonisation. *ibid.*

- ²¹Sastri, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
- ²²J.N. Farquhar. 1967. *Modern religious movements in India*. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1st. Indian edition, p. 36. Possibly Rammohun means that India must maintain its status as a Hindu country even though it had intellectual, social and cultural intercourse with the West.
- ²³Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 275.
- ²⁴Sastri, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.
- ²⁵A.L. Basham. 1971. *The wonder that was India*. Fontana Collins, p. 484.
- ²⁶Leonard, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-54.
- ²⁷Kalidas Nag. "The Brahma Samaj." In *The cultural heritage of India*, vol. 11, Calcutta: Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Committee, no date of publication, p. 411.
- ²⁸Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 365.
- ²⁹Leonard, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
- ³⁰Prosanto Kumar Sen. 1950. *Biography of a New Faith*, vol. 1. Calcutta: Thacker Spink, p. 137.
- ³¹Sen. *ibid.*
- ³²Leonard, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
- ³³Monier-Williams, *Brahmanism and Hinduism*, *op. cit.*, p. 492. Williams describes the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* to mean 'Truth-investigating' or 'Truth-teaching Society', *ibid.*
- ³⁴Leonard, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
- ³⁵Farquhar, *Modern religious movements in India*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
- ³⁶Leonard, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.
- ³⁷Farquhar, 1909. "Brahmo Samaj." In James Hastings (ed), *Encyclopaedia of religion and ethics*, vol. 11. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, p. 816 See also Monier-Williams, *Brahmanism and Hinduism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 492-493.
- ³⁸Leonard, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.
- ³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 76.
- ⁴⁰Farquhar. *Brahma Samaj*, *op. cit.*, p. 816.
- ⁴¹Farquhar, *Modern religious movements in India*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
- ⁴²Muhammad Mohar Ali. 1965. *The Bengali reaction to Christian missionary activities, 1833-1857*. Chittagong: The Mehrub Publications. p. 22.
- ⁴³Farquhar, *Brahma Samaj*, *op. cit.*, p. 816.
- ⁴⁴Kalidas Nag. "The Brahma Samaj." In *The cultural heritage of India*, vol. 11. Calcutta: Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Committee, no date of publication, p. 413.
- ⁴⁵Farquhar, *Modern religious movements*, *op. cit.*, p. 41. The word *Sangat*, as Farquhar says, is used by the Sikhs for a group of pious people. *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶David C. Scott, (ed.). 1979. *Keshub Chunder Sen*. Madras: The Christian Literature Society, p. 9.
- ⁴⁷Leonard, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
- ⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 120.
- ⁴⁹Farquhar, *Brahma Samaj*, *op. cit.*, p. 817.
- ⁵⁰D.S. Sarma. 1973. *Hinduism through the ages*. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. p. 63.
- ⁵¹*Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.