

Introduction

Brahmo Samaj had played a historical role in the social regeneration process of Indian, especially Bengali, society in the 19th century. It was a great agency for the revolt of mind against the tyranny of dogmas and traditional authorities, beliefs and customs. The Brahmo Samaj was mainly reformist in character and sought to emphasize the essential principles of Hinduism by denouncing later accretions which formed the chief target of attack by Christian missionaries and followers of Islam. It was the best representative of neo-Hinduism in Bengal and instrumental, to a large extent, in opening the floodgate of reforms in social, religious and political fields translating Bengal from the Medieval to the Modern age.

Keshub Chunder Sen was one of the most important representative leaders in the history of the Brahmo Samaj in the 19th century Bengal. He brought to his age the message of the new social movement as represented by the Brahmo Samaj. Keshub was a born leader, a dynamic man of action and a magnetic personality. He was a genuine nationalist and vindicated the cause of India and Asia before Europe and America. He revolted against the social injustice and wrongful customs in Bengali society. In course of this movement Keshub formulated his views about the people, society and the polity which were significant contributions to the store-house of modern Indian social and political thought.

It is rather unfortunate that till now no systematic analysis has been made of the rich and suggestive ideas of such

a creative thinker like Keshub Chunder Sen. Scholars have so far dwelt on his life, works and teachings. The present study will make an attempt to fulfil the long-felt need of reconstructing and making a critical analysis of Keshub's social and political ideas.

Review of the Literature on the Subject

The books written in the past dealing with Keshub Chunder Sen were mainly either biographical or historical (dealing with Brahma Samaj) by Brahmans, historians and critics. The well-written biographies of Keshub by Pratap Chunder Mazoomdar, Gour Govinda Roy, Trailokyanath Sanyal, Prem Sundar Basu, Prasanta Kumar Sen, Jogesh Chandra Bagal and others are undoubtedly valuable contributions to the study of the life and teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen but the biographers have depicted his personality more or less spiritually and subjectively.

On the other hand, the Brahma historians and the Sadharan Samajists like Sivanath Sastri,² Christian missionary historians like J.N. Farquhar³ have not been able to ease the complexity and contradictions of his thoughts, rather they have sometimes under

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1. P.C. Mazoomdar, Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen.
G.G. Roy, Acharya Keshub (in Bengali), vols. I, II, III.
Trailokyanath Sanyal (Chiranjib Sarma), Keshub Charit (in Bengali).
 - P.S. Basu, Life and Works of Brahmananda Keshav
P.K. Sen, Biography of a New Faith, vols. I and II.
J.C. Bagal, Keshub Chunder Sen (in Bengali).
 2. Sivanath Sastri, History of the Brahma Samaj, vol. I (1911),
vol. II (1912) ; second Edition (1974).
 3. J.N. Farquhar, Modern Religious Movements in India.

rated and confused, consciously or unconsciously, Keshub's legacy to the succeeding generations.

Recently, a new interest has been awakened in the reappraisal of Keshub by some overseas scholars and also by some Indian authors. One such study has been done by Meredith Borthwick, an Australian research scholar on oriental studies.⁴ She has, in this study, attempted to evaluate Keshub as an outstanding but neglected figure of the nineteenth century India. For this purpose she has presented in her book some forgotten facts of the past history of Bengal and some valuable information of the life and activities of Keshub Chunder Sen and of the Brahma Samaj movement. Most of the source material are English. The study is no attempt to systematize various social and political ideas of Keshub but to comprehend the composite nature of his personality. It is undoubtedly a praiseworthy and interesting presentation. But the author has not been very successful to comprehend the reasons behind apparent contradictions in Keshub and occasionally she has run after hasty conclusions on matters like Keshub's early spiritual awakening, Cooch Behar marriage episode, New Dispensation idea, the objective behind Keshub's loyalty to the British ruler etc.

The second recent significant study, though not exclusively on Keshub, has been done by David Kopf, the renowned American orientalist.⁵ This is an objective study of the 'detailed history of the Bengal forerunners of Indian

4. M. Borthwick, Keshub Chunder Sen - a Search for Cultural Synthesis.

5. David Kopf, Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of Modern Indian Mind.

modernization.⁶ The study is not a narrative of the Brahma Samaj though it covers a wide range of subjects starting from Rammohun Roy down to Rabindranath Tagore. It is rather an objective analysis of the 'lives, consciousness and the ideas' of the early rebels of Bengal. In Chapter IX Prof. Kopf deals with Keshub Chunder Sen as a prophet of harmony. He has attempted to establish the fact that Keshub Chunder Sen, the cosmopolite with 'sharp eclectic intellect' was really the synthesizer of the conflicting tendencies in the minds of Brahma intelligentsia and he was the forerunner of Rabindranath's universalism. Kopf has done a difficult job in analysing the history of Brahma movement dealing with the modernizing and significant roles also of Rajnarain Bose, Bijoy Krishna Goswami, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, the less known figures of the Brahma Samaj, of course, with all their limitations. But the way Kopf has dealt with the whole subject-matter of such wide range of personalities and ideas has not been easily understandable to the general and new readers of the social history of Bengal. Barring that the whole treatise is an illuminating study of Keshub and the minor figures of the Brahma intelligentsia and it is a new analysis of the Brahma movement and the social history of Bengal.

The third study made exclusively of Keshub Chunder Sen by F.L. Damen remains still an unpublished dissertation.⁷ Damen, a Belgian Christian theologian, mainly deals with Keshub in the context of the emergence of Brahma Samaj as a religious and

6. *ibid.*, preface, p. xv.

7. Francis L. Damen, S.J. Crisis and Religious Renewal in the Brahma Samaj Movement (1860-1884) - A Documentary Study of the Emergence of the New Dispensation under Keshub Chunder Sen, Thesis for the Doctorate in Sacred Theology, Katholieke Universiteit Te Leuven, Leuven, 1981.

apostolical body, and the advent of the New Dispensation as a religious renewal in the spiritual crisis among the Brahmos. The scholar himself a Catholic Church father pays special attention to the spiritual culture of the New Dispensation with elaborate references from the journals conducted by Keshub. Though the study is not an attempt to analyse the many-sided ideas of Keshub in a comprehensive way yet due emphasis has been given by the researcher on the religious motive of Keshub which was the foundation of his other ideas.

Another important study though not exclusively on Keshub has been made recently by Spencer Lavan.⁸ Lavan deals with the spread of Unitarian ideas in India from Rammoan Roy to Mahatma Gandhi and its consequence. He deals with the development of the ideas of the great Unitarian philosophers like Theodore Parker, Robert Channing during Keshub Chunder Sen's life-time. He assumes that the Unitarian ideas in connexion with temperance, educational reforms etc. had good impact on the religious orientation of Keshub and on the Brahma social reformism due to the former's personal acquaintance with Rev. C.H.A. Dall, the Unitarian Christian missionary. However, this is a partial analysis of Keshub Chunder Sen's personality and many-sidedness of his thought and movement.

Yet another overseas writer is Donald H. Bishop, who deals with Keshub's fundamental beliefs in 'Fatherhood of God'

8. Spencer Lavan, Unitarians and India - A Study in Encounter and Response.

9. Donald H. Bishop (ed.), 'Keshub Chunder Sen and the Brahma Samaj', Thinkers of the Indian Renaissance.

and 'Brotherhood of man' and his liberal and humanitarian outlook on the development of Brahma Samaj and the nineteenth century awakening in India. The above book is an edited work and it is a new addition to the studies of philosophical and social history of the Indian renaissance starting from Rammoan Roy down to S. Radhakrishnan though it includes a brief outline of the philosophical and religious ideas of Keshub.

Besides the above research works and books from the overseas scholars and authors some studies have also recently been made on Keshub by a few Indian authors. The treatise edited by David C. Scott can be mentioned here first.¹⁰ This study is more or less inspired by the work of Meredith Borthwick. The author is a scholar and a Christian theologian and his observations on Keshub are mainly confined to a short biographical sketch in the editorial pages. He has done a good job by collecting some important lectures of Keshub and the excerpts concerning Keshub's ideas of Christ and Christianity in India from the New Dispensation.

Another recent and important study of Keshub Chunder Sen has been made by Jhara Basu in Bengali.¹¹ The study analyses the development of Bengali prose in the hands of Keshub and his Brahma associates and followers mainly in the seventies and eighties of the nineteenth century.

So far as the studies of social and political ideas of Keshub are concerned there are only two brief discussions made by

10. David C. Scott (ed.), Keshub Chunder Sen.

11. Jhara Basu, Unish Sataker Bangla Sahitye Keshub Chandra (in Bengali).

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V.P. Varma in English and Sourendra Mohan Gangopadhyay in Bengali tracing the history of political thought in modern India and modern Bengal, respectively. Though these two discussions have been made in a summary form mainly based on secondary sources yet they are helpful to awaken interest in Keshub and his thoughts.

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All other works published recently and dealing with Keshub, though interesting, are not complete analyses of his ideas and institutions and they are, again, mainly based on secondary references.

Object of the Present Study

Hence the present work is an attempt at an objective analysis of various social and political ideas of Keshub Chunder Sen. Its purpose is not so much to present factual accounts of the life and works of Keshub. In fact, there exist a number of works either in the form of biography or history of the Brahma Samaj mentioned earlier. The main purpose will be the analysis of the complexity of the various social and political ideas of Keshub. In dealing with this matter, an attempt has been made to analyse such ideas objectively in the background of contemporary social and political history of India. All available data have been used to present the socio-political personality of Keshub. Factual details have not been always ignored to maintain the

12. V.P. Varma, Modern Indian Political Thought.

13. Sourendra Mohan Gangopadhyay, Bangalir Rastrachinta.

14. F.X. Max Mueller, Keshub Chunder Sen, ed. Nanda Mukerjee.

Arabinda Poddar, 'Keshub Chunder Sen : The Discomfiture of an Eclectic', Renaissance in Bengal.

consistency in Keshub's thoughts and to fill up information gaps, still left after so many historical and biographical studies of Keshub. Care has been taken to make the study free from subjective bias.

Keshub Chunder Sen was primarily a man of ardent faith in God and man. His different ideas - social, political, educational etc. - centred round his broad spiritual and humanitarian outlook. He was not simply a religious preacher like the traditional Indian sadhaks or saints, or the Christian missionaries or evangelists. He was more than that. He took true religion to be the basis of life - individual and social. He took religion to be the basis of all social reforms and material development of India. He preached a religion of love and unity among the hostile communities, a religion of social and political progress. He would not have been the same Keshub, once the 'Thunderbolt of Bengal' in the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century India, if he were merely a spiritual personality.

Keshub, again, was neither a social scientist nor a theologian and not even a philosopher in the strict sense of the term. He was primarily a preacher of ideas. He was quick in his response to Western ideas. The impact of indigenous ideas on Keshub was significant too. His personality was a continuous growth in the cross-currents of the opposite ideas of the West and the East. He was also influenced by the greatness of different personalities with whom he came in touch in different times. He thus did not make a fetish of so-called consistency.

So far as the source material are concerned the present

study is mainly concerned with the works of Keshub in the form of speeches, tracts, letters, statements, sermons, prayers and diaries. The interpretations given by various scholars and commentators on the life and works of Keshub have also been taken into account. Contemporary and near-contemporary biographies, autobiographies and reminiscences, though not always considered to be reliable source, have been used to understand the general trend of events and the formation-process of ideas.

Excerpts from Bengali books and journals have been used in English translation in different chapters of the present dissertation ; wherever the name of the translator has not been mentioned, the present writer is responsible for the translation.

A Brief Note on the Chapters

In dealing with various social and political ideas of Keshub Chunder Sen the dissertation has been divided into different Chapters (I to X).

First, Chapter I deals with the family background, and the formative period of Keshub Chunder Sen. Different influences starting from his Colootola family house down to the outside agencies on the development of the socio-religious personality of Keshub and on the formation of his ideas have been taken into account. The fundamental ideas and beliefs of Keshub, namely, Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man, philosophy of history, theory of greatmen, rule of unity etc. have also been elaborately analysed in this connexion to bring out his total personality

and the main tenets of his thoughts.

Secondly, Chapters II, III, IV especially deal with the historical and sociological significance of Brahmoism. Brahmoism emerged initially as a religious reform movement but failed subsequently and especially in the sixties and seventies of the 19th century India it turned into a great social reform movement. It contributed to a large extent to the partial break-up of the mediaeval ideas and the rise of modern 'modes of thought' in India. Contributions of Rammohan Roy, Devendranath Tagore and Keshub Chunder Sen to the Brahmo movement have been dealt with under these Chapters.

Thirdly, the Brahmo movement was once closely associated with the evolution of modern education in India. Keshub Chunder Sen, the third leader of such movement had played a vital role in this connexion. His thoughts on education - man-making, real and fruitful - are still suggestive. He contemplated and worked for a comprehensive educational scheme catering need for men, women, children, workers, peasants and downtrodden people. He chiefly emphasised vernacular, primary and mass education. His scheme for vocational education through Industrial School was novel too. Chapter V deals elaborately and critically with such educational ideas of Keshub.

Fourthly, Keshub Chunder Sen, one of the pioneers in the field of women's emancipation in India, devoted himself wholeheartedly to the cause of women's education and liberty. He held that the regeneration of India would never be complete unless her women-folk were emancipated from the thraldom of

ignorance and Zenana. In spite of the limitations and reservations of his theory of emancipation of women in India his contributions to the cause were immense and far-reaching. Chapter VI deals especially with such pioneering and significant role of Keshub.

Fifthly, Chapter VII deals with Keshub's ideas of New Dispensation or Navavidhan which emerged mainly in the early eighties of the 19th century. Since then Keshub's Brahma Samaj of India has been named as Church of the New Dispensation or the Navavidhan Samaj. Keshub's idea of New Dispensation, as practised and developed subsequently, was claimed as 'New Eclecticism' and had a double purpose, one, to boost the morale of the Brahmos and to consolidate them under the banner of the new Samaj ; and the other, to provide a new approach to the study and practice of religion. The whole idea of Keshub's New Dispensation was primarily a spiritual approach to synthesise and harmonize the conflicting cultures like Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. The significance and weakness of such a search for synthesis and unity have been fully dealt with in this Chapter.

Sixthly, Chapters VIII and IX deal with Keshub's thoughts about politics, patriotism and nation-building including his concept of the nature and functions of the state, individual and social liberty, representative form of government, political obedience, political trusteeship and the guidelines for national integration and regeneration. It should be remembered in this connexion that though Keshub Chunder Sen was primarily a socio-

religious personality he did not completely detach himself from politics and the political problems of his time. He held that so long 'there is religion in politics' he is 'bound to uphold and vindicate it.' The purpose of politics, according to Keshub, should be to be a means to social and political good. But he was opposed to amoral politics. Politics, according to him, should be grounded on the principles of true religion.

His idea of 'universal fellowship' was the offshoot of his idea of the Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man. Keshub expounded the ideas of international fellowship, peace and amity among nations more spiritually than politically. This has been discussed elaborately in Chapter IX.

Lastly, a re-appraisal of Keshub with a final analysis of his different socio-religious and political ideas has been attempted in Chapter X of the dissertation.