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3

Influence Of Brahma Samaj In Bihar

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Brahmo Samaj and its characteristics As early as 1803, in his preface to Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidi, Rammohun recorded in unmistakable terms his convictions about the unity of Godhead, and his life thereafter seemed to be but an improvisation on that theme. Almost simultaneously with his settling down in Calcutta, we find him establishing the Vedanta College, in 1816, for the 'propagation and defence of Hindu Unitarianism'. Shortly before, Rammohun founded the Atmiya Sabha with some of his illustrious contemporaries as members: Dwarka Nath Tagore, Prasanna Coomar Tagore, Nanda Kishore Bose (Father of Rajnarain Bose), Brindaban Mitra (grandfather of Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitra), and others. Two renowned Sanskrit scholars, Pandit Sivaprasad Misra and Hariharananda Tirthaswami, joined the Sabha. Pandit Sivaprasad signed some of the controversial writings actually composed by Rammohun. Hariharananda was the mendicant friend of the Raja from the days of his religious discussions with him at Rangpur. The Swami not only contributed substantially to the philosophical make-up of the Sabha, but gave his own brother, Pandit Ramchandra Vidyavagish, who became the first minister of the Brahma Samaj founded by the Raja. For the first two years (1815-16) the Atmiya Sabha held its weekly meetings in the garden-house of Rammohun at Manicktolla. There were recitation and expounding of sacred text and the singing of hymns composed by Rammohun and his friends. In 1819, a memorable debate took place between Subrahmanya Sastri of Madras and Rammohun, When the latter is reported to have completely vanquished the former in a discussion on idol-worship in the presence of the leading citizens

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of Calcutta including Radhakanta Dev, who was the leader of the orthodox Hindus and who later on, in 1830, promoted the foundation of the Dharma Sabha, the rival organization of the Brahma Samaj. Between 1815 and 1819 most of the important texts and translations relating to the Vedanta and the Upanishads were published by the Raja, who simultaneously started his campaign of social reform with the anti-suttee agitation. These publications not only created a stir in his own country, but roused the attention of his European contemporaries. The services of the Brahma Sabha (the popular name of the Brahma Samaj) began to attract a large number of sympathizers, so that within two years Ram Mohan was able to raise sufficient funds for the purchase of a house to serve as the permanent place of worship for the members. The institution was opened by the late Raja Ram Mohan Roy in 1830. There were about 500 Hindus present and among them many Brahmins who, after the prayers and singing of hymns had been concluded, received gifts in money to a considerable extent.

That Ram Mohan devoted a considerable part of his fortune to the propagation of the cause was attested by other European contemporaries. Ram Mohan's religion was the crowning glory of his carrier as a scholar, a statesman, and a patriot. We can easily understand why he laid so much emphasis on unity in this land, where man and man, sect and sect, community and community were weekend and degraded through irrational and interminable wrangling resulting in disunion. The success of his pioneer activities in connection with the unification (cultural as well as spiritual) of India, inhabited by persons of so many races and religions, should not be judged by the numerical strength of the congregation which he grounded. It is rather the fundamental truth of human fellowship and unity underlying the memorable trust deed of the Brahma Samaj (dated 8th January, 1830) that should be cherished as a priceless legacy of the Raja to posterity. At the outset it was made clear that in conducting the said worship or adoration no object, animate or inanimate, that has been, or is, or shall hereafter become or be recognized, as an object of worship, by any man or set of men, shall be reviled or slightly or contemptuously spoken of or alluded to either in preaching. Praying, or in the hymns, or other mode of worship that may be delivered or used in the said message or building. And that no sermon, preaching, discourse, prayer, or hymn be delivered, made or used in such worship but such as have a tendency to the promotion of the contemplation of the Author and Preserver of the Universe, to the promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, virtue, and to the strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds.

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Ram Mohun Roy and Bihar Brahmo Samaj in Bihar can be traced back to the educated middle-class Bengalis who came to work for the East India Company and the newly constructed railways in the late nineteenth century. This influx of Bengalis to Bihar was largely composed of Brahmans. The word of the new awakening was also brought by some Brahmo missionaries who arrived with them. Ram Mohan had close relation with Bihar. He had studied Persian in Patna and during his employment under the East India Company he had served in Bhagalpur and Chatra in Hazaribag district. He, however, did not visit the city after the establishment of the Brahmo Sabha in 1828. It was Keshab Chandra Sen who gave fillip to the Brahmo Samaj movement in Bihar. Jamalpur in Munger became the first centre of Sen's activity in Bihar. Keshab had a short stop over in Patna in August 1868 when he was on his way to Simla from Monghyr to present a petition to the government when doubts were expressed by the then law Member about the validity of Brahmo marriages. Keshab wanted the government to enact a law for validating Brahmo marriages.

Bhagalpur Brahmo Samaj It was in 1883 at Bhagalpur that the first Samaj in Bihar was established in Bhagalpur had already become a centre of educated Bengali gentlemen, the Samaj there was set up mainly through the efforts of Nibaran Chandra Mukharjee. The next Brahmo Samaj centre to be established in Bihar was at Bankipur. The move for setting up a samaj had been a foot when a meeting of some Brahmans had been held between 1863 and 1865 in the house of Ram Babu at Behari Sao Lane in the presence of some brahmans associated with the Taltwabodhini Patrika of Calcutta. An informal congregation of some Brahmo's took place at the thatched cottage of Ishan Singh a local gentleman, in 1865. But it was only in 1866 that the Samaj centre was formally set up. But the Brahmo samaj was popularised in Patna mainly through the efforts of Prakash Chandra Roy and his wife, Aghore Kamini Devi. They had established a Brahmo Samaj centre at Motihari in 1875 prior to Prakash Chandra Roy's posting to Patna in 1877 with his coming to Patna the Brahmo Samaj received fresh inspiration and vigour. The Schism in the Brahmo Samaj also left its mark at Patna because the adherents of the Navobidhan faith built their own Mandir and Sadharan Brahmo Samaj is also built their separate Ashram. However, there was not an open conflict or division among the Brahmans of Patna. Most of the Brahmans of Patna, what ever they were members of Novabidhan or Sarharan Brahmo Samaj, had be extremely liberal reflecting the spirit of the new age and new learning. This was most noticeable during the Maghot Seva and Bhadnot Seva which were always commonly arranged. Moreover both the groups were not

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mutually exclusive and one could change from one group to another. For example Mahendra Lal Sen Gupta who started as a follower of Navobidhan later on became a Sadharan Brahma Samajist, Uma Charan Sen, though he embraced Brahminism at the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, attended prayers and upasanas at the Bankipur Brahma Mandir. In 1960 the Patna Brahma Samaj, was set up mainly through the efforts of Dr. S.K. Ghoshal for removing all the marks of schism and inculcating the sense of belonging to a single community of Brahmins.

Gaya Brahma Samaj The Gaya Brahma Samaj also came into existence in 1866 but we do not have record concerning its inauguration. It is however established beyond doubt that some Brahma families were residing in Gaya in the sixties of the last century. It was the result of the hard work and dedication of Hari Sunder Bose the then Post Master of Gaya, He devoted his life to religious pursuits and community service. To serve the Brahma Samaj with dedication he gave up his job at the Post Office. He started running a cheap school, night school for labourers, a girls school and a printing press. Besides Umesh Chandra Sarkar, there were two more Brahma lawyers of the local courts, Govinda Chandra Rakshit and Chandra Kumar Goshe, who helped Hari Sunder in his work of the Brahma Samaj at Gaya. A local Brahma doctor chandra nath Chattarjee also helped Hari Sunder in his efforts. When the split in the Brahma Samaj came in 1878 it has its impact in Gaya. Hari Sunder Bose along with some other Brahmins joined Kishab'as Navobidhan but Umesh Chandra Sarkar and a few others did not accept the new faith. The result was that Hari Sunder and other followers of the Navobidhan had to shift to another place for prayer meetings and discourse. They took on lease a deserted Bungalow belonging to an English man with the help of Rawalal, a Mukhtiar and Zamindar of Gaya. Aghorenath and Bhai Prakash Dev, Aghorenath and Brajagopal in fact were responsible for initiating and maintaining the tradition of Buddhist studies in Navobidhan Mandali and the same was done in the Sadharan Brahma Samaj by Prakash Dev. Who after his return to Lahore wrote a long monumental work on the life and teachings of Buddha in Urdu in four volumes.

Besides Buddhists, Brajagopal and his followers at the Gaya Brahma samaj were also influenced by Christianity. Besides religious and spiritual topics the samaj members sometimes also involved themselves in discussing political philosophy, education and history. The diary of Brajagopal mentions about discussions on important topics like life of Herodotus, John Stuart Mill's concept of liberty, Platonic

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Dialogues and Spencer's principles of education. Therefore the Gaya Brahmo Samaj emerged not only as a religious place but also as an intellectual centre. Even non Brahmo Bengalis were drawn towards it. The Gaya Brahmo Samaj attracted some Biharis too, In fact Gaya was a place where several Biharis accepted the Brahmo faith. In addition many Bihari individuals, who did not embrace Brahmoism, regularly kept close touch with the samaj and its activities. First among these individuals was Bhai Baldev Narayan. When Keshab visited Gaya, Baldeva was moved by his Upasana and lectures. He remained since then an ardent disciple of Keshab Chandra. ³⁴ From 1887, Baldeva was not only one of the most active member of the Gaya Brahmo Samaj, but a prominent figure of the Brahmo Samaj movement in Bihar, His activities as Pracharak was chiefly confined to Bihar rather he made missionary tours to Karachi, Hyderabad (Sindh) and Mangalore.

Munger Brahmo Samaj After Bhagalpur, Patna and Gaya the samaj came into existence in Munger. It became important because of Jamalpur, which is five miles away from Munger town and is an important railway centre. Many Bengalis came to Jamalpur in the service of the railway. Thus the twin towns of Munger-Jamalpur gradually emerged as a prominent place for Brahmo Samaj activities. Accordingly the Brahmo Samaj was established in Munger in 1867. Both Keshab Chandra Sen and Shivanath Shastri visited this town several times and their missionary spirit soon attracted the attention of the Bengali settlers of the area. Because of their intense enthusiasm a separate Brahmo samaj was also established at Jamalpur in 1868. When Keshab Chandra Sen came to Munger in October 1868, the followers of Keshab were spell bound by the reverence showed by his two disciples Jadunath Chakraverty and Bijay Krishna Gowami published through the newspapers that the followers of Keshab worshipped him in a manner as if he was a divine incarnation. Thus there arose the worship agitation. The activities of the Munger Brahmo Samaj were fairly mobile because of the fact that Bengali railway employees continued to come to Jamalpur and many of them would leave the place after some years of services. This, however, did not affect the working of the Brahmo Samaj, which continued to be the meeting place and cultural centre for the Bengali families. Shivanath Shastri has reported that towards the end of the 19th century, almost all the Bengali settlers, who were mainly interested in the Brahmo Samaj work, subsequently left the place and the samaj was nominally existing with the help of one of the old members, Dwarkanath Bagchi.

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Hazaribag Brahmo Samaj The Hazaribag Brahmo Mandir was established in 1867, a year after the establishment of the Patna Mandir, through the initiative of Jaduanath Mukherjee, a prominent resident of Hazaribag. He was not a Brahmo nor did he formally embrace brahmoism but he felt that he was instructed by God to set up a common platform where people of all castes, creeds and communities could assemble to worship god. Jadunath Mukherjee donated a place of land of the construction of the samaj building on 30 March 1867, and on 14 April, 1867, the inauguration of the samaj took place. Many leading personalities of the Brahmo Samaj visited Hazaribag. Among the important visitors to this town were Keshabl Chandra Sen, Shivanath Shastri, Heramber Chandr Moitra, Sitanath Tettabhushan, Hemlate sarkar, Ramananda Chatterjee, Niranjan Niyogi, Jagidh chandra Bose and Rebindranath Tagore. Their visits and discourse attracted the members of all castes and creeds. The popularity of the Brahmo Samaj increased among other communities. The liberlism of the Hazaribag Brahmo Samaj was demonstrated by the cosmopolitan character of the workers. Among the non-Brahmo workers of the Samaj in the period between 1909 and 1925, there were not only Hindus but Christians as well as Muslims. In 1957 the Hazaribag samaj hosted the All India Brahmo conference; it again hosted All India Brahmo Conferences in 1970 and again in 1982.

Ranchi Brahmo Samaj The Ranchi Brahmo Samaj was founded in 1868 by the Bengali settlers there Ranchi had a fairly large Bengali population, Many of them were government employees. There was also a good number of doctors, engineers, lawyers and teachers, some of the members of this middle class Bengali educated elite embraced Brahmoism and devoted themselves to its work. In the establishment of the Ranchi Brahmo Samaj also a non-Brahmo Bengali gentleman took the bad. He was Binoy Gopal Bhattacharya. He was later helped by two Brahmos, Tripuracharan Roy and Udhao Chandra Roy. Laskhmi Narayan Patnaik, father of Biju Patnaik, a devoted Brahmo gentleman from Orissa, who settled at Ranchi. Among the first trustees were Jaikali Dutta, Satish Chandra Roy, Promotho Nath Basu, Jyotindranath Tagore (Eldest son of Rabindranath Tagore and Sharda Chandra Mitra) who later became judge of Calcutta High Court.

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