

## **Acharya Brojendranath Seal: A Pole Star in the Firmament of Bengali Intellectuals**

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The 150 years birth anniversary programme of Acharya Brojendranath Seal is being celebrated this year. But the number of celebration in respect of it is scant. Kalyani University and two elitist organizations – Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and Institute of Science Education and Culture have organized programmes in this regard. I was present in all of them as a speaker. The present generation is not at all aware of Brajendranath Seal. That is the reason why I am writing this treatise. Brojendranath was born in an aristocrat area of North Calcutta and his father Mahendranath Seal was a well versed Bengali. Like many other Bengalis of those days, Mahendranath also was a positivist. From the very tender age he became the disciple of Auguste Comte. He read Jeremy Bentham, David Hume, Herbert Spencer, Kant and Hegel which were common text, for the Bengali intellectuals in those days. He admitted Brojendra to General Assembly's Institution (now Scottish Church College) for an honours degree in Philosophy. He was associated with Brahm Samaj too. Later on his son Brajendra also got attracted to the spirituality of Brahm Samaj and became its member. Narendranath Dutta (who became famous as Vivekananda) was Brojendranath's class fellow in the college. Both of them used to frequent Brahm Samaj but Narendra took a different path in the following years. Brojendra became the follower and student of Keshab Chandra Sen at Brahma Samaj; on the other hand, Narendranath got attracted to Ramkrishna at Dakshineswar. Both Brojendra and Narendra pursued the comparative study of Eastern and Western spirituality following their own different path. Brajendra completed his masters' degree in Philosophy from Calcutta University and started teaching in City College as a professor, to continue his journey; he taught at Morris College in Nagpur for some time and then entered Krishna Nath College at Berhampur. He composed his new book – '*New Essays in Criticism*' during the years between 1883 and 1907. Hegel's Relative Theory was first applied in literary work in his book, but in reality Brojendra was from the start to end a romantic. He was an avid reader of English romanticism and romantic literature. Strangely, when he did his doctorate, he chose the topic '*The Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindoos*'. In the year 1896 Brojendra got invitation to join Victoria College as the principal by its founder Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup. Nripendra Narayan was the son-in-law of Keshab Chandra Sen. This new job provided Brajendra with financial security and now onward he could devote his soul to acquire knowledge. His epic 'Quest Eternal' and his book of Philosophy 'New Essays in Criticism' established him as a great philosopher and intellectual. During this period he also composed a chapter of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray's book 'History of Hindu Chemistry'. This article gained him such a huge international fame that in 1902 Cambridge University even thought of making him the professor of Philosophy. Maharaja Nripendra Narayan Bhup sponsored his way to Europe in 1899, 1906 and 1911. Brojendra went to Rome for delivering a lecture on human rights in 1906 and joined the first University Anti-Race Congress in London in 1911. On that very year, one of his great patrons, Maharaja of Coochbehar died. After his death Brajendra resigned from the job of Coochbehar due to lack of financial support. After getting back to Calcutta he surpassed his prior stand of Brahma Idealist and became Spiritual Humanist. His celebrated book 'Comparative Study of Vaishnavism and Christianity' was published in 1912. His independent thought upon the comparative study of religious idealisms was delineated in this book for the first time. He came out of the colonial environment to breathe freely in the air of Nationalist Cultural Idealism. It was not merely a narrow view of nationalism and had a universal broadness. Soon after the publication of this book, Brojendra got the post of King George V Professor of Philosophy at Calcutta University. The years between 1913 and 1921 were proved to be the glorious years of his life. Asutosh Mukerjee, the Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University provided

him ample opportunities to deliver his speech as in different universities and publish numerous of books revealing his profundity of knowledge in different fields. Calcutta University decorated him with the doctorate degree on 17 December 1921. Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore invited him to visit Vishvabharati at Santiniketan. He went to Santiniketan, became the Acharya of Vishvabharati and authored its constitution. Brojendranath Seal is the man who gave the phenomenal form to Tagore's dream of making Vishvabharati an International University. After that he was invited by the Maharaja of Mysore to become the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mysore. Brojendra joined the university and continued his job until he became ill in the year 1920. After returning to Calcutta, he wrote a text book on Indian Philosophy and authored the life of Raja Ram Mohan Ray. In 1936 he became bed ridden and completely lost his eye sight, although he completed his epic 'Quest Eternal' before that. This epic is the mirror of *Goethe's Faust* 'and Milton's 'Paradise Lost'. Readers also experience Brajendra's modern intellection in this epic. Sartre's writing is the continuation of his theory of existentialism.

### **Brojendranath's Philosophy of Life**

Brojendranath personally was a profound lover of Hegel's principles. He discovered the resemblance of his religious philosophy with the Religious concept of Brahma with it. Hegel opined that the main stream of progress will be directed from the orient to the occident, but presently it was the reverse. Brojendra felt this statement to be merely monistic. He did not support the European notion of Greco-Roman civilization to be the cradle of human civilization. He declared this statement to be reminiscent of European arrogance. He imagined of a polyphonic culture within which there would be no barrier of different civilizations. At first he was inclined towards the definition of culture observed by Thomas Elliot, as a course of civilization but he did not ignore the Western civilization or Hegel's principle. He did not alienate Western Civilization in his treatise 'World Civilization' although he avoided putting it at the pinnacle. In this treatise Hindu, Muslim and Chinese civilizations are amalgamated to form a unique whole. Brojendra's this principle got its form in his book 'Comparative Studies in Vaishnavism and Christianity' which became the ideology of ISKON in future.

### **Brojendranath's Epic**

Whoever reads the epic 'Quest Eternal' can realize how Brojendra assimilated the philosophy of the East and the West. The aim of both the civilizations is to find a holistic philosophy which is flowing eternally through the ancient, middle and modern civilizations till today. The main source of the epic is hidden in Goethe's 'Faust'. The protagonist of 'Quest Eternal' is a modern and colourful personality representing the global unity. He too practiced the truth like Prometheus and Sisyphus by uniting the Nature and the Man. There is no Marxian stamp on his statement. Here the staple is the angst of the human race. Finally I would like to arrive at the topic of Brojendranath's scientific temper. His famous book '*Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindoos*' is not at all a Hindu minded writing. The civilization which existed before the arrival of Muslims or Christians to our country is known as Hindu Civilization. Writing about Hindu Civilization, he sketched the scientific traditions of the Hindus. Things are same with the Muslims or Christians too. But some scheming historians have made the words Hindu and communalism synonymous with the influence of some politicians. But the scenario was different in Brojendranath's time as our country was not infested with these politicized historians then. Even the Britishers did not consider glorifying Hindus to be communal. Seal spent whole of his life in the revival of the lost glory of the Indians. Apart from that one of the most important parts of his cultivation of knowledge was the cultivation of science. He wrote books concerning Numerology of Algebra which followed his book in which he subtly analysed the cognate, used along with the numerical. This numerology is also the contribution of the Hindu epoch. The great sage Kapil followed the same rule to write his '*Sankhyadarshan*'. In 1911 Acharya Prafulla Ray requested Brojendranath to write the

Introduction of his famous book '*Hindu Chemistry*'. Brojendranath wrote the precious preface by consulting Nagarjuna's '*Rasarnava*' and all other '*Rasa Shastras*'. After writing this, he wrote another book '*Positive Science*' in 1915. In this book he not only discussed Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Astronomy, Physiology, Ayurveda, Surgery but also unfolded the ancient heritage of Veterinary Science. In the 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary, it is essential to discuss Brojendra Seal's multi faceted talent and to republish his principle books. We are selling ourselves to the West since the post Independence period. To come out of this slavery, it is our responsibility to uphold Brojendranath Seal's pursuit of knowledge.

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