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THE BRAHMO SAMAJ MOVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

Sumanta Niyogi

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The Brahmo Samaj Movement was the most remarkable aspect of the nineteenth century Indian Awakening and Reform. It was characterised by a reformist zeal in socio-religious sphere and by an irresistible upsurge of educational and intellectual activities. The movement which contained such illustrious personalities as Rammohun Roy, Keshub Chunder Sen, Devendranath Tagore and Sivanath Sastri, was bound to affect the neighbouring province of Bihar. The Brahmo Samaj, though small in membership in Bihar consisting only of some Bengali Bhadrak families and a sprinkle of local converts, bequeathed a precious legacy to the posterity in the province, particularly in the sphere of education. The author, after collecting numerous unexplored documents, tracts, souvenirs, and Samaj records, which were lying unnoticed and neglected in various parts of Bihar and Bengal, has attempted to throw light on an important aspect of the socio-cultural history of Modern Bihar.

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**BRAHMO SAMAJ MOVEMENT
AND
DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION—1870-1975**

श्रृप्यन्तु विश्वे अमृतस्य पुत्राः
आ ये धामानि दिष्ट्यानि तस्थुं ॥
वेदाहम् एतम् पुरुषम् महान्तम्
आदित्यवर्णं तमसो परस्तात् ।
तमेव विदित्याति मृत्यमेति ।
नाव्यः पन्था विद्यतेऽध्वनाय ॥

—उपनिषद

[“Hear, oh, ye, Sons of the Immortal and all who dwell in this universe—I have known this brilliant and great personality shining like the Sun beyond the darkness. It is only knowing Him that one can escape death. There is no other way to Salvation.”]

विपदि धैर्यमथाभ्युदये क्षमा
सदसि वाक्पटुता युधि विक्रमः ।
यशसी चाभिरुचिर्व्यसनं श्रुतौ
प्रकृतिसिद्धमिदं हि महात्मानाम् ॥

—अथर्ववेद

[“Patience in crisis, forgiveness in deception, eloquence in meeting hall, courage in battle field, aversion to fame and interest in Shastras are the qualities of a great soul.”.]

Brahmo Samaj Movement and Development of Education—1870-1975

A CASE STUDY OF BIHAR

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DE D I C A T I O N

To the sacred memory

of

KESHUB CHUNDER SEN

This illustrious figure of the nineteenth century Indian Awakening and Reform passed away just one hundred years ago. What a highly esteemed man he was to his contemporaries can be best known from the following tribute paid to him by another renowned personality of the time, Max Muller, on his death on 8 January 1884 :

India has lost her greatest son, Keshub Chunder Sen. His was one of the few names known not only most widely among the two hundred and fifty millions who are said to inhabit the vast Indian Empire, but familiar even to European ears. Many of us saw him during his stay in England in 1870, listened to him, admired and loved him, and not a few have ever since remained united with him by the bonds of a real friendship. If we look around for true greatness, not only in England or Europe, but in the whole civilised world, and if we try to measure such a greatness, not by mere success or popularity, but honestly, and, so to say, historically, taking into account the character of the work done, and the spirit in which it

was done, few, I believe, would deny that it was given to Keshub Chunder Sen to perform one of the greatest works in our generation, and that he performed it nobly and well. Like all great men, he had warm friends and bitter enemies. He himself was proud of both, and though fully aware of the greatness of the work committed to him, and quite conscious of his own worth and dignity, he far more frequently protested against exaggerated praise than against unmerited blame. No doubt the controversy between his followers and opponents will continue long after his death, nor is it likely that posterity will be more forbearing to his weaknesses than it has lately proved itself to be in the case of other religious reformers such as Wicklif or Luther. But if we deduct an equal share on both sides—on the side of exaggerated praise as well as on the side of unmerited blame, there remain a sufficient amount of independent contemporary judgment to secure Keshub Chunder Sen the first place among his fellow countrymen and a pre-eminent place among the best of mankind.

The Friend of India

17 February 1884.

PREFACE

In this work I have attempted to make a study of the Brahmo Samaj's role in the growth of education in Bihar. It is published now to coincide with the All India Brahmo Conference to be held this year (7-10 October, 1984) at Patna. This is perhaps the best occasion to acquaint all those, who are interested in the history of educational development of Bihar, with the services and sacrifices made by the members of the Brahmo Samaj in this sphere. I have a feeling that if it is not done now, the saga of these sacrificing souls will not be recorded ever, and like many noble spirits with unrecorded deeds in history they will also vanish into oblivion, being unknown to and unthought of by the future generations. In fact, the Brahmo Samaj itself, which was once a great force and a significant movement, and whose need is increasingly greater today in our society characterised by caste rigidity, dowry deaths and other oppressions on woman, bonded labour, and isolation of and atrocities on Harijans, will take shelter only in pages of history if no vigorous effort on the part of its followers and well-wishers is made for its continuance. This story is being told not only because it is worth knowing but also because it is immensely inspiring, as every story of a noble deed is.

The propagation of education was considered by these Brahmos as one of the many services to the society. Brajagopal

Niyogi, the great Brahmo missionary of Bihar, explained it as "Sadhan O Seva", that is worship and service, and said that by rendering services to humanity one can perform God's work. This blend of spirituality and service is also evident in the deeds of another great Brahmo missionary, Satish Chandra Chakravarty.

My chief sources of information have been the memoirs and personal diaries, chiefly in English and Bengali, of the contemporary Brahmo personalities including the missionaries involved in the Samaj's work. These included the works of Sivanath Sastri, Satish Chandra Chakravarty and Rajnikanto Guha. The records, reports and tracts published by the Brahmo Samajs at various towns of Bihar also proved to be helpful. Among the numerous secondary sources looked into, the biographies of some eminent Brahmos and non-Brahmos proved to be helpful. Newspapers like *The Bihar Herald*, *The Indian Nation* and *The Searchlight* provided lot of information. Oral interviews with aged Brahmos also formed an important source of information.

I must place on record my deep sense of gratitude to my student, Dr. Sutapa Bhattacharya, Lecturer, Khagaul Women's College, Patna, for helping me with her valuable research on the Brahmo Samaj movement in Bihar. I am also deeply indebted to Prof. Nalin Kumar Basu, the President of the Patna Brahmo Samaj, for providing me with lot of valuable informations and suggestions, and to our revered octogenarian Shri Ramlal Gupta for kindly helping me with the memoir (in Urdu) of his great grandfather, Bhai Prakash Devji. I must acknowledge with sincere thanks the great help I received from Shri Kalyan Kumar Poddar, Principal, Ram Mohun Roy Seminary, Shri Asis Kumar Banerji, Secretary, Patna Brahmo Samaj, Prof. Gurucharan Samanta, Secretary, Bihar Bengali Association, and Prof. Gautam Neogy, Professor of History of Kharagpur College, West Bengal, in the preparation of this work.

I wish to express my profound sense of gratitude to Shri Nandakishore Singh of the Janaki Prakashan, Patna, for under-

taking the responsibility of printing and publishing the work. I also extend my sincere thanks to Shri Mushtaque Ahmad of the New Friends' Commercial Institute, and Shri S. N. Singh of the Mithila Typing Institute, Patna, for preparing the typescript of the work. I am very grateful to my student, Shri Shabaz Ali, for helping me in translating the Urdu autobiography of Prakash Devji.

I must acknowledge the great role of my wife, Sandhya, in the completion of this work. She has been a constant source of encouragement and inspiration. Her achievement has been to turn the meagre capacity of an idle individual into some sort of productivity.

The responsibility for errors of fact or argument remains mine alone.

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Sumant Niyogi

CONTENTS

<i>Dedication</i>	v
<i>Preface</i>	vii
I PROLOGUE	1-9
II THE BRAHMO SAMAJ AND THE GROWTH OF EDUCATION IN PATNA	10-64
The Rammohun Roy Seminary The Bankipore Girls' High School The Rabindra Balika Vidyalaya The Aghore-Prakash Sishu Sadan College and University Education	
III THE BRAHMO SAMAJ'S EDUCA- TIONAL ACTIVITIES IN OTHER DISTRICTS	65-87
Giridih High School The Chhotanagpur Girls' High School Children's School and other Institutions Educational work at Hazaribagh and Ranchi Mokshada Girls' High School Cheap School Movement of Gaya College Education	

IV INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL
ACTIVITIES OF BRAHMOS 88-105

Intellectual Centre

Tableaux Vivants, Drama and Music

Associations and Halls

Conclusion 106

Appendix 110

Bibliography 115

Index 129



THE FRONT COVER OF THE BANK IPORE BRAHMO MANDIR
(*Photo, University Studio, Patna*)



A PORTION OF THE RAM MOHUN ROY SEMINARY
(Photo, University Studio, Patna)

PROLOGUE

The Brahmo Samaj movement was the most remarkable aspect of the nineteenth century Indian Awakening and Reform. The movement was characterised by a reformist zeal in socio-religious sphere and an irresistible upsurge of educational and intellectual activities. The movement had tremendous impact in Bengal and Maharashtra. The first half of the nineteenth century, which can be termed as the age of Raja Rammohun Roy, witnessed the advent of rationalistic and scientific spirit, the endless endeavour for the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, the tireless struggle for the emancipation of women and continuous battle against the time honoured orthodoxy, backwardness and superstition. The spirit of the new age and new learning in Bengal was reflected in the setting up of numerous schools for spreading modern education, in the formation of the debating clubs and political associations and in the publication of several journals, newspapers, books and encyclopaedias. The reformist and intellectual activities in Bengal continued with greater momentum in the second half of the nineteenth century which can be regarded as the age of Keshub Chunder Sen and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and this continued till the early part of the twentieth century.

The unprecedented intellectual and cultural efflorescence and the profound impact of the reforming activities, mainly effected through protestant Brahmoism, on the Bengali thought and society, have inspired the scholars to regard the happening as the Bengal Renaissance. Of course, some scholars have grave doubts about the applicability of the term 'Renaissance' in the context of the nineteenth century resurgence in Bengal. The recent Marxist studies on modern Indian history have raised objection to the use of the term in the nineteenth century context, when economic exploitation of India by British colonialism was going on in full swing.¹ These scholars hold that the term 'Renaissance' is a myth, conveniently used to veil the real situation. They put forward the view that whereas the European Renaissance effected a fundamental change in socio-economic structure, the so-called Bengal Renaissance failed to do so. However, the arguments in favour of the retention of the term are equally strong and plausible. The birth of rationalism, humanism and universalism very much signify renescent fervour. The exposure to Western knowledge and education, and the inspiration from India's classical literature and ancient heritage initiated a remarkable process of change so much so that, we can say, modern India evolved out of the awakening of the nineteenth century. And Bengal was the centre of this awakening. This has been beyond doubt a historic truth.²

The impact of the Bengal Renaissance percolated into Bihar in a slow manner. In this process of transference and

-
1. See Susobhan Sarkar, *Bengal Renaissance and Other Essays*, New Delhi, 1970, pp. 150-1, the essay was written by Prof. Sarkar as early as 1946; V. C. Joshi (ed.), *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernisation in India*, New Delhi, 1975, particularly the articles of Barun De, Asoke Sen and Sumit Sarkar; Benoy Ghosh, *Banglar Nabajagriti*, Calcutta, 1979, pp. 162-5.
 2. See Nemai Sadhan Bose, *Indian Awakening and Bengal*, Calcutta, 1976, p. 1; David Kopf, "The Orientalist Legacy and the Problem of Brahmo Identity in the Bengal Renaissance", in Rachel Van M. Baumer, *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, New Delhi 1975, pp. 43-4.

assimilation, the Brahmo Samaj made the most noteworthy contribution. A fairly large migration of Bengali 'Bhadraloks'¹ to Bihar for serving the needs of the British Indian bureaucracy and the newly built railways and post and telegraph started in the mid-sixties of the nineteenth century. Many of them were engaged in the legal and medical professions and some were in the educational service.² Several of these Bengali youngmen, kindled with the spirit of the new age, embraced Brahmoism and settled down in Bihar. Along with these new converts, the Brahmo missionaries also gradually came over to this province carrying with them the message of the new awakening. With the help of this vibrant Bengali officialdom and dedicated missionaries the Brahmo Samaj movement could make headway in Bihar.

A remarkable point about these new Brahmo converts is that most of them embraced Brahmoism in the teeth of severe opposition and resistance from their families.³ The strain, stress and struggle through which they passed made a memorable saga of ordeal and sacrifice. When they had realised that they could not embrace Brahmoism and at the same time remain in their families, they left their families and discarded their claims to any share of family property. The appeal of the Brahmo doctrines and ideals was strong indeed to these young and middle-aged individuals and many of them preferred a missionary life of struggle and poverty to that of a life of security and comfort. One such missionary, Rajanikanta Guha

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1. A term used to indicate the educated middle class elite of Bengal consisting chiefly, if not essentially, of Brahmins, Kayasthas and Vaidyas, See J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society*, Berkeley, 1968, pp. 1-20 and N. K. Bose, *Modern Bengal*, Calcutta, 1959, for the picture of the 'Bhadralok' Society.
 2. B. B. Majumdar's article, "Religious Movements in the Hindu Community in Bihar (1859-1961)", in the *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, Vol. III, Part-II, edited by K. K. Datta, Patna 1976, p. 6.
 3. Sutapa Bhattacharya. "The Brahmo Samaj Movement in Bihar : A Study of its Socio-religious Dimensions" the unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Patna University, Patna, 1983, p. 53.

who was highly qualified and left a well-paid job at Calcutta to organise Samaj activities in Bihar, wrote in his diary on 1 June 1896: "Today, I realised that it is futile to run for money and luxury because at no point this run will end at satiation. There will always be craving for more fortune and greater comfort. I decided right away to spend my life for Brahmo Dharma Sadhan, for Brahmo Samaj's Seva and Brahmo Dharma Prachar."¹ In Bengal, these individuals were considered by the orthodox section of the society as the rebels against tradition and the established order. When they came to Bihar, they had to struggle against a much more conservative society, where the Brahminical orthodoxy reigned supreme.² As a result, they often faced opposition from the rigidly tradition-bound society. The sermons against idolatry and caste rigidity often brought forth opposition sometimes taking a serious turn, ranging from threat of intimidation to violence. Thus the important fact that one has to keep in mind is that these Brahmos faced opposition not only on the religious ground, but also struggled against financial strain along with their family members, which sometimes became too unbearable for words. Another missionary Bhai Prakash Dev, who left his job in the railways at Lahore that offered him nice salary and attractive future prospects, and joined the Sadhan Ashram at Patna to work for the Samaj, records in his note "Sometimes the condition at the Ashram was extremely pathetic so much so that the inmates had to think over getting the next day's meal. But we took it as a life of penance ordained by God, who always protected us and there was no crisis at all. We left everything to Him."³

Moreover, they had to struggle against diseases and epidemics too. Modern medical facilities were not available then. We come across numerous mentions of frequent occurrence of epidemics and death of several members in the family without

1. Rajanikanta Guha, *Atmcharit* (autobiography in Bengali), Calcutta, 1949, p. 301.

2. Sutapa Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

3. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 76.

much of a treatment in the contemporary works, particularly those of missionaries and, workers of the Samaj in Bihar.¹ While malaria and cholera were greatly feared, they really appeared helpless and left to destiny in case of plague.

Another noteworthy point about these new converts and missionaries who came to Bihar is that most of them belonged to the 'Bhadralok' section of the society, consisting chiefly, if not essentially, of the Brahmins, Kayasthas and Vaidyas. In case of these Bengali immigrants the term 'Bhadralok' is very much applicable, but, at the same time we should keep in mind the fact that many among these Brahmo converts belonged to the intermediary castes bearing the surnames Poddar, Saha, Karmakar and Pal. They certainly raised themselves to the status of 'Bhadralok' by means of education and profession. We also have examples of some lower caste individuals like Pramanik and Mandal joining the Samaj.² Many of them embarked Brahmoism in the various Samaj branches of Bihar.

Patna has a historical importance for being the city where Rammohun Roy came to learn Arabic. However, Rammohun did not visit the city after the formation of the Brahmo Samaj. Of course, he had close relations with Bihar because in his administrative career under the East India Company, he happened to serve in Bhagalpur and also at Chhatra in Hazaribagh district. He acted as the Diwan of the East India Company and was posted at Bhagalpur from January to April 1809. His short stay in Bhagalpur, according to several scholars, was the turning point in his life. Immediately on his arrival at Bhagalpur he had a direct confrontation with Sir Frederick Hamilton, the then Collector who insulted the Raja, "with an epithet of abuses too gross to admit of being stated without a departure from respect", for not saluting him while proceeding in a palanquin

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1. These include the works of Sivanath Sastri, Bhai Prakash Dev, Rajanikanta Guha, Brajagopal Niyogi and Satish Chandra Chakravarty, all of them will be frequently referred to in the following pages.
 2. Sutapa Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

from the river-ghat.¹ The Raja was relaxing in the Palanquin which was being carried to the pre-arranged rented house. Besides the carriers, a coterie of subordinates went with the palanquin. It was five o'clock in the evening. Hamilton was standing on the roadside. Rammohun did not know him. His palanquin along with the men moved on. Hamilton got red with anger for the whole coterie moved without a single salutation. He shouted at Rammohun asking him to stay the palanquin but he did not stop. Hamilton moved fast on his horse and at a distance of three hundred yards was able to obstruct the way of the Raja. In spite of the "epithet of abuses," the Raja tried to convince him, but without any effect. The Collector told him to dismiss at least the carriers who were outside and yet did not salute. The Raja refused that too. The Raja wrote a historic letter to the Bengal Governor-General, Lord Minto, describing the entire happening. The letter further said, "If natives, therefore, of caste and rank, were to be subjected to treatment which must infallibly, dishonour and disgrace them not only within the pale of their own religion and society, but also within the circle of English Society of high respectability into which they have been most liberally admitted they would be virtually condemned to close confinements within their houses from the dread of being assaulted in the streets with every species of ignominy and degradation." Disillusioned by Lord Minto's silence, Rammohun Roy could not continue in office for long.

However, though the name of Rammohun Roy is associated with Bihar for many reasons, he cannot be credited for any

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1. Collected from Mr. Shiva Priya, I. A. S., District Magistrate of Bhagalpur, in June 1982. A delegation of scholars led by the former Vice-Chancellor of Bhagalpur University, Prof. M. Q. Towheed, made an appeal to the District Magistrate requesting him to set up a suitable memorial to the Raja at Bhagalpur. In commemoration of this incident the district administration has named the important Wilson Road beginning from the Kutchery Chowk as the Raja Rammohun Roy Road in June 1982, and has installed a marble plaque at a place adjacent to the Collector's Office.

effort whatsoever, for the spread of Brahmoism in Bihar. It was Keshub Chunder Sen who gave real impetus to the Brahmo movement in Bihar. He along with Sivanath Sastri can be regarded as the inspiring force and the guiding spirit of the Brahmo movement in Bihar. The town of Monghyr became his first centre of activity in this province. Keshub Chunder had a short stopover at Patna, on his way from Monghyr to Simla, in August 1868.¹ Even that brief stay made Patna a memorable place for Keshub Chunder and the Brahmo Samaj, for here in consultation with some local Brahmo missionaries, he drafted a petition to the government for the enactment of the Brahmo Marriage Law.² The effort bore fruit when on 4 June 1872, the government issued a notification granting legal sanction to and providing registration facilities for Brahmo marriages.³ From then onwards the Brahmos could marry in accordance with their rites and customs. This was a factor that augmented the number of Brahmos in Bihar.⁴

The first Samaj was founded in Bihar in the town of Bhagalpur as early as 1863.⁵ Bhagalpur had already been a centre of educated Bangalis engaged in government employment and professions. It was followed by the establishment of Brahmo Samaj centres at Patna, then called Bankipore, and Gaya in 1866.⁶ At Patna it was the hard work and genuine dedication of Prakash Chandra Roy and his wife, Aghore Kamini Devi, that helped the emergence of Brahmoism in the future capital of Bihar. They were destined to play an exceedingly significant role not only in the Brahmo Samaj movement

1. B. B. Majumdar, op. cit., p. 6; also see Prem Sundar Basu, *Life and Works of Brahmananda Keshav*, Calcutta, 1940, pp. 155-7.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. S. Gopal and S. Prasad, "Brahmo Samaj in Bihar in the Second-half of the Nineteenth Century", *Bengal Past and Present*, vol. Xcl, 1972, p. 26.

5. Sivanath Sastri, *History of the Brahmo Samaj* Calcutta, 1974 (New edition). p. 525.

6. Sophia Dobson Collect, *Brahmo Year Book*, 1868.

in Patna, but of entire Bihar. In 1874, Prakash Chandra first came to Motihari from Harinabhi (East Bengal) to take up a government job.¹ He became Superintendent of Famine Relief at Motihari.² Prakash Chandra was a close friend of Sivanath Sastri who gave him great encouragement to take up the Motihari assignment. Before this, Prakash Chandra was offered a highly lucrative job in a Zamindar's Diwani at Gauhati, Assam. But he refused it because he was afraid that material conditions might hamper his religious pursuit and moreover, he did not feel that the place would facilitate his missionary activities.³ In 1875, his wife Aghore Kamini Devi came to Motihari alongwith her two daughters and here also they established a Samaj and undertook social work. In 1877, Prakash Chandra came to Bankipore, that is Patna, as an excise inspector.⁴ With his coming to Patna, the Brahmo Samaj received a new inspiration and vigour. In spite of heavy pressure of work, he exerted himself fully to the propagation of the Brahmo faith. He was known for helping the poor and the needy in a typical Brahmo spirit. He was so much dedicated to his work for the Samaj that he was called a Brahmo 'Saint.'⁵ His was a noble life lived in the spirit of the new faith. From an early period of his life, he accepted the New Dispensation and gave himself entirely to those convictions and to the practice of piety. In course of time, Prakash Chandra built a house at Khazanchi Road and named it the 'Aghore Paribar.' This house, which is still there, became one of the chief centres of Navavidhan faith and Brahmo activities at Patna. Thus, both Prakash Chandra and the Aghore Paribar were identified with the Brahmo Samaj movement in Bihar.

The Gaya Brahmo Samaj also holds an exceedingly important place in the history of the Brahmo Samaj movement in the province. It was the result of the tireless effort and the

1. Prakash Chandra Roy, *Aghore-Prakash*, Bankipore, 1907, p. 22.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 25.

4. Ibid., p. 31.

5. Shivnath Sastri, *History of Brahmo Samaj*, p. 526.

spirit of service of Bhakta Hari Sunder Bose.¹ He came to Bihar from Bengal as a postal employee and was later transferred to Gaya as post-master. His was the life devoted to religious pursuit and community service. In collaboration with some Brahmo families and some Bihari friends, he wanted to turn Gaya as an ideal seat of the Brahmo Samaj. While his religious pursuit engaged him in Upasanas, Shastrapath and Kirtan, his community service included running a cheap school, night school for labourers, a girls' school and a printing press. He was so much absorbed with the work of the Samaj that he left his job at the post-office and devoted himself fully to the Samaj activities.²

The foregone study presents just a brief account of the origin of the Brahmo Samaj movement in Bihar. The movement gained momentum with every passing year when new branches of the Samaj came into existence at Hazaribagh, Giridih, Ranchi, Muzaffarpur and other places and the existing branches expanded their sphere of activity. The history of the origin and growth of the Brahmo Samaj movement in Bihar is so long and inspiring that it needs a detailed and separate study. The above account only attempts to indicate that it was the Brahmo Samaj that first carried the message of the new learning and new awakening of the nineteenth century to Bihar.

1. Sutapa Bhattacharya, op. cit., p. 89.

2. Ibid. Also see Surendra Gopal, "Brahmos and Social Reform in Bihar," in Swami Vedantananda (ed.), *Religion in Bihar in the Modern Age*, Patna, 1983, p. 70.

THE BRAHMO SAMAJ AND THE GROWTH OF EDUCATION IN PATNA

“Ignorance has clouded thy knowledge; what doest thou ? Forgetting the Supreme, takest thou other things as such ? The pursuit of a mirage in the hope of water is a fruitless speculation in which I see no gain. Thou has forsaken the truth in ignorance, and hast accepted falsehood in its stead.”

—Rammohun Roy
(English translation
of the Bengali hymn
composed by Roy).

असतो मा सद्गमयः ।
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमयः ॥

This immortal Upanishadic sloka was the guiding factor of the Brahmo leaders of Bihar in their efforts for the spread of education. Education brings enlightenment, enlightenment

generates progress. This philosophy of the eighteenth century French Enlightenment and the nineteenth century English Utilitarians was shared by the contemporary Brahmo missionaries. The ideas of the Victorian England had its impact upon the Brahmo thought on education.

“Let knowledge grow from more to more
But the reverence in us must dwell.”

Several factors inspired the Brahmos of Bihar to take up the cause of education. Firstly, the concept that the society can be freed from the bondage imposed by custom and tradition, from superstition and from backwardness was ingrained in the minds of the torch-bearers of the Brahmo movement in Bihar. This was a direct impact of the new awakening in Bengal. The spread of knowledge would free individuals from the darkness of ignorance. Therefore, they continuously and in a selfless spirit struggled on for leading men from ignorance to truth, and from darkness to light. So it was an endless urge to get away from the clutches of a backward looking system to a vigorous forward moving one. The status quo must end, the old order must change yielding place to the new one, immobility must be replaced by dynamism. The early Brahmos of Bihar thus launched an endless battle against ignorance by taking up the cause of education.

Secondly, a spirit of service also motivated the Brahmo leaders in their work of education. It was not always that they took up the cause of education with some objective in view. The Christian missionaries whose work in Bihar in the contemporary period became fairly wide, had an ulterior objective—that of proselytization, notwithstanding the fact that many of them made genuine contribution to the spread of knowledge in a selfless spirit. Proselytization was definitely not uppermost in the minds of the early Brahmo missionaries in Bihar. We rarely come across a case of conversion through pressurisation, certainly not of a single case of forcible conversion.

The proselytization was achieved through persuasion. In most cases it was the appeal of the Brahmo doctrine, the simple life of the missionaries and the emulous examples set by the Brahmos that proved attractive and brought many educated Hindus to the fold of Brahmoism. Therefore, it was exclusively a spirit of service of making some better individuals out of the ordinary ones, of giving the individuals the basic knowledge of three "R"s, so that they would be able to earn their livelihood in a better way, had been the motivation behind the work of education of the Brahmo leaders. And in this work some of them made supreme sacrifice without the least expectation of personal return.

The society in Bihar was too conservative in the second half of the nineteenth century to be influenced by the forces of the new reform movement that was sweeping over Bengal. Moreover, this province did not experience that early and closed contact with British rule as Bengal had done, and so the Western ideas and education could not make an early infiltration here.¹ However, social conservatism and lack of early contact with British rule only delayed the process of educational growth. They could not prevent it. And it is in this context that the role of the Brahmo Samaj as "agent of transformation" has to be considered. The noteworthy point is that the Brahmos undertook the work of education in the teeth of severe opposition from the conservative sections of the contemporary Bihari society. They had to operate not only in a conservative society, but also in an alien one if the linguistic and social factors are taken into account. In the beginning the Brahmo educational activities had remained confined chiefly to the Bengali community. That was obvious. Some recent studies have shown that the Bengalis, by and large, were much advanced in education

1. Sumanta Niyogi, "The Brahmo Samaj Movement in Patna; A Study of its Socio-Cultural Legacies", in Bhagwant Sahay (ed.), *Bihar Past and Present*, Patna, 1981, p. 102.

and the Bengali dominance in Bihar's educational life was too apparent to need any pointer.¹

The Brahmos made great contribution to the spread of primary and secondary education, for both boys and girls in the province. Among the districts of Bihar, Patna was far ahead of others in the sphere of educational development,² and it was at Patna that the major portion of the work of the Samaj in the sphere of education was accomplished. Patna, being the nucleus of the Brahmo Samaj movement in Bihar, a single chapter is devoted to the Brahmo educational activities in the city. This city was one of the early centres of the educational activities of the Brahmo Samaj. The three leading high schools—the Rammohan Roy Seminary, the Bankipore Girls' High Schools and the Ravindra Balika Vidyalaya, and one middle school, the Aghore-Prakash Shishu Sadan, are the living symbols of the education, sacrifice and service of the Brahmos of Patna.³ A great happening of the 1880s which helped the establishment of these schools, was the growth of three Brahmo centres of activity. One was the Bankipore Brahmo Mandir, the beautiful building in a fairly big plot of land beside the present Hathwa Market at Bari Road, the second centre was the 'Aghore-Paribar' premises at Khazanchi Road, where the great Navabidhan followers Prakash Chandra Roy and Aghore Kamini Devi lived and the third one was the Sadhan Ashram, located at the Khuda Bakhsh Library Road very close to the Library itself.⁴

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1. S. N. Pandey, *Educational and Social Changes in Bihar (1900-1921)*, Varanasi, 1975, p. 167; P. N. Misra and N. K. Jha, "Social and Religious Reform Movements in Bihar in the 19th & 20th Centuries", in S. P. Sen (ed.), *Social and Religious Reform Movements in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Calcutta, 1979, p. 108, 110.
 2. S. N. Pandey, op. cit., p. 173.
 3. S. Niyogi, op. cit., p. 104.
 4. In spite of all efforts on the part of the present researcher, the exact location of the Sadhan Ashram could not be found out. It could have been anywhere between the present building of Rammohan Roy Seminary at Khazanchi Road to the Khuda Bakhsh Lane or the adjacent main road presently called Ashok Rajpath upto the main gate of the Patna Medical College Hospital,

It must be kept in mind that the origins of the centres were not simultaneous but by the first decade of the twentieth century their existence was quite recognisable. The first two centres, as already noted, owed their origin primarily to the efforts of Prakash Chandra and Aghore Kamini Devi. The third one, Sadhan Ashram, was set up by a band of religious and social reformers attached to a brotherhood of Brahmo missionaries called the Brahmo Sadhan Ashram, founded in Calcutta in 1892 by that illustrious personality of the nineteenth century Indian Awakening and Reform, Pandit Sivanath Sastri.¹ Inspired with the zeal of serving the countrymen, many among this brotherhood sought, under the stewardship of Pandit Sastri, fields of work in different parts of the country. One group came to Bihar and set up a branch of the Ashram at Arrah. However, they found that the town offered little scope for their activities. So, after two years they shifted to Patna and putting up in a small hut at Chowhatta established the Bankipore branch of the Sadhan Ashram in 1895.² At first there were only five Bhais (brothers), but with the foundation of the Rammohun Roy Seminary their number increased. The five Bhais were Prakash Dev, Satish Chandra Chakravarty, Gurudas Chakravarty, Rajanikanta Guha and Sundar Singh, a Sikh bhajan singer who had embraced Brahmoism.³

The Rammohun Roy Seminary

The idea of setting up the Rammohun Roy Seminary first came in the mind of Sivanath Sastri. He often visited Patna as a Brahmo missionary.⁴ In December 1896, he after consultation with the two leading bhais of the Sadhan Ashram,

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1. The Sadhan Ashram, according to its founder, was a sort of 'Brahmo workers' shelter', where all inmates would fully devote themselves to the cause of Brahmoism and service to society. See Sivanath Sastri, *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 199-200.
 2. Sutapa Bhattacharya, op. cit., p. 74.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Sivanath Sastri, *Atmacharit* (in Bengali), pp. 158, 166-7, 176, 261. And also see his *History of the Brahmo Samaj*, p. 327, 334.

Gurudas Chakravarti and Rajanikanta Guha, decided to open a school at Bankipore.¹ The idea was transformed into reality when in a small meeting at Sadhan Ashram in December 1896, the Rammohun Roy Seminary came into existence.² Rajanikanta Guha records in his autobiography that a small bungalow was taken on rent at Chowhatta and the regular classes began to take place from January 1897. However, the constitution of the Seminary records that the school was founded on 1 February 1897.³ So there is slight difference of opinion, with regard to the exact date of the school's opening, but this is certain that it formally came into existence in the early period of 1897. It is also confirmed that the school functioned in a hired building located near the present children's ward of the Patna Medical College Hospital.

The object of the Rammohun Roy Seminary, as laid down by Sivanath Sastri in the first prospects of the Seminary is, "to impart to its students a thoroughly good secular education, along with such moral instruction, based on the universal principles of Natural Religion as will make them honest, earnest and God-fearing citizens in after-life."⁴ It was indeed unique that he could plead for a secular progressive education which reflected the typical Brahmo attitude. Gurudas Chakravarty became the first Secretary of the Managing Committee and Rajanikanta Guha the first Headmaster of the school. Among those who started school and served as teachers in its infancy there were many who possessed not only high academic qualifications and inspiring personality, but also

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1. Rajanikanta Guha, *Atmcharit* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1949, p. 304. Gurudas Chakravarty was for over a decade a prominent figure in many public and philanthropic activities in Patna. He was one of the founders of the Bihar Youngmen's Institute, a centre of physical education and indoor games at Patna.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
 3. Constitution of the RMR Seminary, adopted at the Governing Body Meeting; Sadhan Ashram Sewa Samsad, 19 April 1934, kept in the old file of the RMR Seminary. See Appendix.
 4. *Ibid.*

a wonderful gift of vision and indomitable spirit. Besides Rajanikanta, the teaching staff consisted of three Brahmos, Satish Chandra Chakravarty, a first class M. A. degree-holder in Philosophy from the Calcutta University, Hem Chandra Sarkar, also an M. A. in Philosophy, and Srirang Behari Lal, who had passed M. A. in English from Patna College in 1899.¹ It was the only high school in Bihar at that time to have four M.A. degree holders as teachers.² Sivanath Sastri sent furniture for the school from Calcutta. The school expanded in 1897 when seven teachers for teaching English, Mathematics and Geography, one Kavyatirtha degree-holder Pandit and one Maulavi were appointed.

Sivanath Sastri, though mostly away from Patna, was the life and soul of the band of mission workers who formed the nucleus round which the Seminary crystallised into an institution of learning. For one year Sivanath Sastri himself supervised the teaching and looked after the administration of the Seminary.³ He had heavy preoccupation with the management of the Calcutta Sadhan Ashram. Even then, he was extremely concerned about the survival of the Seminary. In the first year of its existence he visited Patna at least once every month to personally supervise the functioning of the school. The financial aspect being the greatest handicap, he raised donations from various parts of Bengal for the continuance of the school.⁴ The year 1897 can be regarded as the year when Sivanath Sastri identified himself with the Seminary, always thinking of its survival, giving guidance and advice to the teachers and raising funds from possible sources. When the school attained stability after some years, he entrusted the responsibility of administration to Gurudas Chakravarty and returned to Calcutta.⁵ Before leaving for Calcutta he also

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1. Rajanikanta Guha, op. cit., p. 305. See also J. N. Sarkar, B. Prasad, & J. C. Jha, *A History of Patna College*, Patna 1962, p. 79.
 2. S. Niyogi, op. cit., p 104.
 3. Rajanikanta Guha, op. cit., p. 305.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Ibid.

advised that dedicated Brahmo doctor Pareshnath Chatterjee to take special interest in the school which the latter did with all devotion and dedication.¹ Two other Brahmo missionaries also made great contribution towards the development of the school in its early stage. They were Bhai Sundar Singh and Bhai Prakash Dev. They completely identified themselves with Brahmo Samaj and this inspired them to work for the Seminary with utmost sincerity. However, both of them were more concerned with the administration than teaching in the school.²

In its early years the Seminary confronted difficulties for three reasons. Firstly, it was a period of intense financial strain. Among those who founded the school and served it as teachers were some working on subsistence allowance, some without pay and some even helping it with money out of their private resources. Though the self-sacrifice of these teachers made it possible to keep the expenditure of school management low, yet the lack of finance caused several objectives unattained. Secondly, the high ideal the promoters had set before them meant they had to struggle hard for their attainment. Their formidable determination to keep up the ideal at any cost and not to yield to the temptation of seeking cheap popularity by lowering the standard of discipline and efficiency was slow to gain public appreciation. It requires a stretch of imagination to appraise at this distance of time what primitive ideas about education were generally entertained by the people about ninety years ago. It was absolutely unusual to see a band of self-sacrificing workers outside a foreign Christian mission endeavouring to build up an educational institution with such a high ideal. The project was thought to be Utopian and grave doubts were expressed by many if persons with such high university degrees and distinctions would long continue to do this labour of love. Lastly, the popular prejudice of the orthodox section of the

1. Ibid., p. 307.

2. Ramnarain Gupta, *Savanah Umri Shradheya Prakash Devji; Pracharak Brahmo Dharam* (in Urdu), Lahore, 1915, p. 73.

Hindu community prevalent at the time against the Brahmo Samaj was another great obstacle in the way. This also reflected the conflict between orthodoxy and radicalism. The conservative circles with overwhelming sway over the contemporary Bihari society looked upon a Brahmo as a rebel against time-honoured traditions and social institutions. Fear of conversion of their boys into Brahmoism was uppermost in their minds. So some orthodox men made attempts to see the end of the school, while some others dissuaded willing parents from sending their wards to the school. Interestingly enough, it was easier to admit Muslim boys rather than the Hindu ones.¹ Such were the unrelenting obstacles from hostile quarters that the Seminary had to tread its way through. So, the first twelve years had been exceedingly testing for the school. Fortunately, it survived the ordeal.

The day in the school began with prayers from the Upanishad and Bhagawat Gita and classes were held till 3 P.M. The school very soon earned a reputation for its high standard of teaching.

The high standard of the school is confirmed by the fact that two of its teachers Satish Chandra Chakravarty and Hemchandra Sarkar received Teachers' Training Scholarship for studies at Manchester College of Education. Satish Chandra received it in 1897 while Hemchandra was awarded the same next year.² Unfortunately, Satish Chandra could not avail himself of the scholarship. Being a dedicated missionary he was immensely involved with the problems of the Bankipore Sadhan Ashram; the health of Bhai Prakash Devji was still critical and Rajanikanta Guha was a newcomer, so Satish Chandra had additional responsibilities. Therefore, in spite of sound health he could not go to England. Sivanath Sastri was at first annoyed with Satish Chandra's decision, but later on,

1. Rajanikanta Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 306, 325,

he highly appreciated the sacrifice made by him for the sake of the Sadhan Ashram and its members.¹ This also indicated the genuine feeling of fraternity and comradeship among the Bhais of the Samaj. Fortunately, Hemchandra could avail himself of the opportunity and left for England in September 1898.

A vivid picture of a teacher's life at Rammohun Roy Seminary is evident from the account of Rajanikanta Guha.² He received Rs. 50/- per month as salary. Private tuition was other source of income. Though it was not very easily available Rajanikanta managed to get two boys for private tuition. One of them was the son of Guruprasad Sen, a prominent Brahmo with a thriving legal practice at the court. Sen appointed Rajanikanta to teach his son, Sharada Prasad, subjects like Latin, English and History as a preparation for the Indian Civil Service. He received Rs. 30/- per month.³ The second one was Jagatanand, the son of the Zamindar, Harbans Sahay, and a student of fourth year whom he taught English and was paid Rs. 30/- per month. The house rent used to cost him Rs. 12/- per month. However, being a mission school, the salary was very fluctuating. Sometimes, the teacher could manage to have more from private tuition, a system unthinkable in the present day.⁴ However, sometimes even private tuition was not available. For example, when Rajanikanta finished the private tutoring of Sharada Prasad and Jagatanand, the former having left for England and the latter passed the B. A. examination in 1899, he could get only one tuition for the next session, teaching Chandrashekhar, the son of a High Court lawyer Shaligram Singh, Latin and English. Of course, for that reason he sometimes received an extra sum from the school, depending on the availability of funds.⁵ Teaching at the school and the private boys was indeed strenuous and meant nine to ten hours of

1. *Ibid.*, p. 306.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 326.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 327.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 326-331.

5. *Ibid.*

work everyday, and this often deprived the teacher from attending the morning prayer at Sadhan Ashram.

The Rammohun Roy Seminary and the Bankipore Sadhan Ashram had been inseparable. The objective of the Bhais was not only the propagation of the Brahmo faith but the development of the school. And dedicated persons like Prakash Dev, Srirang Behari Lal, Satish Chandra Chakravarty and Chanchala Ghosh completely identified themselves with the school.¹ For Prakash Devji, the school was a holy temple of learning to which all attention should be diverted for its further progress and for the preservation of its purity. He considered this as the work of the Sarva Shakitman Parmeshwar i.e., the Almighty God. He raised donations for the school in whatever places, from Lahore to Darjeeling, he had visited as a Brahmo missionary.² Fortunately for the members of the Sadhan Ashram, a suitable accommodation near the school could be located. This was the spacious house of Khuda Bakhsh Khan. Four Brahmo families shifted to the place in March 1899. They were Srirang Behari Lal along with his wife, Indu Bhushan Roy with his wife and three children, one female missionary Chanchala Ghosh along with her three daughters and Rajanikanta Guha with his wife began to stay here.³ Stay in this house in a healthy atmosphere enabled them to pay full attention to both Rammohun Roy Seminary and the Sadhan Ashram.

Besides the financial problems of the teachers individually and the financial strain of the school in general, the Rammohun Roy Seminary had to face other sorts of troubles too. In 1899, a few of the students could not come upto the standard set by the school authority and therefore they could not be sent for matriculation examination. As a consequence, the teachers of the school and the members of the Sadhan Ashram had to face

1. Ramnarain Gupta, op. cit., p. 73.

2. Ibid., p. 74.

3. R. Guha, op. cit., p. 329.

ugly harassment and obscene nuisance for a few days. During nights these boys along with rowdy elements threw filth and dirt at the Sadhan Ashram.¹ These disgruntled boys had also planned to assault the Headmaster by entering his house on the flimsy ground of seeking transfer certificate. Fortunately, this plot was nipped in the bud.² Some parents went to the Collector of Patna, H. Le Mesurier,³ with complaint about the school authorities. Mesurier had a very high impression about the Seminary. He admonished the parents of the non-sent-up boys, and told them, "Every father would do well to send his son to this school for education."⁴ These unpleasant incidents certainly depressed the teachers and Ashram members, but their missionary spirit remained unperturbed and they continued their work in spite of these social hindrances in a strange place. In 1899 six students were sent up for matriculation examination. Two of them passed in the first division and two of them in the second. In 1900, out of five, two secured first division and one second. The improvement of the school was confirmed by the fact that in 1901, the school showed cent per cent success. Of the twelve boys sent, eight secured first division, and the remaining four second. The performance of the school attracted the attention of the then Governor Sir John Woodburn, the Education Secretary, Sir Richard Pedler and a host of prominent Hindu and Muslim gentlemen who highly praised its functioning.⁵ In August 1900, the school was granted seventy rupees. However, this was a sum too small for the school taken as a whole. Moreover, in accordance with one condition of the grant, the teachers had to be paid a certain amount of salary. So, the financial condition of the school did not show any improvement. In 1900, the total strength of the school was a little below 150

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1. Ibid., p. 349. The author even mentions that the rowdies threw human excreta at the Ashram.
 2. Ibid., p. 350.
 3. H. Le Mesurier later became the Governor of the province.
 4. Quoted in K. M. Poddar, *Sixty Years of R. M. R. Seminary, Patna*, 1957, p. 3.
 5. R. Guha, op. cit., p. 350.



for which a fair amount of financial assistance was needed and the financial situation got worse by the spread of plague that year. The Brahmo missionaries thus had to struggle on against poverty, rowdy elements and disease. The records of Rajanikanta Guha and Bhai Prakash Dev show that financial strain and disease made life intolerable at Bankipore but it was the blessings of God that provided them strength to carry on their work. However, one good point was that they did not have to go without meal a single day, because the prices of vegetables were moderate at Bankipore.¹

The year 1901 was a landmark in the history of the Rammohun Roy Seminary. The first noteworthy development was the setting up of the Building Fund, followed by an appeal to the public for generous contribution to the same. The second development was the assumption of headmastership by Satish Chandra Chakravarty as Rajanikanta Guha was called away to shoulder greater responsibilities at the Sadhan Ashram, Calcutta.² Rajanikanta had successfully steered the Seminary through many winds and tides in the early years of its existence and his departure was indeed a great loss to the school. Fortunately for it he was succeeded by Satish Chandra, who continued the good work of his predecessor. In fact, his advent, as the head of the institution gave new strength and direction to the school. The next important development was the gaining of public appreciation by the founder brothers of the Patna Sadhan Ashram for their humanitarian and philanthropic work. Satish Chandra records that the brothers had, through other channels of devoted service, proved themselves worthy of the sympathy and esteem of the local people. During attack of famine, cholera and the bubonic plague, the workers of the Sadhan Ashram organised themselves into bands of relief, visiting the afflicted and the dying, giving them medicine, food and pecuniary help, and doing all in their power to

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1. Ramnarain Gupta, op. cit., pp. 350-351, and S. Roy Choudhary, *Sris Chandra Chakravarty*, Calcutta 1960, p. 9.
 2. Sris Chandra Chakravarty, *Fifty Years of Rammohun Roy Seminary 1897-1947*, Bankipore, 1947, p. 4.

ameliorate their distress.¹ He rightly emphasises the point that by this time it was realised by the people, who had vehemently opposed the good work of the Ashram Bhais, that these Brahmo Samaj workers were friends alike of the Hindu and the Muslim, the Bihari and the Bengali, the people and the Government.²

The immense exertions made by the authorities for the Building Fund bore good fruits. An encouraging amount was collected in a year's time and in 1902 the authorities were able, to purchase a house and a plot measuring about five standard bighas of rent-free land at Moradpur (north of the present Hospital for Women) at a cost of about Rs. 12,000/-. The Government of Bengal kindly contributed Rs. 5,000/- towards the cost.³ In addition to the funds raised, the school authorities had to take a loan for the purchase and for effecting necessary alterations and repairs of the house. The Building Fund had, therefore, to be kept open for some years more. Government officials, local zamindars and the gentry as also persons in sympathy with the Brahmo Samaj work, from the Punjab to Travancore and from East Bengal to Baluchistan generously contributed to the Fund. It is not possible to mention them here individually, but two names must be mentioned. One is of the great sage of Bengal, Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore who sent his contribution as his blessing and token of love, and the other of Seth Gobardhandas Damodar Das of Bombay both of them made the great contribution of Rs. 3,00/- each⁴ The donors' list also included such well-known figures as H. Le Mesurier, J.C. Cumming, Hathwa Raj, Dumrao Raj, Tikari Raj, Bettiah Raj, Maharajas of Travancore and Mayurbhanj, Nawab Bahadurs of Patna.⁵ This shows the eagerness of the princely houses and aristocracy for contributing towards a noble work undertaken by the Brahmos.

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Donors' List, Managing Committee File, R.M.R. Seminary, 1904-5.

5. Ibid.

Provided with a house and thus placed on a permanent footing, the school began to push its way on steadily, though yet slowly. But there was yet another trial in store for it. The plague again made its appearance—this time in a repeated and very virulent epidemic form. In consequence the numerical strength came down by 1905 from 140 to 70. The school was hard hit.

By 1960 the epidemic was arrested to a certain extent and the number on the rolls began to increase and the finances to look up again. In that year the school was able to pay off the previously incurred debt and also to build quarters for the headmaster. But about the end of this year Gurudas Chakravarti had to leave Patna to take up charge of a bigger mission centre after rendering the Seminary yeomen's service for about a decade. His inimitable missionary zeal, his unwearied labour and his indomitable spirit ready to face any exigency had gone a great way to place the Seminary on a stable footing.

About this time Satish Chakravarti, on whom now fell a considerable portion of the burden of the Secretary also, was able to introduce further improvements in the working of the school. An avowed student of psychology, he by private study, made himself thoroughly acquainted with the most up-to-date principles and advanced methods of education. His daily reading—followed by discussion—of books on the art and science of teaching with other teachers formed a special feature of the academic life of the staff. Great improvement in the organisation of school work and class teaching was effected by this. The Seminary was now generally recognised to be an ideal school and it began in popularity and strength. In two years, that is by 1908, the number of students went upto 200.

The progress continued and by 1912 the numerical strength reached 300 with a pressure for more admissions. A project of additions and alterations of some of the rooms had to be undertaken at a cost of about Rs. 20,000 towards which the Government contributed Rs 7,000. Further expansion was, however,

soon called for. But there was a talk by this time that the Seminary premises might be acquired by Government for the extension of the Medical College Hospital and in the meantime the First World War had also broken out. These two factors put a stop to any further construction work. The years 1914 to 1923 were years of uncertainty and admission had to be restricted to the limited accommodation available. Two of the classes, however, could in the meanwhile be duplicated by make-shift arrangement.

Meanwhile towards the end of 1919 Satish Chandra Chakravarti, after having spent the best part of his life in Bihar for the cause of education, had to leave Patna and go to Calcutta in response to a call from the central Sadhan Ashram as greater responsibilities awaited him there. Such calls had come to him often before. But he would not leave his dear Seminary in any dubious condition. At least when it was certain that it could be left in other hands he responded to the call. He had worked for the school as headmaster for two decades and as a teacher for about a quarter of a century. It was during his headmastership that the Seminary raised itself to the status of a high school. With dedicated missionary spirit and tireless work Satish Chandra transformed it into an ideal institution. His achievement becomes more remarkable when we take into consideration the various crises and unfavourable circumstances he had to confront. The confidence of the public in the school, its influence and reputation, are due mostly to his rare personality—a unique combination of intellectuality and piety, self abnegation and efficiency. Even after his retirement as headmaster he was, for many years practically at the helm of the school as its active joint Secretary. In the minds of many of the Patna public his name is still inseparably associated with the Seminary.

Though Satish Chandra left, he had done a great service to the cause of the school by appointing his brother Sris Chandra Chakravarty as a teacher in the Seminary in 1912. Sris Chandra was another great talent. With the coming of Sris Chandra, the school received a new impetus. While teaching

at the Seminary, he was able to pass the B.T. examination from Patna University and stood first in Geography at Patna College. Therefore, the then Director of Public Instruction R. Thicket offered Sris Chandra lecturership at Patna College. However, Sris Chandra dedicated himself with all his heart and soul to the cause of making the Seminary an ideal institution. He also received offers of headmastership from Gauhati, Lucknow and Cuttack. However, he did not respond to the position, but to the service and sacrifice. He spent his thirty-five years of teaching career for building up the Seminary. Sris Chandra was a great asset to his elder brother Satish Chandra.

In 1919, Srirang Behari Lal became the Headmaster of the school and remained in that position till his retirement in 1928.¹ This has been an exceedingly crucial period for the school. The financial situation of the school improved to some extent by 1920 when the government, satisfied with the performance of the school, decided to sanction grants. Muhammad Mazharul Haque, the revered nationalist leader, wrote a letter to the Headmaster in 1920 describing the Seminary as a National School.² The school's teaching staff was further strengthened by the inclusion of three extremely sincere and newly converted Brahmos. Kshetramohan Poddar, a youngman from Barisal, East Bengal, who had accepted 'diksha' from Satish Chandra Chakravarti, joined the school in 1924. He passed B. A. from Calcutta's City College and had taken up service at a printing press in Calcutta with a salary of Rs. 80 per month. He left the job to take up a teaching assignment at the Seminary with a reduced monthly salary of Rs.50/.³ Another youngman was Ajit Kumar Bandyopadhyaya, who came to the fold of Brahmo Samaj, after his 'diksha' from the eminent Brahmo missionary, Dr. Prankrishna Acharya. Inspired by missionary spirit, he resigned from the government job of sub-inspector of schools in East Bengal and came to Bankipore to

1. S. Roychoudhary, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

2. Ibid., p. 94.

3. K. K. Poddar, *Amader Pitrideb; Kshetramohan Poddar* (Short biographical sketch in Bengali), Calcutta, 1966, pp. 2-3.

take up the job of a teacher in the Seminary, at a paltry salary of Rs. 90/- only.¹ He joined the school in August, 1924. The third youngman, Bejoy Chandra Karmakar joined the school in 1926. He embraced Brahmoism with 'diksha' from the devoted Brahmo missionary Prasanna Chandra Choudhary of Giridih.² All these teachers, alongwith Sris Chandra formed the backbone of the teaching staff of the school.

The year 1926 is a memorable year for the school. The government acquired the land where the old building of the Seminary existed with a view to expand the Patna Medical College. So, a new land and new building for the Seminary was essential. In June 1926 the present plot of land, measuring 1.146 acres, was awarded to the trustees of the school in exchange for the old one at Muradpur. Besides giving Rs. 46,000/- as compensation for the old building, the government gave a balancing grant of about Rs. 65,000/- towards the construction of the new building, the total cost of which came up to about Rs. 1,18,000/-. The foundation of the new building was laid on 4 November 1926 by Satish Chandra Chakravarty, who was then the head of the missionary body of Calcutta's Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. The new building was inaugurated on 1 November 1927, by the then Education Minister Sir Saiyid Md. Fakhruddin, K. B., to whom the school will forever remain indebted for the great interest taken by him in all matters connected with its rehousing. His attachment to the school had developed during his tenure as President of the school's Managing Committee from 1915 to 1918. It was owing to his efforts that land could be acquired and grants for building construction could be obtained. The foundation of the new building was laid at Khazanchi Road in 1926.³ The government was considerate enough to award some grant. Money for land and building,

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1. A. K. Bannerjee, *Shradhya Swaran : Ajit Kumar Bandopadhyaya* (A short Biographical sketch in Bengali), Patna, 1969, p. 6.
 2. Subir Karmakar, *Bejoy Chandra Karmakar : A Tribute on the occasion of his Shradha Ceremony*, Patna, 1974, p. 2.
 3. S. Roychaudhary, op. cit., p. 9.
Ramnarain Gupta, op. cit., p. 75.

however, was obtained chiefly through public donations and government grants. But the real architects of this huge building project were two Brahmos, one was Sris Chandra Chakravarty and the other was Mahendra Lal Sengupta, a Brahmo engineer, who with his family lived at 'Aghore Paribar'. Mahendra Lal got fed up with the corruption and bribery of the Public Works Department of the Bihar Government, resigned the government job and joined as lecturer in the Bihar College of Engineering, Patna. Both these men devoted their entire time, energy and mind continuously for three years to the construction of the building.¹ In this new imposing structure, consisting of a large hall and twenty spacious rooms to begin with, stand realised the most cherished dream of the founders and promoters of the school. Particularly for Sris Chandra, the construction work became a passion. Jyoti Bhushan Mukherjee, a student, puts it beautifully on his involvement with the construction work :

I can imagine clearly the middle-aged man, at his off-hours, from the old seminary, walk up and down, near a plot of land in Khazanchi Road. A boundary wall is coming up, a few hutments are being demolished, the land is being excavated. Everyday inch by inch he sees a change. There must have been so much of tribulations regarding money for the building, land, work of construction, etc. And as good and evil must go side by side, there must have been a politics round the new Seminary coming up. But not heeding to all these, I can visualise him intently watching the foundations of the building being laid, then the walls coming up brick by brick, the floor of the classrooms setting, the first floor getting completed, the staircases, the big black boards on the walls—all coming up under the hopeful looks of a man, who is sent to start, his life's mission anew in this building.²

In 1928, Sris Chandra became the Headmaster on Srirang

1. Roychoudhary, *op. cit.*, pp. 10, 37,

2. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Behari Lal's premature retirement and held that position till 1947. It was indeed unfortunate that only within a year of the opening of the new building, Srirang Behari Lal had to retire being unfortunately incapacitated for work owing to a sudden stroke.¹ He was a selfless man loved by all for his unassuming manners and amiable nature. It is worth-recording here that it was greatly due to his earnest pleadings for his own dear province that the Sadhan Ashram missionaries had selected Bihar for their field of work.² With his retirement came the end of the illustrious line of headmasters drawn from the original self-sacrificing body of founders. It was another glorious period for the school. One can assess this dedication to and spirit of service when one learns of his untiring effort to improve the school including the condition of the teachers. He continued to work as Headmaster with a small salary of Rs. 150/- per month for a long time though he always successfully put before the managing committee the need for increasing the salary of teachers. He was a Headmaster in typical "Arnold tradition" of the Rugby school of England in mid-Victorian period. His emphasis was not only on the dissemination of knowledge but also on character-building, instilling patriotism and personality development of the students.

In 1933, the Rammohun Roy Seminary became the first school in Bihar to start co-education. The idea came in the course of a casual discussion which Sris Chandra had with the then Director of Public Instruction, C.E. Faucus, about the paucity of girls' schools and general difficulties of providing girls' education.³ Faucus enthusiastically welcomed the suggestion that classes in boys' school might be thrown open to girls as well. He expressed the hope that in a school reputed for its discipline like the Seminary co-education might easily be made

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1. K. M. Poddar, *Sixty Years of Rammohun Roy Seminary 1897-1957*, Patna, 1957, p. 6.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Sris Ch. Chakravarty, *Fifty Years of Rammohun Roy Seminary 1897-1947*, Bankipore 1947, p. 10.

a success and thus a way might be paved to solve a great problem of the province.¹ In spite of terrific social opposition, Sris Chandra admitted his two daughters in the school with a typical Brahmo revolutionary spirit.² Sris Chandra held that strict segregation of boys and girls would retard the progress of the society. If boys and girls are kept in separate water-tight compartments, there cannot be exchange of ideas between the young, enterprising and intelligent members of the future generation. It was indeed a progressive and practical attitude when we look at the present day school system, where co-education is very enthusiastically encouraged. However, in spite of Sris Chandra's initiative, co-education did not gain fast popularity. It was obvious in a conservative society. But from the midforties co-education really picked up at the Seminary and by the late forties with 125 girls, the school became the leading co-educational institution in the province.

Special mention must be made of the exemplary relief work done by the school's scouts and volunteers, both locally and in North Bihar, during the devastating 1934 earthquake. Their excellent work won the appreciation and congratulations of Sir Courtney Terrel, the then Chief Justice of the Patna High Court and the Chief Scout of Bihar. As Sris Chandra commented, "In such services the Lokasreya (the good of humanity) spirit of Rammohun Roy imbibed by the promoters of the school must have worked through the students."³

Other accomplishments of the school during Sris Chandra's headmastership had been the first position secured by a student of the school, Subhash Mukherjee,⁴ in the Matriculation Examination in 1940, the repeated victories of the school teams

1. Ibid.

2. S. Roychoudhary, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

3. Ibid., p. 95.

4. He later became a member of the Indian Administrative Service in the year of its inception in 1948. He also served as the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bihar before his retirement in 1983.

in the inter-school football and cricket championships, and the annual Baisakhi Sammelan, that is the annual function when students staged Bengali, Hindi and English plays and variety entertainment. In the Quit India Movement of August 1942, two school students Umakant and Ramanand sacrificed their lives for the cause of the country's independence. All these earned for the school a widespread reputation throughout the province. The Seminary became a sparkling epitome of dedication, high ideals and hardwork of the Brahmos.

It is a strange coincidence that Sris Chandra retired in 1947, the year of India's Independence. Reminiscing on this Sris Chandra on one occasion later said,

"Is it possible for me not to recollect with joy and pride that the students of the Seminary took no insignificant part in the freedom's fight—two of them becoming martyrs of the '42 upsurge. Deplorable excesses and transgressions there did occur in these struggles. But on the whole the students were true to the spirit and tradition of their Alma Mater. Most of the students, who suspended studies and joined the "Satyagraha" or Civil Disobedience movement did so with honesty of purpose. We had more than once congratulations from some of the public men that the Seminary supplied the best kind of volunteers—sincere, honest and restrained. The Seminary has always aimed at the building up of character of which self-restraint is an essential element. Yes, our country has attained freedom, but that freedom is to be made fuller, richer and truer by removing all forms of invidious disparity—social and economic. There are strong elements, hostile to the realisation of this freedom, and struggle is afoot. Even young students cannot fight shy of this struggle. They have to face it and take it up in their own spheres—not in an aggressive or coercive way, but in a self-restrained, peaceful and brotherly way, as was Rammohun's method."¹

1. Quoted in S. Roychoudhary, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

In 1957, Kshetra Mohan Poddar became the Headmaster of the School. As already noted, Kshetra Mohan had also joined the Seminary purely out of missionary zeal. His long cherished dream was to become one day the head of this institution of the Brahmo Samaj. When he had been a teacher of the Seminary, he had passed M. A. in English and Diploma in Education.¹ He remained Headmaster of the school till 1962 when he had to discontinue due to an attack of incurable uraemia disease. He suffered terribly for four years and at last in 1966 succumbed to its deadening grip.

His period was also one of tremendous activity and development of the Seminary. Not only the reputation of the school increased but also Kshetra Mohan himself gained a standing of his own in the field of education. He became one of the most recognised teachers Seminar held at Singapur. During his tenure as Headmaster, the number of sections had been increased in the higher classes. However, opening of new sections though certainly meant the increase in the number of students as not only boys but girls were also eager to be admitted in the school, yet in the higher classes the split-up was done to pay more individual attention to students. One section was meant for teaching through Hindi medium and the other was through Bengali medium. However the science classes used to be common. His period also saw the continuance of Seminary as one of the leading schools of the province. How deeply the Brahmo missionary spirit was ingrained in Kshetra Mohan and how profoundly he was attached to the idea of building a strong nation is confirmed by the memorable lines penned by him :

“But if this is true that man maketh the nation, true in the trite old saying that the child is the father of the man. Spoil the child and you spoil the man and quite certainly you spoil the race itself. The value therefore of having

1. K. K. Poddar, op. cit., p. 6.

a child grow fully, physically, mentally, morally, industrially, commercially and even soldierly cannot be exaggerated. It is a fully trained and correctly brought up child who has expected to grow into a man worthy of the nation, and of himself. A strong foundation alone can maintain a beautiful and lasting structure and is an all-roundly trained child that can be the foundation of a strong and prosperous nation. . . . Changed is the time, but the teacher still is the same, moulding the tender mind, developing the intellect of the child and trying to make him a worthy citizen of the new India, that is fast being ushered into existence.”¹

Indeed, under Kshetra Mohan's guidance the Seminary built up youngman, strong—physically, morally and mentally, On his death, *The Indian Nation* commented that he was a “noted educationist who served the cause of education in Bihar for nearly four decades and earned for him the love and respect of all who came in contact with him.”² Another leading daily of Patna, *The Searchlight* remarked, “The late Principal who served the cause of education in Bihar for nearly four decades, endeared the hearts of thousands by his sweet behaviour and amiable temperament. To his credit is the galaxy of reputed scholars and administrators of whom the nation is proud.”³

The Seminary has been fortunate to receive the proper guidance and wise counsels of some eminent personalities who served as president and secretary of Managing Committee. Sivanath Sastri himself served the school as president from 1897 to 1911;⁴ he was succeeded by the leading physician of the city Dr. Asdar Ali Khan, K.B., who chaired the committee meetings from 1912 to 1914. Sir Saiyid Md. Fakhruddin succeeded him and graced the presidential chair from 1915 to 1918.⁵ However

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1. Quoted in K. K. Poddar, op. cit., p. 23-4.
 2. *The Indian Nation*, Patna, 13 April 1966.
 3. *The Searchlight*, Patna, 13 April 1966.
 4. Satis Chandra Chakravarty, op. cit., p. 16.
 5. Ibid.

Dr. Khan had become so intimately attached to the school that he continued to serve it as secretary for a long period from 1915 to 1933.¹ After Sir Saiyid, a chain of persons who earned eminence in the spheres of law and judiciary occupied the chair of the president like Prosanta Kumar Sen, from 1923 to 1931, when he had become a well-known barrister in the country; Justice Khaja Md. Noor (1931-33), Justice Saiyid Fazal Ali (1933-42), Justice Sukhdev Prasad Verma (1943-46) and Justice Syed Jafar Imam (1946-55).² Presently, Mrs. Zohra Ahmed, an esteemed name in the province's political and social welfare circles, and wife of the great scholar of Persian and English the late Dr. Kalimuddin Ahmed, is serving as the president of the school's managing committee. The list of secretaries also contains some eminent names, like barristers W. M. Das (1909-14), B. K. Sen (1935-37), S. M. Gupta (1937-43) and physicians Dr. Bidhan Prasad Mazoomdar (1945-47) and Dr S.M. Ghoshal (1947-60), besides Dr. Asdar Ali Khan.³

The Rammohun Roy Seminary is still continuing its great work under the present principal Shri Kalyan Kumar Poddar, who succeeded his father Kshetra Mohan Poddar in 1962, when the latter had to retire on the grounds of poor health. The unforgettable words which Headmaster Sris Chandra Chakraborty spoke on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Seminary in 1947 sum up the entire story very well:

"The present is not an occasion for us to say whether the school so noble in its origin has been as admirable in its achievements. It is for posterity to estimate the worth or otherwise of its endeavours. For us the present is an occasion for rejoicing and thanksgiving. It is in a spirit of joyous thankfulness that we recount today what an enviable reputation it has enjoyed and what unstinted confidence, friendship and good wishes it has received

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

from all sections of the people during the fifty years of its life in spite of its many shortcomings and pitfalls. In the history of this institution we read the lesson that if any good and noble cause be worth upholding, it is worth striving and sacrificing for. When the founder undertook the arduous work in 1897 all their capital to quote a previous report 'consisted in their devotion to the cause. They were literally without a single pice in their hand or an inch of land in their possession.' The institution in its present status is a monument to the triumph of faith and disinterested service. May God bless the institution and may he enable it to achieve greater success in this age of the land brightened with the dawn of freedom."¹

The Bankipore Girls' High School

In the field of female education also the Brahmos took the lead. Most of the Brahmos by the late nineteenth century put great emphasis upon the education of women. Keshub Chunder Sen, Sivanath Sastri and Ananda Mohan Bose struggled hard to promote education of women. In Patna, Prakash Chandra Roy was very much distressed by the low status of women in Indian society, particularly in Bihar. School education for girls was unthinkable at that time in Bihar. And higher education for them was considered as good as a sacrilege.

The credit for establishing the first girls' school with indigenous effort in Patna can be attributed to a Brahmo. And she was no other person than Aghore Kamini Roy. In 1892, she set up a small school with ten girls at her rented bungalow in a beautiful surrounding at the bank of the Ganges. This bungalow belonged to one Englishman Stephen Boilard. The income of the school was only forty-eight rupees per month. It

1. Sris Chandra Chakraborty, *Fifty Years of Rammohun Roy Seminary 1897-1947*, Golden Jubilee Celebration, Headmaster's Speech, Bankipore, 1947, p. 15.

was run mainly on donations, but the donations were not regularly available. Obviously, the financial strain was acute but Aghore Kamini's was a life absolutely dedicated to the school. She was not ready to give up the struggle in spite of so many hazards. With help and moral support from her husband Prakash Chandra Roy and the local lawyer Guruprasad Sen, she carried on the work. In her ideas and attitude, Aghore Kamini Devi was incredibly ahead of her time. In that age of diehard conservatism, particularly in respect of the status of woman, she fought for the liberation of woman from the age-old bondage in a tradition-bound society. She openly advocated widow-remarriage and inter-caste marriage. She went against the convention of a caste-ridden society when she arranged the marriage of her eldest daughter, Susharbasini, with a young school teacher Brindaban Sur, who belonged to a lower caste. The Roy family had to face social boycott at Patna for this marriage.¹ Prakash Chandra records that Aghore Kamini proceeded on the Brahmo belief that the "God is our father and all men and women are brothers and sisters, enjoying His equal protection and the benevolence of His Will. Every member of the Samaj whether male or female has equal rights."² That men are superior and females are inferior is a wrong conception according to Aghore Kamini. This idea was ingrained in her mind and her life was one of continuous struggle for emancipation of Indian women. The founding of the girls' school at Bankipore was an endeavour with this noble objective in mind.³

The idea of founding a girls' school was motivated by the starting of a boarding house which she has opened at her Bankipore residence on 11 February 1891. She brought two little Brahmo girls' one belonging to a family of Danapur and the other of Mokama. She saw that the two girls though belonging to educated Brahmo families were not getting even primary

1. Sutapa Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

2. Prakash Chandra Roy, *Aghore-Prakash*, p. 141.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

education. As it was not possible for a Brahmo family of ordinary means to send their daughters to Calcutta for education, so Aghore Kamini on her own initiative brought the girls to Bankipore. This led to the setting up of the boarding house and then the establishment of the school. However, she very soon realised that it was a very difficult task. Running and managing a school was not an ordinary household work and they needed proper training. So, encouraged by Prakash Chandra, she decided to join Isabella Thoburn's famous Women's College at Lucknow.¹ She was fairly aged now and was the mother of five children. She created an extremely good impression at the Lucknow College. Finding her an elderly lady, Principal Thoburn paid special attention to her and always insisted upon exempting her from many bindings and obligation. But she never sought concessions and considered herself equal to other students much younger than her. Her devotion to duty and her adherence to all rules and regulations extremely impressed Principal Thoburn, who became very close to her.² At the college, the environment was absolutely alien to her with young Christian and Anglo-Indian girls who dominated the school rolls. But even in such strange environment she carried on her studies and learnt not only the Kinder-garten system, But also gained a fairly good command over English and Hindi.³

Finance was not the only problem of the Bankipore School. There were numerous other difficulties which are unimaginable in the present day context. Aghore Kamini enthusiastically visited the houses of prominent Brahmos and Bengalis in search of donation which was not always happily forthcoming. The greatest difficulty was the collection of girl students. She moved from door to door in search of girl students and in most of the houses she obtained rebuke instead of welcome, yet, she was firm in her resolution. She used to visit the families who

1. Ibid., p. 90.

2. Ibid., pp. 92-3.

3. Ibid.

had little girls. She made friends with the mothers and gradually convinced them of the need for girls' education. Gradually, this process of socialisation yielded result. Many mothers agreed to send their girls to her school. This house-visit and work of persuasion was one of the items in her daily schedule. Some houses had to be visited numerous times and it needed a lot of patience and tolerance to do such work.¹ Some parents agreed to send their daughters on the condition that girls will be taught more of cooking than the three 'R's. Taking into consideration the social conservatism, Prakash Chandra also suggested to her to lay more emphasis on cooking. But Aghore Kamini did not yield to this pressure too. She replied, "What is there in cooking? I can teach the girls cooking in fifteen days. But what is needed more is the knowledge of arithmetic, geography and hygiene which would enlighten them and free them from permanent habitation in the kitchen."² Indeed, these were the words coming from a Brahmo reformer of the late nineteenth century. It not only exuded the reformist zeal but also reflected the rebellious character of the Brahmo struggle against traditionalism. Education of girls was not all a likable proposition in the contemporary Bihari society. The age-old traditionalism granting women an inferior status and confining them within the house was too rigidly based to be shaken. There had also been a shortage of teachers and this meant extremely heavy work for her.

The house along with the Roy family and children came to be called "Paribar" that is, family. She taught in the afternoon after heavy family work and spent the evening in looking after the records and files regarding the school management.³ Prakash Chandra often expressed surprise how she could manage so much of work. He believed that all human beings possess inexhaustible source of energy and therefore Aghore

1. Ibid., p. 145.

2. Ibid., p. 144.

3. Ibid., p. 143.

Kamini too as a sincere individual must be capable of doing a great work. By March 1892, fifteen Bihari girls also attended the school. Girls also came from outside the province. Besides Prakash Chandra and Guruprasad, two very sincere Brahmo missionaries Amritlal Bose and Brajagopal Niyogi helped her in various ways.

The subjects taught were arithmetic, geography and language. But Aghore Kamini had one problem. There was no teacher available to teach geography. She too did not have geography in her college course at Lucknow. Therefore she tried to get over the problem herself. Prakash Chandra, who humorously called himself her 'Pardhan Mantri' or chief adviser, suggested her some readings on geography. She collected some books and did serious reading. After acquainting herself well with the subject she taught the girls very well.¹ She further improved her teaching ability by reading books other than her own subjects. Prayer and physical exercise had also been in the daily routine. She got so involved with the girls that during tiffin break she used to play with the girls and taught them several games. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's lyric 'Bande—Matram' was often sung in the prayer. She was able to give her love and affection to the girls and she greatly endeared herself to the girls. They regarded her as their mother and called her 'Maijee'.² The very utterance of the word used to fill the hearts of children with reverence.³ She attended the school and took classes even when she was ill. Often she went without eating as the food could not be prepared in time. She set such a good example of regularity and punctuality that other teachers also rarely remained absent and worked with full devotion in spite of the poor salary.⁴ The daily routine of Aghore Kamini gives an indication of her activities and engagements throughout the day. Her day began with prayer and sermons

1. Ibid., p. 144.

2. Ibid., p. 145.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 144.

very early in the morning. Then she looked after her children and the school kids, who used to reside with her in an adjoining boarding house. After completing their bath and breakfast she used to prepare for the school and simultaneously arranged for Prakash Chandra's departure to office. She remained engaged in school activities till 3 o'clock, with a lunch break between twelve o'clock and one in the afternoon. During this time attention was paid to the education of the children. After the school she got engaged in various activities connected with the children; for example, stitching their clothes, giving the dirty linen to the washerman, making quilt and shoes for them and so on. In the evening the children were helped in preparation of their lessons. Another compulsory involvement in the evening was attending on the sick and the diseased ones. This spirit of caring for the sick was an important quality of her character. In the holidays and Sundays an additional work during the evening was meeting friends and visiting some Brahmo as well as non-Brahmo families. She was not free even after dinner. She made estimates of the day's expenses and recorded other financial accounts, like payment of salary to the teachers and so on. So the entire day kept her engaged in the activities concerning the school.

One Sindhi gentleman Hiranand Jethwani was so impressed by the school that he brought his two daughters from far away Sind and put them in Aghore Kamini's care. *The Indian Spectator*, the leading Calcutta newspaper reported on 2 April 1893:—

"By far the most notable institution, however, at Bankipore, is an unpretentious Boarding House, managed by a Brahmo lady and her two daughters. Mrs. Prakash Chandra Rai is the wife of a gentleman who holds a respectable government appointment, and who is in well-to-do circumstances. At the age of 35 she and her husband took the vow of Brahmacharya, and both have religiously observed it uptodate. With her husband's full consent, Mrs. Rai (Perhaps I should spell, 'Ray') went with

her two daughters to Lucknow to study at Miss Thoburn's Institution there. One of the daughters is now 24, the other is much younger. The elder is married, but continues to live with her parents, and to help them in their beneficent works. The younger girl is a pearl. She is unmarried, and looks after the children in the Boarding House with a little mother's care; and sets there the example of true sisterly love and self-sacrifice. Mrs. Ray speaks English fluently, and is well-read.

Early in the morning the children in her home offer their prayers in their own simple way, for no set prayers are used, and no compulsion is put upon their tender conscience. Each of the elder boarders is in charge of one or two of the younger, and each keeps a small diary in which she notes down every day her failings and blackshidings if any. The boarders attend the female school conducted under Mrs. Ray's supervision, and are helped in their studies at home by her and her daughters. The whole cost of education and boarding amounts to Rs. 7/- and odd per month. The children look bright and lively and the lesson of purity, self-help and self-sacrifice, taught to them by example and precept, are likely to have an enduring influence on their after life. The Boarding is not kept for profit, indeed, the amount charged to the boarders is much less than the actual cost. The deficit is made up by Mr. Ray who takes the deepest interest in the work of his wife and daughters."¹

This is indeed a moving picture of a family fully devoted to the cause of education and upliftment. As year passed on, the struggle also increased. Finance proved to be the greatest hurdle. The maintenance of the boarding house, education of children and their caring during illness entailed a lot of expenditure. But she never gave up the

1. *The Indian Spectator*, 2 April 1893.

hope and carried on with the school. She often used to forego her one time meal in order to feed the kids.¹ Prakash Chandra often mentioned about the financial crisis in managing the school. But he was scolded by Aghore Kamini, "Why do you often complain about the lack of money? It reflects lack of faith in God's work."²

So with lot of strain and stress the girls' school continued. A favourite song of Aghore Kamini had been Rabindranath Tagore's :

"Tomaro Pataka jare dao,
Tare bahibare dao shakati."

Undoubtedly, she carried the banner of female emancipation with tremendous strength bestowed upon her by the blessings of God.

By 1896, the school became so well-known that the then Chief Secretary, William Bolten, came to visit it. He was highly impressed by the school. He went straight to Aghore Kamini and said, "I am very pleased to see the school. In England this sort of work is generally done by unmarried or widowed women. How could you manage to do this with family and children?"³ Immediately he ordered the liberal sanction of grants. He also proposed the government takeover of the school, subject to the approval of the Managing Committee. This marked the end of the tremendous financial crisis the school was facing.

The struggle against tradition and convention reflected another aspect of the problem. Even if the financial crisis ended, the element of social resistance still continued. At every

1. Prakash Chandra Roy, op. cit., p. 162.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 199.

step Aghore Kamini and Prakash Chandra had to confront opposition of the orthodox religious elites, even for trivial matters. Once, for example, a storm of protest was raised when a girl appeared on the stage and presented a recitation.¹ However, Aghore Kamini remained unperturbed. She evinced the Brahmo character of struggling against the old and traditional order. She wrote in her diary, "However strong the opposition is I am not going to give up my struggle. This is my pledge."² This indeed reflected the truly rebellious character of Aghore Kamini.

The school's Managing Committee decided to hand over the school to the government in March, 1896. This was done mainly to avoid the financial problems the school was facing during private control. By a strange coincidence, the government decided to comply with the request of the Managing Committee and after a few days Aghore Kamini Devi passed away. Her diary records, on 31 March 1896, "Today the Managing Committee of the school has decided to hand over the school to the government. When the school was started there had been only five girls in the list. I depended on prayers to the Almighty. Owing to the prayers the school has forty girls today. Some new teachers have joined in and we are on the verge of retirement. Now the school has a lot of money, it is now rich."³ This proves that by March 1896, the school was in a favourable financial position. This was all the result of her untiring effort. The lamp of learning that she lighted continues to illuminate thousands of homes.

But the government did not take over the control of the school immediately. In fact, it took several years for the government to take control of the school. During this period, the school was managed mainly due to the efforts of Prakash Chandra Roy. It was he who called upon a devoted Brahmo

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1. Ibid.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.

Samaj member Brajagopal Niyogi to take charge as the Headmaster of the school and superintendent of the boarding house.

Prakash Chandra was the master as well as the mentor of Brajagopal. Therefore, on his request, the latter, who was then staying at Gaya and involved with the Samaj activities of the Gaya Brahmo Samaj, came to Patna in February 1892.¹ It was till then managed by Bidhan Mandali. On Prakash Chandra's request, Brajagopal came from Gaya to manage the school. At that time, the school was located at the Sabjibagh area across the present Ashoke Rajpath, very close to the Civil Court at Adalat. It was, in fact, located in the compound of the Adalat. The school itself had a compound. The school had a strong one-storeyed pucca building. The quarters of the Principal was located in one corner of the compound. Brajagopal stayed here for four years. He was a great fighter for the cause of female education. The experiences he gained and the efforts he made for the proper education of women and girls were later applied by him in the foundation of Calcutta's famous Victoria Institution, which became the symbol of women's march towards freedom and progress in the early twentieth century Bengal. Under his supervision the school showed improvement and underwent expansion. It is recorded that mainly the girls from middle class Bengali families and some rich Bihari families attended the school because there was no other girls' school except St. Joseph's Convent which mainly the girls of British and European families attended.²

However, he continued Aghore Kamini Devi's efforts to attract girls in larger number from Bihari families.³ It bore fruit and the number of girls coming from Bihari families gradually increased. For encouraging female education among

1. Niranjan Niyogi, *Sadhan O, Seva : Braja Gopal Niyogir Jiban Alekhya*, pp. 64-5.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Bihari girls, Brajagopal also used Hindi as the medium of instruction. However, female education was not yet encouraged in the conservative Bihari families. Of course, Brajagopal did not give up the efforts and on account of his genuine involvement, the number of girls on the school rolls was increasing, and in this way the Bankipore Girls' School played a pioneering role in the sphere of female education in Bihar.

Though the formal connection with the Brahmo Samaj was ended with the government take-over, the informal connection continued till the middle of the twentieth century. In the first three decades of the present century more than half of the teachers of the school were Brahmos. Some lady teachers also came from Bengal. Several Brahmo ladies worked with tremendous devotion and unceasing energy to make it a great institution of learning for women. Prominent among these ladies were Banolata Dey, Muktikana Bose, Amarabala Pal, Shobhana Niyogi, Sushama Sen Gupta and Shova Das. Banolata Dey, served as the Lady Principal of the school for a long time and under her leadership the school attained remarkable progress. Her principalship was crucial because that witnessed the gradual transformation of the school as a top-ranking high school for girls. Presently, the school with its majestic building opposite Golghar on the beautiful bank of the Ganges is definitely the largest girls' school in the state.

The Rabindra Balika Vidyalaya

The Balika Vidyalaya was the second girls' school to be founded in the city by the Brahmos. It started much later than the two previously mentioned schools. While the Rammohun Roy Seminary and Bankipore Girls' High School came into existence in the nineteenth century, the Balika Vidyalaya was started in 1928. Inspired by the renascent spirit of female emancipation and progress through education, the wife of Professor Niranjana Niyogi, Shrimati Shantwana Devi, along with a non-Brahmo lady Anusuya Das Gupta, the wife of Haralal Das Gupta of the famous 'Ganga-Villa' (of the present

Annie Besant Road) started the school.¹ Moreover, the need was felt for a girls' school and the Brahmo Samaj of Patna wanted to set up a school on its own, particularly after the success of the Seminary and the Bankipore Girls' School. Considering all the prevalent factors, it was thought that in the first instance it could establish a primary school. It began purely as an informal affair. These two ladies began to gather girls from their locality and taught them reading, writing and arithmetic in their homely atmosphere. It was found that the number of girls was increasing. The number of Bihari girls was also remarkable, because by this time several families were shaking off the conservatism regarding female education. The main problem was of accommodation. And it was solved by the benevolence of the great Roy family. A portion of the house of Prakash Chandra Roy, the 'Aghore Paribar' on the Khazanchi Road was offered and accepted, thus heralding the further contribution of the Roy family for the cause of education. The sons of Prakash Chandra not only provided accommodation to the school but also extended financial assistance from time to time.² The school that came into existence on 7 December 1930 was named the Bankipore Balika Vidyalaya.³ The members of the first Managing Committee of the Vidyalaya was appointed by the Bankipore Brahmo Samaj in 1930. The list of members included some prominent Brahmos and important luminaries in the field of education and administration like Devendra Nath Sen, Principal, B.N. College, A. T. Mukherjee, Professor of Physics, Science College, H. D. Chatterjee, Assistant Commissioner of income-Tax Mrs. H. D. Chatterjee Rai Bahadur Bechu Narayan, Head Master, Patna Collegiate School, Banalata Dey, Lady Principal, Bankipore Girls' High School, Niranjan Niyogi, Professor of English, Patna College, and Rai Bahadur B. P. Mazoomdar, Deputy Director of Public Health, Bihar.⁴ Principal D. N. Sen was the

1. Ibid., p. 79.

2. Ibid., p. 80.

3. Rabindra Balika Vidyalaya, Secretary's Report, 1 January 1964, p. 1,

4. Ibid.,

President and Professor A. T. Mukherjee, the Secretary.

The school's early progress was disturbed by the disastrous Bihar earthquake of 1934. A part of the Khazanchi Road house collapsed and a new accommodation had to be found out. After much difficulty, a rented house was secured at Dariapur near Patna Collegiate School, and the school, was shifted there. Between 1934 and 1945 the school developed first from a primary into a middle school.¹ As a result, shortage of space became the major problem. This was solved by shifting the primary section of the school to Bankipore Brahmo Mandir, while the upper classes continued at the Dariapur house. During this period, the school's Managing Committee included such prominent townsmen as Deewan Bahadur Radha Krishna Jalan and Sarju Prasad who later become the Chief Justice of a High Court. Jyoti Kundu, a young Brahmo lawyer, joined as Secretary of the committee in 1943 and held that position till his death in 1977.

In 1944, the school sent up the first batch of candidates for matriculation examination. It was followed by the government recognition of the Balika Vidyalaya in 1945.² The Bihar Government's Education Department authorities had been impressed by the progress of the school, and therefore the recognition was granted. By now all doubts as regards the stability of the school were removed. Thus, the untiring efforts of the early Brahmos were crowned with success. Now, the Samaj thought of looking into the problem of building an accommodation. The dilapidated building at Dariapur was felt to be unfit for the accommodation of hundreds of girls studying in the middle and high school sections. So the Managing Committee looked for suitable accommodation. However, land could not be acquired immediately. The problem was temporarily solved when the government, recognising the service rendered by the school, sanctioned a grant of Rs. 500/-

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p. 2.

per month as house rent. Since then the Education Department continued to pay Rs. 6,000/- every year till the school owned a building. The school might not have survived without this financial help from the government. In 1952, the school moved to a bigger house in Kadamkuan, near the present Buddha Murti Golambar, and all the classes from the primary to the high school sections were accommodated in that building. With the change of location, the name of the school was altered to Kadamkuan Balika Vidyalaya. The building of Kadamkuan near the present Buddha Murti, where the school is housed, is a spacious one. In the period 1958-63, the amount of rent for it was Rs. 700/- per month. Of this, Rs. 500/- per month was provided by the State Government. In 1963, the number of students reached 500.¹

In 1958, due to pressure on space once again, and the government's decision that high school classes must be separated from primary and middle sections, only the upper four classes were kept in the Kadamkuan building and classes—VII and below were shifted to a building at Bari Road. So in fact, two separate schools under two different Managing Committees were run by the Samaj since 1958—the Balika Vidyalaya High school and the Balika Vidyalaya Middle School.

The High School at Kadamkuan was doing well during the early years, but in the period 1960-61 it fell under a spell of bad omen. The commercial aspect of running a school crept into the minds of some individuals of the Managing Committee who in collaboration with some clerical staff of the school, took advantage of the tolerant attitude of the Brahmo Samaj members, and the liberal disposition of the Brahmo Lady Principal, Sudhakana Bose. These non-Brahmo individuals motivated by lust for money and influence tried to convert the school into a personal position. For some time it appeared that the Brahmo missionary spirit and the spiritual zeal as symbolised by the school would be crushed by the commercial

1. Ibid., p. 3,

interest of a few self-seeking individuals. This can be regarded as a period of storm and stress in the history of this institution of learning. These individuals misinterpreted the constitution of the school and even questioned the control of the school by the Brahmo Samaj. The matter reached to such an unpleasant extent that it had to be taken to the High Court. The court in its judgement upheld that the Balika Vidyalaya was an institution established and administered by the Brahmo Samaj. The judgement was a matter of jubilation for the Brahmo Samaj and a personal triumph for the local Brahmo physician Dr. Saradindu Mohan Ghoshal. With tireless effort, indomitable spirit and unbounding determination, Dr. Ghoshal pursued the matter and with immensely sincere assistance of two local Brahmo lawyers, Jyoti Kundu and Dipendranath Sircar (popularly known as Montu Sircar), achieved an outstanding victory. The Samaj also remembers with gratitude the help it received from the eminent barrister P. R. Das.

After the school's restoration to the Brahmo Samaj in 1961, it continued its progress under a Managing Committee with a new zeal and vigour. Dr. S.M. Ghoshal continued to be the inspiring force and the guiding spirit. That was also the year of Rabindra Nath Tagore's birth centenary. So the Samaj decided on renaming the school as Rabindra Balika Vidyalaya,¹ a commendable decision indeed to honour the memory of one of the greatest sons of the nation. Kishori Sinha,² the wife of the then Education Minister, Satyendra Narain Sinha, became the President of the school's new Managing Committee. This was indeed a fruitful happening. The Education Minister's genuine regards for Dr. Ghoshal and his wife's involvement with the school inspired him to devote his time and attention towards the development of the school. Moreover, he was also concerned with the progress of female education in the province. His help in the allotment of land and construction of building can never be overestimated. The Education Department granted

1. Ibid., p. 3.

2. Ibid,

Rs. 40,000/- for the purchase of land. A great thing happened when Ramchandra Sinha, Chairman, Patna Improvement Trust, allotted to the Samaj the only space available in the planned and modern residential colony, Rajendranagar, a plot of 34 kathas of land. For the school, the greatest problem was solved. S.N. Sinha advised the Managing Committee to take up construction of the new school building. He insisted that time and money should not be wasted on a function for laying the foundation stone and that the construction work should start as early as possible.¹

But the immediate problem was one of finance. A considerable sum of money was needed for the building construction. After paying Rs. 20,000/- (twenty thousand) toward the price of the land, only a small balance was left in the building fund.² The amount was too meagre for starting the construction work. Therefore, the Brahmo Samaj of Patna launched a fund raising campaign in 1962-63. Earlier in 1961, an appeal was made to Dr. B.C. Roy, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, for donation. Dr. Roy was born at Patna and cherished the memories of the early years he spent here. On learning of the condition of the school and its possibilities, he sanctioned a grant of Rs. 25,000/- towards the building of a school from his state government.³ This generous grant came as a Godsend to the institution. With this amount as a fresh nucleus, the building fund started growing. Money came from several sources, from the students of the school, and from the Brahmo Samajis throughout India. The Managing Committee decided not to approach the State Government for financial help until it had raised a substantial amount through donations. An idea of the receipts of the money relating to the building till the end of December 1963 can be gained from the following records:⁴

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., (School file), p. 4.

4. Ibid.

5. From the Report of the Patna Brahmo Samaj, 1964.

1. Subscriptions collected from the students from 1950 to 1963 Rs. 40,000/-
 2. Donation from Bengal Government Rs. 24,000/-
 3. Donation from Brahmo Samaj Rs. 10,000/-
 4. Donation from Public Rs. 15,000/-
 5. Matching grant from Bihar Government (received and promised) Rs. 90,000/-
- Rs. 1,80,000/-

In the construction of the school building which started on 26 May 1963, Dr. S. M. Ghoshal played the most active role. The building took about seven months to complete due to the uninterrupted absorption of Dr. Ghoshal in the construction. The ground floor was fully completed, but the first floor remained half complete. A major portion of the plot was kept vacant for the provision of playground and an open air stage for annual functions. Dr. Ghoshal's deep involvement with the building construction was reminiscent of Sris Chandra Chakravarty's involvement with the construction of the Seminary building about thirty two-years ago. He spent hours and hours every day at the construction site as if he was there to observe the laying of each and every brick that gave him immeasurable pleasure. When the building was constructed and got ready for inauguration he was overwhelmed with joy and remarked with a voice choked with emotion, 'This would perhaps be recorded as the greatest achievement of the Brama Samaj in the second half of the twentieth century, not only in Bihar but throughout India.¹ The comment has definite historical validity considering the fact that in the second half of the

1. Recorded from the oral interview of Ashish Kumar Banerjee and K.K. Poddar, the two leading Brahmos of Patna.

present century the Samaj cannot be proud of erecting such a huge permanent structure anywhere in the nation.

The inauguration ceremony of the Rabindra Balika Vidyalaya building, held on the New Years day of 1964, was indeed a memorable occasion for the Patna Brahmo Samaj. It was a fitting tribute to the help provided by S. N. Sinha, the then Education Minister, that he was requested to open the building. The inauguration marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the educational institution. An extremely happy coincidence was the assumption of principalship by Shova Das. She served continuously for ten years, from 1964 to 1974 as the Lady Principal of the school and then served as the Rector till her death in 1980. Inspired by a typical Brahmo zeal, she provided the right type of leadership and guidance needed for the development of the school. The administrative section, which had been neglected till now, was properly developed, the teaching staff was gradually expanded, the sporting and recreational facilities for girls were provided and in general, the morale of the school improved. The percentage of success at the Bihar Secondary School Examination also showed tremendous improvement. The noteworthy point is that the building was able to accommodate both the high school and middle school sections. This arrangement brought considerable economy.

The constitution of the school indicates that the object of the Rabindra Balika Vidyalaya is to impart secular education to the girls irrespective of caste, community or religion, and to instil in them the ideals of courage, truth and tolerance in keeping with the traditions of Indian womanhood. There is no doubt that the school attained its objective when we came to know that girls from all classes, castes, creeds and communities attend it for the sake of education. The school is now one of the best girls' schools in the province and the large rush for admission every year signify a tribute to the dedication and the missionary spirit of the local Brahmos for the cause of education. The teachers also belong to all castes and communities. There is absolutely no effort to impose Brahmo personalities on

the school but the noble Brahmo ideals are always striven for. At its inaugural function in 1964, the Secretary Jyoti Kundu concluded in his report :—

“Those responsible for the conduct of the school are not oblivious of their imperfections with regard to its working. But without feeling discouraged they will continue to strive, being sustained by the faith that ‘our sincere endeavours are acceptable to that Being who beholds in secret and compensates openly’, as was so nobly expressed by that great countryman of ours, I mean, Raja Rammohun Roy.”¹

The Aghore Prakash Shishu Sadan

Another remarkable Brahmo contribution in the city's educational sphere is the Aghore Prakash Shishu Sadan, a school for girls and boys with primary and middle sections. The school is housed at the ‘Aghore-Paribar’ building of the Khazanchi Road. Thus it stands as a tribute to the memories of that great Brahmo couple, Prakash Chandra Roy and Aghore Kamini Devi. The school was set up by a Brahmo lady Sushama Sen Gupta, the daughter of Mahendralal Sen Gupta, who had made a lasting contribution by constructing the building of Rammohun Roy Seminary. Sushama inherited the strong will and power of work from her father. She and her brother Dr. Subinoy Sen Gupta had plans to set up a school and nursing home after the latter would return home completing his higher education in Surgery in England. Dr. Sen Gupta returned to India after successfully completing his F.R.C.S. course. But while in England he was attacked by nephritis, and on return to India, passed away within a few months in 1948.

This came as an unbearable shock to Sushama, but it strengthened her determination to go along with the plan of

1. Quoted in the Secretary's, Report, 1964.

starting the school for needy and destitute children. She realised that it would be the most touching memorial to her beloved brother Subinoy. She had to raise donations and monthly subscriptions from several persons and institutions. In this respect, the doctors and the teachers of the Patna Medical College and Hospital had been most generous. The tragic demise of Subinoy left extremely sympathetic feeling among his friends and teachers at the Patna Medical College. Among them, Dr. Dukhan Ram, the famous eye surgeon and Arya Samaj leader and Dr. Saradindu Mohan Ghoshal had been extremely helpful.

As the mansion and the premises of 'Aghore Paribar' carried the memory of the glorious old days of Brahmo activities at Patna, it was quite obvious that Dr. B.C. Roy, being the only surviving son of Prakash Chandra and Aghore Kamini, and himself a patron of education would like the house to become a seat of education. It was this house where Bidhan Chandra spent his childhood and youth and completed his graduation from Patna College. He decided, in consultation with Sukumar Roy,¹ the well-known Calcutta business magnet and son of Prakash Chandra's eldest son Subodh Chandra Roy, and Renu Chakravarty,² the daughter of Prakash Chandra's second son, Sadhan Chandra Roy, to create a board of trustees to look after the building. They also entered into a Trust Deed in which it was clearly stated that the building would be under the overall control of Sushama Sen Gupta till her death. Sukumar Roy was the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and Renu Chakravarty, Saradindu Mohan Ghoshal and Ganga Saran Sinha³ were the other trustees.

1. He earned good reputation in Calcutta's business circle and even served as President of Bengal Chamber of Commerce. He passed away in 1977.
2. She had been an active member of the Communist Party of India in the fifties and sixties and was also a member of the Lok Sabha on a C.P.I. ticket from West Bengal.
3. A socialist leader, an ardent follower of Jai Prakash Narayan, and also served as a Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha).

The control over the building gave Sushama Sen Gupta a great impetus, as it solved the problem of accommodation and gave her a legal sanction to set up a school, right in the 'Aghore Paribar' building. Her dreams came true when the school came into being. In December 1949, the inaugural function was presided over by Dr. Basudeo Narayan, the Principal of Patna Medical College and later the Vice-Chancellor of Patna University. The inaugural function was graced by the presence of many prominent citizens of the city, most of whom evinced great interest in helping the development of the school. Many of them became regular contributors to the school Management Fund. A Managing Committee was also set up with a local physician Dr. A.K. Barat as Secretary and Anisa Imam as President.

The first few years saw tremendous financial crisis. Contributions from individuals did not prove sufficient. For this reason classes were limited only upto standard III. However, within a short time the school gained great reputation as a pre-school centre. Sushama Sen Gupta was experienced in Montessori teaching, which she had learnt from Hemlata Sarkar, the daughter of Sivanath Sastri, while she was working in a Brāhmo Samaj school at Darjeeling where Hemlata Devi was the Headmistress. Hemlata Devi's dedication and missionary spirit had a great impact on young Sushama. When the school started functioning she devoted all her time and energy to its proper development. She collected funds from various sources in order to tide over the financial crisis. Father Lois of the Holy Family Church of Patna had been very kind. He was instrumental in providing some help from some foreign Christian organisations. With tireless effort and consistent persuasion Sushama Devi was able to receive annual grants from the State Government. It was indeed amazing to see her moving in the sweltering heat of May, in the rainy days of August, as well as in the biting cold of December-January, going to various places to raise funds, exploring all the possible sources and trying to find new ones. The Shishu Sadan became her only absoption. "She thought of it in the day and dreamt of it during

the night," said one of the teachers of the school.¹ She often used to comment, "as the school is set up, it has to continue." Dr. B.C.Roy also provided help in several ways. With the help and encouragement of so many individuals and with her deep devotion, the school was able to survive. Two prominent ladies had been of great help. One was Lakshmi Menon, who had held important government portfolios including the deputy leadership of the Indian delegation to the United Nations Organisation. The other lady was Durgabai Deshmukh, the then Chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board. These two prominent personalities helped in providing funds and facilities for the school from various places. It was through their effort that she even met Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India, in 1959. The Prime Minister was highly impressed by her devotion to children's education and made a grant of Rs. 5,000/—for the development of the school. Another prominent personality to show great interest in the school was Dr. Zakir Hussain. Himself an outstanding educationist, he came to know about Shishu Sadan during his governorship in Bihar. He once came as the chief guest in the prize distribution function of the school. He was so impressed that he provided grants from the governor's fund. He continued to take interest in the school even when he was the President of India. What impressed Dr. Hussain most about the school was the congregation of little children from all castes, creeds, classes and communities, and each child receiving the full attention of Sushama Devi, whom they called 'Bandhu'. From then onwards, Dr. Hussain continued his contact with the school and also provided financial assistance from the governor's fund. This interest was maintained by Dr. Hussain even when he graced the chair of the President of India.²

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1. Interview with Bina Das, a teacher of the school.
 2. These informations have been collected from the old files of the school and from oral interviews of Vidyawati Gupta, Lady Principal, and Uma Mazumdar and Shariti Mitra, the two seniormost teachers of the school.

The school was limited only to Class III in the beginning. In fact, in the earlier stage it met only on Sundays, where lessons on Brahmo ideals, health and hygiene and several crafts were taught to the little boys and girls, who came from families of the locality belonging to all classes, castes and communities. Gradually, Sushama Sen Gupta realised that mere conduct of Sunday school would not serve the purpose for which the school was launched. Therefore, she decided to run a regular school for the children in the locality. So the regular children's school began to be conducted, while the Sunday School continued as before. In course of time the Sunday School was completely given up and whatever subjects and crafts had been taught in the Sunday School were introduced in the regular day school. The Shishu Sadan became very popular as a preparatory school. Many working parents put their children here during their office hours. In that sense it was among the early pre-schools started in the city. At present there has been a mushroom growth of pre-schools in various parts of the city, but the way was shown by Sushama Devi. Within a short time, the school got so much popularity that on account of pressure from the locality Sushama Devi had to introduce regular classes upto standard V. The remarkable point is when the regular classes began in 1953 one of her major objectives was to recruit children from Harijan and backward families. For this purpose she visited the houses of the sweepers and scavengers as well as poor Yadavs and Kahars of the locality. She made it her mission to contribute in her little way for the uplift of the downtrodden and the weaker sections of the society. Fortunately enough, the response was encouraging and a fair number of children from the lower classes and castes gathered in the school. She provided for a big playground in the school and it was really inspiring to see kids from all castes, classes and communities doing their lessons together, playing together and sharing the joys of life under the tender care and watchful eyes of the Bandhu. She also paid attention to the extra-curricular activities in the school. A big concrete stage was constructed where the children presented recitation, dance and drama. The annual fair called the 'Varshik Mela' and the annual prize distribution functions of Shishu Sadan came to be recognised as major

events in that locality. In the annual fair, the children used to sell the large variety of handicrafts made by them. They also, along with the school teachers, opened tea and snack stalls in the fair. It still continues to be an exceedingly attractive event. The prize distribution function helped the children develop their extra-curricular activities. The school proved to be so successful that there was further pressure for upgrading and she had to upgrade it upto standard VII. It is still continuing upto this standard.

In the recruitment of teachers also Sushama Devi showed humanitarianism. While she kept ability and the patience to tackle the children as essential qualifications, she also put the financial condition of the teachers as a criteria. As a result girls belonging to poor families got teaching assignments in the school. She trained them sincerely and built them up into dedicated teachers. In this way also she helped several families. The school made gradual progress due to her dedication and the teachers' sincerity. The financial condition of the teachers really improved when new pay-scales were implemented according to the Kothari Commission recommendation. The Shishu Sadan received a great shock with the passing away of Sushama Sen Gupta on 4 June 1976. There arose some uncertainty about the continuance of the school after this. However, the gloom of uncertainty was removed and things brightened up when Sukumar Roy and Renu Chakravorty decided not to sell their ancestral house and land at Khazanchi Road, but to let the school continue to serve the needs of the community. The school is a living symbol of the dedication of a Brahmo lady who withstood all storms and stress in order to devote herself to a noble cause. At present, the number of students is 700, and there is eagerness and interest coming from the Education Department as well as the residents of adjoining localities for the school's upgrading upto matriculation standard. It is certainly going to be upgraded within a year or so as a girls' high school.¹

A big concrete stage was constructed where

¹ This has been reported by Smt. Vidyawati Gupta, the Lady Principal of the school.

This would mean the coming of the third girls' high school in the city under Brahmo sponsorship.

College and University Education

In the sphere of university education too, the Brahmos of Patna made some pioneering effort. The most notable personality in this regard was Devendra Nath Sen. He can be regarded as the father figure of the Bihar National College.¹

Devendranath came from a staunch Brahmo family. It was on the recommendation of Pratap Chunder Mazoomdar, one of the most devoted disciples of Keshub Chunder Sen and a very respected individual in the contemporary educational circle, that Devendranath was appointed in the teaching Staff of the B.N. College. He took the charge of principalship at a very critical period when the very survival of the College appeared to be in doubt. Under such a situation accompanied by financial crisis, Devendranath decided to devote himself to the cause of reviving the college. His long duration of principalship (1900-35) brought a new lease of life to the B.N. College. When he assumed the principalship, the college was run on a small annual budget of Rs. 3600/- only. The situation was critical and the moment was crucial. Devendranath took it as a challenge. The Brahmo missionary spirit and the indomitable courage was very much present in his character. With patience and perseverance, he gradually tided over the crisis, and eventually made the B.N. College a premier institution of learning in the province.

Devendranath Sen also played a noteworthy role in the establishment of the University of Patna. He was a member of

2. The Bihar National College was founded by two brothers, Saligram Singh and Bisheshwar Singh, Zamindars of Kulharia (Shahabad), who were great patrons of higher education in Bihar. It is to this great institution that Bihar "largely owes its educational progress among the poorer middle classes;" see Sachchidanand Sinha, *Some Eminent Bihar Contemporaries*, p. 22., and P.N. Mista and N.K. Jha, op. cit., p. 98.

the Patna University Committee set up by the Lieutenant Governor in February 1930 to draft a scheme for setting up a university at Patna. This had been a powerful committee and he was inducted in his capacity as the Principal of B.N. College.¹ Some other prominent names in the committee were Sachchidanand Sinha, Charles Russell, the then Principal of Patna College, V.H. Jackson and K.S. Caldwell, both Professors at Patna College.²

The Patna University has been benefited by the Brahmo Samaj in several remarkable ways other than Devendra Nath's great role in the revival of the B.N. College. Some top ranking teachers of the Patna University were Brahmos. Niranjan Niyogi was the first non-British teacher to join the Department of English of Patna College. He joined the department in 1907.³ He had completed a brilliant academic career at the University of Calcutta and was one of those young Brahmos, who were inspired with a spirit of service and sacrifice for the cause of education. He served as Professor of English at Patna College for many years and earned great reputation as a teacher. Another Brahmo celebrity in the teaching staff of Patna College was Dr. Subimal Chandra Sarkar. Born in a devoted Brahmo family of Sorisha, near Diamond Harbour in Bengal, he had his schooling in Chittagong (in present Bangladesh) and Contai in Midnapur. His father Suresh Chandra Sarkar, a member of the Bengal Civil Service, built a house 'Upalapatha' in the Brahmo Colony at Barganda, Giridih. A brilliant product of Calcutta University culture from where he obtained M. A. degree in Ancient Indian History he later obtained a Doctor of Philosophy (D. Phil.) degree from the Oxford University in ancient Indian history. This was a rare distinction in those days. He joined the Bihar Education Service and was appointed as Professor of History at

1. S.N. Pandey, op. cit., p. 108.

2. Ibid., p. 109.

3. J.N. Sarkar, B. Prasad & J.C. Jha, *A History of Patna College, Patna*, 1962, pp. 119-122.

Patna College in 1917.¹ His profound erudition in ancient Indian history was confirmed by his D. Phil thesis at Oxford, which was published by the Oxford Press in 1928 with the title *Some Aspects of the Earliest Social History of India : Pre-Buddhist Age*.² Two great Indologists of his time, F.E. Pargiter and M. Winternitz highly praised the work.³ He was one of the early scholars to adopt a scientific and rationalistic approach to the study of Indian history. Perhaps the Brahmo upbringing helped him to develop a rationalist and secular attitude. For this reason the book is highly recommended even at present. He, along with another doyen of Indian history, Sir Jadunath Sarkar, initiated a rich tradition of research in History at the Patna University. His fame as a Professor of History spread far and wide and his classes drew large number of students.⁴ He also earned a reputation as a teacher of medieval and modern Indian history and wrote several scholarly works on the subject. He was not only a very successful teacher and a great scholar but there was hardly any form of college activity with which he did not thoroughly identify himself. Among his notable achievements was the establishment of the Archaeological and Historical Society and Historical Museum in Patna College. The Archaeological and Historical Society was indeed an outstanding contribution. It

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1. Ibid., p. 140.
 2. A reprint of the book has been made by the Janaki Prakashan Patna in 1985.
 3. See the reprint, pp. V-XI.
 4. A large number of persons who attended his classes had been interviewed and all of them gave evidence of the tremendous popularity of his classes, particularly on the Mughal period. Some of them even now carry the mark of great impact left by the scholarly teaching and guidance of Dr. Sarkar, notably Dr. Yogendra Mishra and Dr. B.P. Majumdar, both of whom served as Head of the Department of History, Patna University. Two eminent historians, Prof. S.H. Askari and the late Dr. K.K. Datta, both of whom happened to be his younger colleagues told the author that Dr. Sarkar inspired them to take up research with utmost devotion. Also see the biographical note of Dr. S.C. Sarkar written by Dr. Rajendra Ram in the reprint of Dr. Sarkar's book.

encouraged the spirit of research in historical studies among the postgraduate and honours level students of History in the University. Papers on historical and archaeological topics were presented at the regular meetings of the society. The society also arranged inter-college debates and trips to places of historical interest.¹ It may not be out of place to state that the Historical Society was one of the major factors for the high level of research mindedness in the History Department. The society is still in existence though its activities do not carry that standard of excellence which was evident even a decade ago. Perhaps it has also been caught in the vortex of a general decline in standard and norms evident in every sphere of life and activity in the present days. Dr. Sarkar also served as Principal of Patna College and he eventually retired from Patna College, which became a sort of spiritual abode for him in 1945, after "many years of meritorious service."² It has been observed that he was an institution in the College in his own way and so it was rather difficult to fill up the void he had left behind."³

Another Brahmo teacher of tremendous repute to grace a teaching position in the Patna University was Dr. Saradindu Mohan Ghoshal. He began his career as Lecturer in the Department of Medicine of Prince of Wales Medical College,⁴ and was later promoted as professor and Head of the same department. His reputation, as already mentioned as a physician was spread even to the remotest village of Bihar. In the teaching work too, he demonstrated the same standard of excellence. The days of hardship in childhood and youth inculcated in him a humanitarian spirit and he knew no bounds to help his students. Even after classes, he called students in his clinic, held practicals and asked volumes of questions in his characteristic humorous way. He has been regarded as one of

1. J.N. Sarkar, B. Prasad & J.C. Jha, op. cit., p. 150.

2. Ibid., p. 140.

3. Ibid.

4. It has been named Patna Medical College after Independence.

the most distinguished teachers in the history of the Patna Medical College and many of his students earned a reputation as eminent physicians and child specialists, not only in India but in several parts of the world. Incidentally, another Brahmo physician Dr. Bikashendu Dhar was a brilliant disciple of Dr. Ghoshal and he also graced a teaching position in the Department of Medicine of the Patna Medical College. After some years of service, he later emigrated to the United States and at present occupies the position of the chief physician and director of a prominent medical college and hospital at New York.

Some Brahmos distinguished themselves in teaching in the Science and Arts Faculties of the Patna University. Most prominent name among them is Professor Nalin Kumar Basu who rendered a long service as Professor of Chemistry in the B. N. College. He was also the first youth Welfare Officer of the Patna University, prior to his retirement in 1962. Among the other notable Brahmo teachers, mention must be made of Professor Ashalata Bose who had served for an exceedingly long period as Professor of Economics at Magadh Mahila College and ended up her teaching career with the principalship of the same College, in which capacity she served for three years before her retirement in 1979.

Another distinguished Brahmo scholar in the Patna University was Dr. Ranjita Coondoo. After a brilliant career at Calcutta University which climaxed with the acquisition of M.A. degrees in English and political Science, she joined the Patna University. Later she was promoted as Professor and Head of the Department of English in the Magadh Mahila College. In recognition of her scholarship, she was also asked to engage classes in the postgraduate Department of Political Science of the Patna University. She later obtained a Ph. D. degree in Political Science from the Calcutta University and later capped her outstanding teaching career with a D. Litt. degree in English from the Bhagalpur University. She had the honour of being the first D. Litt. in English from a University in Bihar. She also authored several scholarly works in English and Political

Science. She also wrote *Sishu Sahitya Bhagirath*, an excellent biography of her illustrious grandfather Jogindranath Sarkar, a well-known figure in the realm of children's literature in Bengali. Many other Brahmos have served and are still serving in several faculties and colleges of the Patna University.

The educational activities of the Brahmos in the old town of Bankipore which grew into the city of Patna, have been characterised by some salient features. The most remarkable feature was the genuine dedication of the Brahmos to the cause of education. That dissemination of knowledge would create a better individual, and that the combination of good individuals would bring a better society had been very much ingrained in Brahmo thought. Secondly, they had been so much in love with the cause of education that they were ready to confront all odds for the spread of education. The long chain of strain, suffering, financial problems and social opposition could not stall their endeavour nor could dampen their spirit. Lastly, these Brahmos demonstrated a broad perspective and modern outlook in their educational activities. They demonstrated a grand blend of spirituality, liberalism and rationalism. They studied the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bible on the one hand, and also learnt of Western Philosophy, science and technology on the other. This gave them progressive attitude and scientific thinking.

THE BRAHMO SAMAJ'S EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN OTHER DISTRICTS

"Religion is not a social fashion. It is intimately associated with the all-round development of man. If we accept this as a dictum, then we have got to make provision for imparting true religious instructions to our children. For this, suitable opportunities and environments are essential."

—Rabindranath Tagore
(Quoted from his essay
entitled "Religious
Education.")

"That education which does not bring any spiritual enlightenment is no education at all. It may enable us to earn our livelihood, nothing else. Do we want only clerks? Or do we not want seekers after truth who will rescue society from its present predicament and deliver us from the slough

of despond in which most of us are floundering? Our children have curiosity, eagerness, energy and inspiration. All that they require is a spiritual orientation. I am convinced that proper education is the vital necessity of the day."

—Sudhi Ranjan Das

*(From Presidential speech at 68th
All-India Brahmo Conference,
Patna, 1958).*

Undoubtedly, the Brahmos bequeathed a lasting and glorious legacy in the sphere of education in Patna. What the Brahmos accomplished with tremendous sacrifice and genuine dedication at Patna are benefiting the later generations in the province. But equally important is the fact that the Brahmo educational attainments inspired the educational activities of the other branches of the Samaj at several places of the province. A noticeable feature of the educational activities of the Brahmos in other districts of Bihar is that though they were genuine and dedicated, they could not be as widespread as in Patna. Of course, many of these institutions are still continuing with much wider enrollment. For convenience, the discussion is being taken up region-wise. The Chhotanagpur Division would be taken up first, and it would be followed by other divisions where the educational activities of the Brahmos left a mark of permanence.

After Patna, it was the Chhotanagpur area where the contribution of the Brahmos for the spread of education has been most remarkable. The Brahmos worked hard at Giridih, Hazaribagh and Ranchi for the growth of education. Of all the places at Chhotanagpur Division, the Brahmos of Giridih made the greatest contribution towards the promotion of education. They set up and managed schools for both boys and girls in the town which proved to be useful for the neighbouring areas too, as students came from distant places.

Giridih High School

The Brahmo Samaj of Giridih established a high school for boys in 1887.¹ It came into existence after the amalgamation of Bengali medium primary school at Pachamba and an English medium middle school at Giridih. The middle school was run by a Brahmo gentleman Purnananda Mitra. In the amalgamation of the schools and thus setting up of boy's high school, the leading role was played by Tinkori Basu and Purnananda Mitra. Very soon land was donated by the local authorities for constructing the school building. Tinkori Basu again rendered the most active service in the construction of the school building. Dharanidhar Banerjee was the first Headmaster of the school.² The school showed remarkable improvement under his guidance. As it was the only high school for boys at Giridih and neighbouring areas, it never faced any problem of getting students. In the beginning, out of 60 students, 40 were from Bengali families.³

Like other Brahmo sponsored schools, this school also faced financial difficulties. It often passed through phases of financial strain right from its birth to 1913. The government made annual grants, but that was not sufficient for running the school. Dharnidhar Banerjee was able to run the school through donations raised from Brahmo and non-Brahmo individuals. He also constantly put pressure upon the Education Department of the government to raise the amount of annual grant. In the long run his effort was crowned with success and in 1910 the government raised the amount of grant which went a long way in solving the financial problem of the school.

The school moved ahead in spite of several difficulties. The real development of the school began with the coming of

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1. Saroj Kumar De and Sharadindu Chhatteropadhyay, 'Giridir Vividha Pratisthan' in Ramananda Chatterjee (ed.), *Prabasi*, 34th part, No. 6., vol. II, Calcutta, 1933, p. 765.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.

Manilal Sanyal,¹ M. A., as the Headmaster of the school in 1918. His was a long period of headmastership, from 1918 to 1940. Under his stewardship, the school showed all-round development. By 1914, the number of teachers were 24 of whom 12 were Brahmos. The number of students in this year rose to 489.² The remarkable point is that the main objective of the builders of the school was very much fulfilled by 1934. The builders aimed at the spread of education among the Bihari families. By that year, of the 489 enrollment, 349 students belonged to Bihari families. The school was fortunate to have Tinkori Mukherjee, M. A., B. L. as its Secretary from 1930 to 1945. He was a leading lawyer of Giridih and in spite of his professional preoccupation, he paid full attention to the development of the school. The school was also fortunate to have a very able teacher like Himanshu Bikash Roy.³ He taught for a long period. He was a student of Shantiniketan and had close contact with 'Gurudev' Tagore. The impact of Shantiniketan was very much evident in his teaching and activities. Under his training, the boys of the school learnt Rabindra Sangeet very well.⁴

Many eminent personalities had been the students of the Giridih High School. The most notable among them are Prabhat Kumar Mukhopadhyay, the biographer of Rabindranath, and the famous scientist, Dr. Gyan Ghosh.

The Chhotanagpur Girls' High School

The most outstanding contribution of the Brahmo Samaj at Giridih is the Chhotanagpur Girls' High School. When female education was considered a taboo in the Chhotanagpur region, it was the endeavour of some Brahmo Samaj workers

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. S. K. Mazumdar, "Bargandar Brahmo Uparibesh," *Desh*, No. 28, 48th year, 1 August 1981, pp. 37-39.

4. Ibid.

that set up this girls' school in 1911 at Giridih. In fact, this was the first girls' high school in the Chhotanagpur region. Most of the founders of this school were the residents of Giridih and the thriving Brahmo Colony of Barganda. They included Jogindranath Sircar, Bamandas Mazumdar, Rajanikanto Niyogi, Sashi Bhushan Basu, Bende Bihari Roy and his wife Leela Roy, Sir Nilratan Sarkar's sister Khirodebasini Mitra, Radharani Lahiri,¹ Ramlal Bandopadhyaya and Tinkori Basu.² Thus the list includes almost all the reputed local Brahmos. In the beginning there had been only eight girls, but within a few months the number rose to 49. Encouraged by the response, a girls' hostel was established in the school premises. In the period between 1911 to 1920, except a few Assamese and Punjabi students, most of the girls on the roll came from Bengali families. The first Headmaster of the school was Krishnoprasad Basak. He devoted a lot of time and energy to the development of the school as a premier girls' institution in the region. But the real forward move for the school took place when a very experienced lady from Calcutta joined the school as Headmistress in 1920. She was Hironmoyee Sen, the Headmistress of Calcutta's Bethune Collegiate School. Thus the organising ability and educational experience of this Brahmo lady was effectively applied for the growth of the Chhotanagpur Girls' High School.³ It was confirmed beyond doubt that the school would survive and it had withstood the preliminary ordeal with courage.

The continuance of the school was made possible not only by the devotion and perseverance of Krishnoprasad Basak and Hironmoyee Sen but also by the contributions and donations from various individuals and government grants. Kamini Roy, the famous contemporary poetess, gave her residence to house the school. The school continued in her residence so long as

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1. A former Professor of Bethune College and earned reputation as the Hostel Superintendent of Bethune College.
 2. Saroj Kumar De and Saradinhu Chattopadhyaya, *op. cit.* p. 763.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 764.

it did not have its own building. Sir Nilratan Sarkar also allotted his residence without any rent for the purpose of girls hostel. P. N. Dutta, donated Rs. 1300/- to the school's Managing Committee. Another pious gentleman, M. N. Dutta made a monthly donation of Rs. 100/- to the school. Besides these noble individuals, some other persons to make monetary contributions were Gorikanto Roy and Satyananda Basu.¹ By this time the school attracted the attention of the Bihar Government. The authorities of the Education Department realised the importance of the school. The Government made a monthly grant that varied from Rs. 350/- to Rs. 500/-.

The school faced a critical time in 1927 when the government grant was stopped. The number of students was reduced to 38. Yet the Giridih Brahmos and Managing Committee did not get perturbed by the crisis. After sometime, the Managing Committee appointed Labanyabala Ghosh, M.A., B.T. as the new Headmistress. She was a lady with high academic attainments and tremendous experience in the field of education. She graduated from Lucknow's famous Isabella Thoburn College and she also served for three years as Professor in the same college. Before coming to Chhotanagpur, she had also served as a teacher in Cuttack's Ravenshaw Girls' High School. She was able to tide over the situation with patience, perseverance and hard work. The government grant was also resumed mainly due to the kindness and initiative of the then Education Minister, S. Fakhruddin.² This also helped the revival of the school. In 1925, the number of girls was 94. Of these, 5 were Bihari and 2 came from the Oraon tribal family, and the remaining 87 were Bengalis. The school had 10 teachers. Three of them held B.A. degree. Of the teachers, 8 were Bengalis, one was an Adivasi lady teacher, who had been educated in this school, and the tenth one was a Bihari pundit. Labanyabala Ghosh was an influential personality and considering her

1. Ibid.

2. It was his generosity and help that solved the financial crisis of B. N. College also on a few occasions.

great qualities, the government nominated her as the only woman member of the local municipality. It was as a result of her effort that the monthly grant of Rs. 500/- was regularised. The school's annual expenditure was Rs. 800/- and so Rs. 300/- had to be raised through donations.

This was not a major expenditure according to the contemporary standard. Labanyabala, in a true Victorian spirit, resorted to thrift. However, further economy could not be pursued because of the fact that the school had to pay a considerable amount of money as house-rent. Kamini Roy and Sir Nilratan Sarkar had been kind enough to allot their houses rent-free for some years. However, for personal requirement, the houses could not be let off for long, so the Managing Committee had to shift the school, as well as the girls' hostel, to rented houses.¹ Realising the gravity of the situation the Managing Committee decided to raise donations for constructing the school's own building or to purchase a building for that purpose. The Members of the Committee began to work in right earnest. The response was encouraging. A local Brahmo, Birendranath Deb, made a contribution of Rs. 2,000/- for the construction of a girls' hostel in the memory of his father, the late Satkari Deb. The Ramgarh Ward Estate made a contribution of Rs. 2,000/- and Rai Bahadur Ananta Nath Mitra donated Rs. 500/- towards the construction of the school building.² Besides these contributions some members of the Indian Civil Service, namely, D. P. Sharma, S. Solomon, H. Whitaker (the then Judicial Commissioner of Chhotanagpur), who served some time as the Sub-Divisional Officer of Giridih, very much encouraged the idea of having the school's own building.

However, in spite of so much strain and so many constraints, Labanyabala carried on the struggle. She is another

1. De and Chattopadhyay, op. cit., p. 764.

2. Ibid.

example of devotion, dedication and tenacity that characterised a Brahmo educationist of that period. She visited several places in order to collect donations for the management of the school. She used to go to Hazaribagh and Ranchi for the purpose of raising funds for managing the school.¹ Without her efforts, the management of the school would have been impossible and it would, like many other institutions which were born out of the noble objective of spirited souls but did not survive due to subsequent stress and strain, have gone into oblivion. In the school curriculum also she left a stamp of originality. Not only the conventional subjects were taught as usual but she put greater emphasis upon the subjects that would make the girls not only competent housewives, but even capable women, independent enough to make a living if circumstances would force them to do so. Here the impact of Aghore Kamini Devi is evident. It not only aimed at the development of the womanhood, but total emancipation from the hold of tradition and authority. The selection of subjects shows a strange similarity with that of Aghore Kamini Devi's school. Noteworthy among these non-academic subjects were nursing and first aid health and hygiene, general science, domestic science which included cooking, knitting, craft work and tailoring.² Besides, painting and clay, doll-making were also taught. Training in spinning wheel and some other cottage pursuits were also imparted. In order to improve the standard and encourage the girls, the Managing Committee provided for prizes and medals among the girls. There was also the provision of daily prayers and Upasana. The emphasis was definitely on secular education. Not only girls from all castes and communities were admitted, but in the daily conduct of the school the secular character was evident. But secular character should not imply that education was fully devoid of religious instruction. This cannot be imagined in a Brahmo school because the Brahmos of the period put great emphasis upon religion as a means of character building. By this we mean that subjects were taught

1. Ibid., p. 765.

2. Ibid.

which rose above sectarianism and religious bigotry. In the morning prayer, passages were read not only from the Vedas and Upanishads, but also from the Bible, the Koran and the Granth Saheb.¹ This was indeed a laudable effort in the decades of the twenties and thirties of this century.

The school aimed at not only imparting education to girls in modern liberal subjects but also to improve their health, broaden their mind, sharpen their intellect and inculcate broad religious feeling. The then Inspector of Schools penned a very impressive note on the school's development. He wrote,

"The girls were growing up amidst the healthy environment and enchanting natural beauty of Giridih. The girls were receiving education. The comparatively free movement and adequate provision of sports made each girl fairly healthy. Their regards for regulation and discipline were also praiseworthy."²

This was indeed a very commendable work of the Brahmo Samaj at Giridih. In the beginning, it was confined mainly to the girls of the Bengali families, but as time passed on, girls from Bihari families also came to the school. The school is still continuing. Thus the Brahmo Samaj can claim the credit for establishing the first girls' high school in the Chhotanagpur Division.

Children's School and other Institutions

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the children's education movement sponsored under the leadership of the Brahmo Samaj was going on in full swing in Bengal. Sivanath Sastri, Upendra Kishore Roychoudhury, Sukumar Roy and Jogindranath Sircar championed the children's literature

1. Ibid.

2. Cited in *ibid.*

movement. Schools were opened in Calcutta and other towns of Bengal for providing healthy education to children and putting them on the right track through play, demonstration and enjoyment. This sort of children's education movement was very much noticeable at Giridih. The impact of Bengal was also evident in this field. In 1909 a children's school was established and managed by a local Brahmo gentleman, Bamandas Mazumdar.¹ The school was a full-time engagement for him. Bamandas was not trained in Montessori System. It is really surprising how a gentleman without formal training in children's teaching could impart instruction to the tiny-tots on modern and scientific lines. The devotion and idealism sometimes worked wonders. This school became very popular and survived even after the establishment of several primary and middle schools. A fitting tribute to Bamandas is the fact that Sunirmal Basu, a great name in the realm of children's literature in India, was a product of this school.

In 1914, a primary school was established at Giridih with the initiative of the Brahmos to impart education to the children through Bengali medium. This school was named Banga-Shishu Vidyalaya.² Tinkori Basu and Ramlal Bandopadhyay took the lead in setting up the school. It taught upto Class VI. The number of students was 46 in 1934.³ Obviously, all of them were Bengalis. The school was run mainly on the fees of the students and charity of the Bengali families of Giridih. The school showed great prospect when Kedarnath Banerjee, the retired Deputy Police Suprintendent, became the Secretary of the Managing Committee of the school.⁴ Kedarnath also had business interest in coal-mining and railways. Under his secretaryship, the school did not face any financial crisis and took rapid strides. The school became a regular one when Kedarnath became the Municipal Commissioner of Giridih.

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1. S.K. Majumdar, *op.cit.*, p. 39.
 2. De and Chattopadhyay, *op.cit.*, p. 764.
 3. *Ibid.*
 4. *Ibid.*

In the realm of primary education and female education, another noteworthy achievement of the Giridih Brahmos was the Upper Primary Girls' School. This school also aimed at imparting education to the Bengali girls through the medium of Bengali. Men like Dharanidhar Banerjee, Umesh Chandra Nag and V. Roy played the leading role in the establishment of the school,¹ situated at Barganda Road. A local gentleman² made a handsome contribution of land and money and on this land and with this money, a small school building was constructed. It began with 20 girls in 1920 which increased to 70 in 1940. All the subjects were taught in Bengali. Two lady teachers and one Pandit formed the small teaching staff of the school.³ The Giridih Municipality made a monthly grant to the school. Harinath Banerjee, a local lawyer had been the Secretary of the school from 1920 to 1940.⁴ The school continued even after 1940, but in the post-Independence period, the school was eventually amalgamated with the Chhotanagpur Girls' High School.

Educational Work at Hazaribagh and Ranchi

Surprisingly enough, the Hazaribagh Brahmo Samaj, which has been one of the chief centres of Brahmo activities in Bihar cannot claim credit for the promotion of education on that scale as was done by some other Brahmo Samaj' slike those of Patna, Bhagalpur and Giridih. This is indeed strange because it was on the strength of an educational institution that the activities of the Brahmo Samaj were carried on. Without such an institution the Brahmo reformist zeal could not derive sustenance. This is true not only of the Brahmo Samaj, but also of the Arya Samaj and Christian Missions in Bihar. Perhaps the management of the Charitable Homoeopath Dispensary and organising other humanitarian and cultural works

1. Ibid., p. 766.

2. The name could not be found.

3. Saroj Kumar De and Saradindu Chattopadhyay, op.cit., p. 766.

4. Ibid.

absorbed much of the time and energy of the members of the Hazaribagh¹ Samaj. However, it may be mentioned here that though the Hazaribagh Samaj failed to make any outstanding contribution in the field of education it had tried hard to create an academic environment, right from its foundation days.

The Hazaribagh Samaj set up the Brahmo Middle School at its own premises. The Samaj possessed a fairly big compound. Therefore, the children got good facilities for sports and play. The Middle School was set up at the time of Jadunath Mukherjee. Both Boys and girls were admitted in the school. The school continued to grow from 1900 to 1930.

The real development of the school took place under the guidance of Manmathnath Dasgupta. He enjoyed profound reverence among the people of Hazaribagh and neighbouring areas. Therefore, he did not have much difficulty in raising funds for the school. When they made donations to Manmathnath they remained sure that they were giving money for a noble purpose. However, the school did not receive any government grants. There was also scope for the expansion of the school as it was held in the Samaj building itself. The school is still continuing. Debaprasad Ghosh, the secretary of the Hazaribagh Brahmo Samaj devoted a lot of time to it. But the unfortunate point is that the school did not rise upto the level of a high school. Being such an old school it would not have been difficult to convert it into a high school. More so, because the Hazaribagh Samaj did not lack in resources and man power.

The Brahmos of the town however made great contribution, both in terms of money and service in the establishment of the Jadunath High School. This school was set up in 1920 in the memory of Rai Bahadur Jadunath Mukherjee. Many Brahmo individuals served as teacher in the school and

1. Sutapa Bhattacharya, op.cit., p. 241.

after passing from the Middle School, students used to be admitted at the Jadunath High School.

The Ranchi Brahmo Samaj though possessed a good number of adherents as well as the patronage of the great Tagore family, did not bequeath an outstanding legacy in the field of education. The Brahmos of Ranchi started a Girls' Middle School when the Samaj owned a building in 1923. The school was shifted in the Samaj. In course of time this became a girls' high school. It was named the Pratibhamayee Girls' School. After the Chhotanagpur Girls' High School, this was the second girls' high school in the Chhotanagpur Division, built under the Brahmo sponsorship. The school is still very well-reputed. It holds an important place in the development of female education in the city.

Mokshada Girls' High School

The Brahmos of Bhagalpur made significant contribution in the sphere of education. The Mokshada Girls' High School can be regarded as a lasting legacy bequeathed by the Brahmo Samaj to the town of Bhagalpur. This is still the leading girls' high school in the Bhagalpur District, and one of the best girls' institutions in the province.

This girls' school was established in 1868 by a young and enterprising Brahmo physician Dr. K. D. Ghosh, the father of Aurobindo Ghosh.¹ At that time there was no girls' school in the province except Patna's St. Joseph's Convent, which was then attended chiefly by girls from Anglo-Indian families. In that sense this was the first girls' school in Bihar to be set up purely with indigenous effort. K. D. Ghosh, inspired with Brahmo reformist zeal and Derozian ideals, came to Bhagalpur

1. A.K.Dutta (ed.), *Centenary Souvenir, Mokshada Girls' High School, Bhagalpur*, 1968, p. 2.

from Calcutta in 1866.¹ With great fascination for British educational institutions, he decided to set up one in the town based on the British model. He himself was a firm believer in the ideal that a nation cannot move forward unless its womanhood is provided with good education. He was fortunate to receive the help and support of some young local Brahmos.²

It first began as a middle school and was named Bhagalpur Girls' Institution. As it did not have a permanent building for a fairly long time it moved from one locality to another like the other Brahmo schools elsewhere in the province. It also happened that sometimes the Institution had to conduct classes in the verandah of some big household. In the year of its inception there were only two teachers. Eight girls took admission in the first year.³ Dr. Kadambini Ganguly (Bose),⁴ the first female medical graduate of India, was one of the eight girls. Another remarkable point is that there were two Bihari girls in this first batch of students. They were the daughters of Shiv Sharan Lal of Mirjanhat, who was the Deputy Inspector of Schools at that time.⁵ It can be said that they were the first Bihari girls to attend any school. In 1881, the Managing Committee of the Institution purchased a small piece of land near the Srinagar Raj House, the present C. M. S. Higher Secondary School. At this time, the leading lawyer of Bhagalpur, Raja Sahib Chandra Banerjee offered to build a building for the school. The offer was accepted and the school building was constructed. The name was changed and it was named the Mokshada Girls' School after Raja Sahib Chandra's mother. The school was making progress in spite of the fact that there had been great difficulty in getting girls for admission not

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1. Surendra Gopal, "Brahmos and Social Reform in Bihar," in Swami Vedantananda (ed.), *Religion in Bihar in the Modern Age*, Patna, 1983, p. 70.
 2. A.K. Dutta, op.cit., p. 2,
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid.
 5. Ibid.

only from Bihari families but also from the Bengali families. In 1883, a girl from this school stood first amongst the M.V. examinees.¹ Mrinalini Sen, the famous Bengali poetess, and one of the daughters-in-law of Keshub Chunder Sen,² who was admitted to the school in 1884 at the age of five, wrote her reminiscences of the school in 1868 :

"I was born in 1879. At that time very few girls used to go to school. I was admitted at the Mokshada Girls' School when I was only five years old. I went to school along with my eldest sister. When she got married at the age of twelve, then I used to go alone. I did not attend any other school or institution except this one. Girls used to remain confined in their houses at that time; I also studied at home after passing from this school."³

After Dr. K.D. Ghosh left Bhagalpur, the school was managed under the secretaryship of Nibaran Chandra Mukherjee. He served as Secretary till 1910. After Nibaran Chandra's passing away, another active Brahmo of the local Samaj, Satyabrata Chatterjee became the Secretary of the school. Under the guidance of Satyabrata Chatterjee, ably assisted by Surendranath Ganguly, the school had made about 8 teachers and the first lady teacher Nirodbasini Basu was appointed. The number of girls was increasing. Therefore, the need was felt for more accommodation. As a result, the first floor with several rooms was constructed. At this time B. C. Sen joined as the Collector of Bhagalpur. He and his wife Labanya Sen took great interest in the school. Labanya Sen served as the President of the school's Managing Committee from 1920 to 1925. On their initiative and patronage higher classes were added to the school.

1. Ibid.

2. She was the wife of Nirmal Chandra Sen, the second son of Keshub Chunder Sen.

3. A.K. Dutta, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

In 1920, the first lady graduate of Bihar, Satyapriya Bose, joined as the Headmistress of the school. Subsequently, B. C. Sen too became the Commissioner of Bhagalpur. He along with his wife Labanya Sen and Satyabrata Chatterjee worked sincerely for the improvement of the school in every way.¹ They together raised a sum of Rs. 20,000/-, built quarters for the resident teachers out of this sum and created a trust fund of Rs. 10,000/- for the school. Satyapriya Bose left the school in 1926 and the next Headmistress was Urmila Banerjee, B. A., the sister of Ajit Kumar Bandopadhyay of the Patna Brahmo Samaj.

The advent of Urmila Banerjee heralded the dawn of a new era in the history of the Mokshada Girls' School. She symbolised the new generation of educated Brahmo womanhood, inspired with a noble mission and a strong will to emancipate the Indian women from the age-old backwardness and to free them from the bondage imposed by tradition and orthodoxy. Urmila Devi joined the school with a mission and it was in the long period of her headmistresship (1926-58) that the school marched forward in every sense of the term. Higher classes were gradually added to the school and girls began to appear as private candidates in the university examinations. From this time onwards, girls from the local Bengali families and some Bihari families began to be admitted in fairly large numbers. The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1931, launched by Mahatma Gandhi, also gave a boost to female education. On the initiative of Urmila Devi, the school was affiliated to the Patna University in 1933 for matriculation examination,² and in the same year the first batch of girls appeared at the matriculation examination. The devastating Bihar earthquake of 1934 dealt a severe blow to the school building. The first floor was heavily damaged. However, Urmila Devi did not get upset. The interesting point is that the classes were never suspended. For the first few days after the earthquake, classes

1. A.K.Dutta, op.cit., p. 5.

2. Ibid., p. 3.

were held under the tree shades and then thatched sheds were put up in the school compound. It was D. Fawcus, the then Director of Public Instructions, who came to Bhagalpur, and suggested the present site, arranged to give it to the school, and helped in the construction of the school building on the same.¹

At this time Kshitish Chandra Mukherjee the son of Nibaran Chandra Mukherjee became the Secretary of the school. And this witnessed all round development of the school under the joint guidance of Urmila Devi and Kshitish Chandra. A commendable thing happened for the school when a Zamindar, Deep Narayan Singh and his wife, great enthusiasts for women's education, created the Leela-Deep-narayan Trust in which they provided Rs. 100/- per month for the cause of encouraging education among the Bihari girls.² Urmila Devi, meanwhile, gave full attention to the building construction work and it was eventually completed in 1926. In the same year the school was removed to the new building. It was on account of her hard work that the girls' hostel, the teacher's quarters and the Headmistress' residence were completed in 1927. In their construction the role of C. C. Mukherjee the Commissioner of Bhagalpur, is indeed noteworthy. It was on account of his efforts that the grants were available.

The dedication of Urmila Devi was so genuine that the school earned a great reputation, both on the academic side as well as in the matter of character building. The fame and popularity of the school had increased so much that it became the long cherished dream of numerous families in the Bhagalpur Division to send their daughters to the Mokshada Girls' High School.

1. Ibid., p. 4.

2. Ibid., p. 5. Deep Narayan Singh was one of the eminent patrons of female education in Bihar. He went to England for higher studies, and since his return to India in 1897, spent several lakhs for encouraging education of girls; see Sachchidanand Sinha, *Some Eminent Bihar Contemporaries*, p. 171, and P. N. Misra N.K. Jha, op.cit., p. 105.

People had so much of confidence about their girls' security under her care, that they rushed for the admission of their daughters. As a result, there was great pressure for increasing the accommodation in the hostel. Urmila Devi took up the matter and expanded the hostel and eventually in 1954, the second floor of the hostel was completed too. Here it must be mentioned that M.K. Chatterjee, I.A.S., the District Magistrate of Bhagalpur in the early fifties, played an important role in the construction of the second floor.¹ He made generous grants from the Development Fund which made possible the completion of the second floor of the hostel.²

Among the other innovations of Urmila Devi were the introduction of Music as a subject in all the classes, the introduction of the teaching of Domestic Science, Drawing and Craft. She was a great supporter of the Girls Guide Movement and a Girls' Guide branch was started in the school in 1952 and it earned a very good reputation. In the same year, a Junior Division of the National Cadet Corps was introduced and many girls, even from conservative families, joined the N.C.C. Interestingly, a product of this school's Girls' Guide and N.C.C. section, Bela Lahiri, later became the Assistant Administrative officer of the N.C.C. at Patna.³ The Bratachari dance movement which was sweeping over Bengal at that time was also introduced in the school. Another great contribution of Urmila Devi was the introduction of science teaching in the school. She wanted to construct a separate science block for the school, but she passed away in 1958 before her idea could be translated into reality. In short, she worked for the intellectual, moral, physical and cultural developments of each and every girl. She lived amongst them and she cared for each of them. One of her students, Lakshmi Dasgupta, who later became a teacher of the school wrote that her motto of life was :

1. Ibid., p. 6.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 7.

"Not enjoyment and not sorrow
Is our destined end or way,
But to act, that each tomorrow
Find us farther than to-day."¹

Another heartfelt tribute was paid by M. L. Bhattacharya, the Sanskrit teacher of the school—

"वन्धवंश समुद्भूत, उर्मिलेति समाख्याता ।
हीनावांल्ये पितृम्वांच, गत्वाच मातुलालयम् ॥
तत्र पाठनपाठीत्सा, सश्रमं विपुलमुदा ।
समाविष्टचेतास्तुहि । पाठम् समाप्यतत्रत्यम् ।
गत्वा विद्यालयं कंचित् । लेमे तत्रचकर्मैवम् ।
शिक्षिकायश्च गौरवम् । वत्वाज्ञानचछात्रिम्यः ।"²

Indeed she worked hard to sow the seeds of the new learning, and she was definitely successful. She also played one of the leading roles in the formation of the Sundarwati Women's College which we shall be discussing right after this. The Mokshada Girls' High School continued to show progress under the guidance of the next Principal Vidya Brahmachary. She is another highly educated Brahmo lady. She had her training under Urmila Devi. She is still continuing. She maintained the high tradition set by Urmila Devi and Kshitish Chandra Mukherjee. The school continues to be the leading girls' institution in the Bhagalpur Division. She put great emphasis upon the teaching of science. She also endeavoured to further the cause of liberal secular education advocated by the Brahmos. As a part of this scheme, she tried to admit more Muslim girls. No doubt, a number of Muslim girls have passed from this school. Yet the number was meagre and

1. Lakshmi Dasgupta, "In Memoriam" in B.C.Banerjee (ed.) *Mokshada Balika Vidyalaya Patrika* (Urmila Banerjee Smriti Anka), Bhagalpur, 1959. p. 2. (English Section).
2. M.L. Bhattacharya, "मन मगिन्या" in B.C. Banerjee (ed.) op.cit., p. 13 (Hindi Section).

Vidya Brambachary appealed to the Muslim guardians to avail themselves of the opportunity and send their daughters to the school.¹

Cheap School Movement of Gaya

Hari Sundar Bose set up, what was called the Cheap School, at Gaya some time in 1870.² It was a primary school in the beginning, but was gradually upgraded into a middle school. However, the best way to its nature and objective is to state that it was a school which aimed at teaching three R's to children at a very low expense. The monthly fees charged varied from one anna to four annas. The boys from poor families paid one anna, those from rich families paid four annas.³ Hari Sundar himself devoted couple of hours every day to teaching the boys language mathematics and moral lessons. In 1880 the school received a great impetus with the coming of Brajgopal Niyogi as a teacher in the same.⁴ It was Hari Sundar's and Brajagopal's absorption that kept the school going. It did not receive any grant from the government. Brajagopal turned it into an ideal primary school where a strong educational base for boys in a religious environment will be built. Interestingly, his salary from the Cheap School was too meagre to make both ends meet, and he took up various part-time jobs and business to support his family.⁵ When Hari Sundar left Gaya in 1887 and Brajagopal in 1892, this virtually signalled the end of the school. Perhaps it carried on upto the first decade of the present century. It is indeed unfortunate that such cheap school movement met its end without spreading to other parts of the province.

College Education

The Brahmo Samaj made some contribution to the spread

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1. A.K. Dutta (ed.), op. cit., pp. 10-11.
 2. Niranjana Niyogi, *Sadhan O Seva*, p. 12.
 3. Satya Sundar Basu, op.cit., p. 15.
 4. Niranjana Niyogi, op.cit., p. 13.
 5. Ibid., p. 15.

of college education of Giridih and at Bhagalpur. At Giridih the Brahmos can claim credit for the foundation of the Ramkrishna Mahila Mahavidyalaya. It has been established as recently as 1979. The naming of the college after Ramkrishna is indeed strange. The fact is that there was already a college with this name at Giridih. It gained gradual popularity among the local people. The way it was functioning and the service it was doing impressed Rani Mahalanobis, the wife of Prashanta Chandra Mahalanobis. Therefore she decided to hand over the three big and beautiful houses, 'Mohua', 'Uttara' and 'Salboni' to the college authorities.¹ This was done in 1978. The college is being run by the Ramkrishna Mission of Giridih and with the acquisition of these buildings, valued at rupees ten lakhs, the Ramkrishna Mahila Mahavidyalaya has now become a well-managed college with proper facilities. It is true that if this women's college had been managed by the Brahmo Samaj of Giridih that would have been a glorious accomplishment of the Brahmos at Giridih. But at the same time it is also highly commendable that a Brahmo lady has made a gift of her valuable possessions for the noble cause of education. At the present money-crazy and materialistic society this is indeed a unique example of sacrifice for a noble purpose.

The Brahmos of Bhagalpur also made great contribution towards the foundation of the Sundarwati Women's College (Sundarwati Mahila Mahavidyalaya) at Bhagalpur. At present this is one of the leading girls' colleges in Bihar. In the establishment of this college Urmilla Banerjee and some other local Brahmo individuals played an important role. The idea of starting a women's college in the town was mooted as early as 1941. Some parents approached Urmila Devi and Kshitish Chandra Mukherjee and requested them to start a college for girls. They acquainted Urmila Devi with the problem of their daughters who passed out from Mokshada Girls

1. Subodh Kumar Mazumdar, "Bargandar Brahmo Upanibesh," *Desh*, No. 28, 1 August 1981, p. 35.

School, and who intended to go for higher education but could not do so due to lack of a girls' college in the town. But opening a college purely for girls was out of the question as the Brahmo Samaj of Bhagalpur was extremely busy with the school itself. But the parents continued to put pressure. Thus Kshitish Chandra found out a solution. He decided to start coaching classes in the morning in the school premises, and to engage lecturers and professors from the local Tej Narayan Jubilee College, to coach the girls who intended to appear for I. A. and B. A. examinations.¹ Thus the coaching classes started from July 1941 and fortunately almost all the well-known teachers of the T. N. J. College extended their help and cooperation. No lecturer had to engage more than two classes in a week. Those who came from distant places were provided with the facility of conveyance. This continued for eight years. Meanwhile, Kshitish Chandra approached the Education Minister during the budget sessions every year for setting up a girls' college at Bhagalpur but nothing fruitful came out of it. Then he along with some Brahmo and non-Brahmo Bengali gentlemen, like Rai Bahadur A. C. Sarkar, Bankim Banerjee of Shantiniketan, Nishi Kanto Mishra and Chandi Prasad Sarkar, decided to start the women's college formally from 1949.² They made all efforts and set the college going from July 1949. Dr. Sharda Vedalankar was appointed as the lady principal and some lady lecturers were recruited. It was formally inaugurated in the school premises on the Independence Day of 1949. Meanwhile, Naresh Mohan Thakur made a gift of a big plot of land as well as a building on the same plot at Gosaighat and the college was named after his late mother Sundarwati Mahila Mahavidyalaya. The girls who took admission in the early years were all products of the Mokshada Girls' High School.

In the running of the college, Urmila Banerjee too played a vital role, particularly in its early years. She herself engaged classes in Bengali and helped the principal in administrative

1. A.K. Dutta (ed.), op.cit., p. 11.

2. Ibid.

work. Principal Sharda Vedalankar writes, "Urmila Devi was an institution by herself. She was not only the heart and soul of the Mokshada Girls' High School but was the main strength of the Sundarwati Mahila Mahavidyalya in its formative years. The lady with the spotless white attire and affective hands that touched every girls' head, stood for Bihari women's march forward through education. Her help in the early part of the college's life was indeed great."¹

From the above discussion it is evident that the Brahmo Samaj made valuable contribution to the spread of education in the towns other than Patna. The most remarkable achievement has been in the sphere of female education. The Chhotanagpur Girls' High School and the Mokshada, Girls' High School are the living symbols of the dedication, sacrifice and struggle of the Brahmos, particularly Urmila Banerjee and Labanyabala Ghosh. They received inspiration from the example of Aghore Kamini Devi.

1. Sharda Vedalankar, "Urmila Didi; ek Sansmaran" in B.C. Banerjee (ed.), op.cit., p. 3 (Hindi Section).

INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES OF THE BRAHMOS

"We must be constantly careful to ensure that our faith remains dynamic and living and does not perish by getting lost in a labyrinth of bewildering and meaningless rituals. In short, while we shall seek inspiration and guidance from our past traditions, culture and wisdom, we must continue to develop our mental processes, so that we can face the future with confidence and hope."

— Sudhi Ranjan Das
(Presidential Address
76th All-India Brahmo
Conference, Patna, 1966).

The Brahmo Samaj's in various parts of Bihar, particularly those of Patna, Gaya, Giridih, Hazaribagh and Bhagalpur have been the culture centres in their respective places. Firstly, they acted as intellectual forums; secondly, they acted as the training ground for dance, drama and music; lastly, the Brahmos individually helped the development of art, literature

and fine arts in Bihar in several ways. In that sense, the Brahmo Samaj by functioning as a culture centre helped the process of diffusion of Bengali culture into this province. But the more important point is that it promoted cultural activities among the people of the province. In that way, while the Samaj, on the one hand, became a centre of cultural activities of the large Bengali community settled here, it became, on the other, a cementing force in the process of emotional integration through the cultural contact with the local population. Once Pandit Harinath Mishra,¹ while addressing the 150th Anniversary of Brahmo Samaj at Patna on 30 March 1979 remarked :

“For us any cultivation or promotion of a regional or sectional culture is only an attempt at bringing out the richness of Indian culture as a whole and showing its underlying unity in the midst of diversity.”²

The role of the Brahmo Samaj can be appreciated if we keep in mind this point of cultural contact and cultural diffusion even in the midst of diversities.

Intellectual Centre

The Brahmo Samaj provided an intellectual forum in the towns where it was set up. Scholars, teachers, pundits, journalists and any individual interested in gaining something from the world of knowledge found the Brahmo Samaj to be a convenient place. This was mainly due to the fact that it was the Brahmo Samaj which started free discussion and exchange of ideas. This broadness and liberalism appealed to many who were straining under a conventional system, where free discussion and fearless expression of opinion was not encouraged. In the beginning, the Brahmo Samaj Mandirs held open discussions as well as discourses, mainly on

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1. The then Speaker of the Bihar Vidhan Parishad and a former member of the Lok Sabha. He is a renowned scholar of Maithili literature.
 2. *Proceedings of the 150th Anniversary of the Brahmo Samaj*, Sadharan Brahmo Samaj File, R.M.R. Seminary, Patna, 1979.

religious and spiritual topics. Gradually, the scope of subjects expanded to include philosophical, literary and historical subjects. The important point is that the Brahmo Mandirs showed the way and the Brahmo Pracharaks and scholars did not confine themselves to the Mandirs but also went to colleges and universities for lectures and discussions. We have numerous records to show that the Brahmo missionaries and personalities like Keshub Chunder Sen, Shivanath Sastri, Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar, Bhai Prakash Dev, Satish Chandra Chakravarty, Rajani Kanto Guha and many others delivered lectures at Patna College, Bihar National College, T.N.J. College and some other leading colleges of Bihar. Their lectures included a wide range of topics which often went beyond religion and spirituality. The non-Brahmo scholars on the other hand flocked to the Samaj Mandirs, addressed the members and participated in the discussions. So an intellectual contact between the Brahmos and non-Brahmos developed through the Brahmo Samaj Mandirs. Thus the Samaj provided a forum for the intellectuals as well as intelligentsia of the towns to meet on a common platform. For example, great scholars like Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Dr. Kalikinkar Datta, Dr. Biman Behari Majumdar and Professor Rangin Halder were non-Brahmos, but were very intimately associated, culturally and intellectually, with the Brahmo Samaj. This tradition of free discussion and liberal exchange of ideas was indeed a great contribution of the Samaj in Bihar.

This tradition started from the days of Prakash Chandra Roy and Guruprasad Sen and continued till the days of Dr. S.M. Ghoshal and D. N. Sircar. The high intellectual standard raised by the Brahmos can be gauged from the fact that it was Guruprasad Sen, a leading figure of the first generation of Brahmos at Bankipore, who laid the foundation of English journalism in Bihar by publishing and editing the newspaper *Behar Herald* in 1875 from Patna.¹ *The Behar Herald* was a great

1. P.C. Roy Choudhary, "The Brahmo pioeers of Bihar," the *Hazaribagh Brahmo Samaj Centenary Souvenir*, 1967, p. 14.

force of that period and later on, it very much encouraged the freedom struggle in Bihar. Guruprasad Sen, with the fortune made from a thriving legal practice and with a mighty pen very much helped the growth of *Behar Herald*, Sachchidanand Sinha in his work *Some Eminent Behar Contemporaries* writes :

“I have thus many reasons to recall with gratitude the memory of Guruprasad Sen—not only for what he did towards organising public life in Bihar, when Biharees were too backward to do so, but also for his great kindness to me personally for years, when I was a struggling junior.”¹ The *Behar Herald* is perhaps the only English weekly in India to have completed more than one hundred years of uninterrupted publication. Its last editor was D. N. Sircar whose sad demise meant a severe blow for the *Behar Herald*. D. N. Sircar also founded the first Bengali monthly news-bulletin *Sanchita*. It was started in 1969 and is still continuing as the mouthpiece of the Bihar Bengali Association. So the Brahmos made important contribution in the sphere of journalism and thus with its limited capacity helped the process of intellectual development.

An essential corollary of the Brahmo commitment to the dissemination of knowledge and promotion of intellectual centres was its involvement with the library movement in Bihar. Wherever a Brahmo Samaj Mandir was established, a school and a library followed inevitably. The small Samaj branches maintained small libraries, some having as meagre a number of books as 200. But the urge to have repositories of knowledge, however small, has always been strong among the Brahmos. Unfortunately, most of the Samaj libraries are non-existent now. Yet a few have managed to survive, the noteworthy among them being the Rajnarayan Bose Library at Deoghar and the Union Club and Library at Hazaribagh.

1. Cited in B.P. Majumdar, “Patnar Itihas,” in Bhagawan Prassad Majumdar (ed.) *Patalshree* (Souvenir, 17th Annual Convention, Bihar Bengali Association), Patna, 1975, p. 56.

Rajnarayan Bose, the great Brahmo leader and renowned litterateur of the nineteenth century, resided at Deoghar for a fairly long period. He was not only a great writer and profound scholar, but also a good collector of books. He collected a large number of books, and turned his house into a paradise for scholars, poets and novelists. After his death in 1899 the house, with its large collection of books has been turned into a library and named the Raj Narayan Bose Library. Happily, it is not only alive, but growing. It is the only standard library at Deoghar, and with annual grants from the State government, it is able to increase its collection to 18,000 volumes.

Another library set up by the Brahmos, which is still existing with glory and reputation, is the Union Club and Library of Hazaribagh. It came into existence in 1882, and was housed in the spacious building called the Keshub Hall. It is the oldest library in Hazaribagh district, and among the earliest ones in the province.¹ The library is serving the reading public of Hazaribagh well, which is evident from the fact that the total membership every year stands around 300, and the average daily attendance is 100. The facility for newspaper reading is provided, and the library subscribes to the leading Hindi, Bengali and English newspapers. Deba Prashad Ghosh, who served as the secretary of the Hazaribagh Brahmo Samaj for a long period till his death in 1984 worked tirelessly for the development of the library. The state government provides an annual grant, which is not adequate. The library has expanded mainly due to public donations, and a new building was constructed in 1957 to accommodate the library.²

Two libraries were set up by the Brahmos at Patna. The one was Kedarnath Dharmagranthagar, dedicated to the sacred memory of Kedarnath De, an early Brahmo missionary from

1. P.C. Roy Choudhary, *Bihar District Gazetteers: Hazaribagh, Patna*, 1957, p. 125.

2. Ibid.

Bengal, who settled in Bihar for missionary work. The fund for setting up the library was provided by Banalata De, the daughter of Bhai Kedarnath and the then Lady Principal of Bankipore Girls High School.¹ She made a contribution of Rs. 1000/-. The library was inaugurated by Sir Ganesh Dutt Singh,² who was then a minister in the provincial cabinet, on 8 February 1935.³ Paresh Nath Chatterji, the Brahmo homoeopath known for his humanitarian works, worked hard for its establishment and maintenance. Kedarnath De was known for his profound scholarship on comparative religion. So, the Dharma-Granthagar, as the name suggests, was intended as the library of religious literature. This was the first of its kind in Bihar, and contained works on all religions and philosophy of the world. Located in the Hiranand Kutir of the Bankipore Brahmo Mandir, it was widely used by scholars and researchers.⁴ Regrettably, the library is in a state of decline since 1960 due to lack of management—the fate that befell many other useful institutions in various parts of the country. The zeal and spirit of the early missionaries and reformers is deplorably absent in this generation of Brahmos dominated by the professionalism and materialism of the present age. The absence of paid manhood and organised mission work in the present day Brahmo Samajs is also responsible for the decline of several Brahmo institutions of learning.

The Brahmos set up another library at Patna—the Rammohun Roy Seminary Library. Satish Chandra Chakravarty

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1. Paresh Nath Chatterji, *Address on the Occasion of the Opening of Rishi Kedarnath Dharma-Granthagar*, Navabidhan Press, Calcutta, 1935, p. 3.
 2. A prominent personality of contemporary Bihar politics ; known for liberal views and selfless philanthropy ; made generous contribution to the cause of education. See Sachchi Sinha, op.cit., p. 92, and P.N.Misra and N.K.Jha, op.cit. p. 105.
 3. P.N.Chatterji, op.cit., p. 2.
 4. Sri Nabashis Bose, presently the secretary of the Navabidhan Brahmo Samaj, Calcutta, who was closely associated with the activities of the Bankipore Brahmo Samaj, has been kind enough to provide information on the Kedarnath Dharma-Granthagar,

built it up with the intention of making it a repository of all Brahmo Samaj and Prarthana Samaj publications from various parts of the country. Within a short time more than a thousand books were collected. The library made further development during the headmastership of Sris Chandra Chakravarty and Kshetra Mohan Poddar. The latter extended its confines by adding books, not only those published by the Brahmo Samajs, but also on the Brahmo Samaj and Brahmo personalities published by non-Brahmo agencies and publishers. Unfortunately, due to the kindness and generosity of the Chakravarty brothers, many books were issued to scholars and interested readers, most of them remaining unreturned. Yet the library is continuing, and the present management of the Seminary has made plans for its restoration on a large scale.

Tableaux Vivants, Drama and Music

The Brahmo Samaj played the pioneering role in the development of open stage performances in Bihar. These open-stage performances included both dance and drama. The Brahmos started here the tradition of staging what was called Tableaux Vivant. Tableaux Vivant was presentation of mythological themes through immobile performers on the stage. The themes like Sitaharan, Dhruva, Prahlad and the Change of Seasons were usually presented with light and sound effects. The young boys and girls, who performed, were very gorgeously costumed with colourful dresses. Music and songs accompanied the enactment of scenes. The whole thing used to be a wonderful experience and left a lasting impression.¹ Aghore Kamini Devi was the first to stage a tableaux vivant and she put the girls of her school for the first time on the stage for this purpose in 1894.² Prakash Chandra gives a vivid description of the performance. "The whole show began with the 'Bande-Mataram' song. The next scene presented Goddess Lakshmi with beautiful red sari under golden crown on the lotus. In the

1. Niranjana Niyogi, *Sadhan O Seva*, p. 68.

2. Prakash Chandra Roy, *op.cit.*, p. 182.

background hymns on the Goddess were being sung. It was followed by a recitation. The next scene showed Goddess Saraswati, holding a Veena in her hand, sitting on the white swan. Then another recitation was presented. The next scene showed the boy Dhruva surrounded by snakes and tigers, appearing with folded hands. In the background the touching song.

“Bijan kanane Suniti tanay kande”

Kotha Hari bole,

Du nayane dhara boi”, was sung which meant the son of Suniti weeps in the wild forest and with tears flowing down from his eyes, he seeks God’s help. The next scene showed Prahlad, tied against a tree by ropes. This show was also accompanied by a background song. There were a few more recitations followed by the scenes of ‘Change of Seasons’. The function climaxed with this song,

“Na jagile sab Bharat lalana,

A Bharat aar jagena, jagena,”¹

which means if you, the woman of India do not wake up, India will never wake up, never wake up.

The whole show was indeed delightful but a daring one. It was a part of Aghore Kamini’s struggle for female emancipation, and at the same time, it created an enthusiasm for such cultural functions. For a few days, the Roy couple faced great storm, but with the passing of time, things became normal again. Tableaux Vivants gradually became a popular stage function. Brajagopal Niyogi also mentions in his diary of the regular staging of tableaux vivants in the big garden of the house, named ‘Rosy Bower’ near the Bankipore Brahmo Mandir.² Interestingly, ‘Rosy Bower’ belonged to Baldev Palit,

1. Ibid., pp. 182-3.

2. Niranjan Niyogi, *Sadhan O Seva*, p. 68,

the head of the famous Palit family of the time. He was also one of those non-Brahmos to be closely associated with the Samaj activities. And he played host and extended hospitality to the Brahmananda, when the latter had visited Patna in 1868.¹

The presentation of tableaux vivants became a regular feature during the Maghotsava celebrations. In the Maghotsava celebrations, the 12th of Magh (generally 26th January) was scheduled as the children's day. This was called the Balak-Balika Sammelan, and it was organised every year. The boys and girls presented recitations, songs and dances. The dances were being performed by the little girls regularly since 1910. At Giridih, the environment was more liberal as it was inhabited mainly by the Bengali population. Therefore, tableaux vivants and even short plays were being staged by the boys and girls from the very beginning of this century. The Brahamo families came down from Calcutta and some of them gathered from various parts of Bihar. As a result, the Maghotsavas and Bhadratsavas used to be very enjoyable social occasions. Children's functions used to be very attractive, more so because some famous personalities of children's literature in Bengal, particularly Jogindranath Sircar, got intimately involved in organising these functions.

In Hazaribagh too, children's functions were organised from the very beginning. Dinanath Gupta, took special interest in Balak-Balika Sammelan during the Maghotsava celebrations. These functions gained further popularity when Manmathnath Dasgupta and Tarubala Roy became the secretaries of the Hazaribagh Brahmo Samaj.

The important point about these children's functions and tableaux vivants is that in the first place, they helped in shaking off the conservatism of the local people and in acquainting them with some fine things of human life like dance, music and recitation. This was indeed a cultural diffusion. The acquaintance

1. Ibid.

with Muses was indeed a noble work and for this the Brahmo Samaj movement in Bihar can claim credit.

The Brahmos of Bihar cannot claim credit for initiating the tradition of modern drama and theatre in Bihar, but they certainly deserve the major credit for popularising dramatic art in Bihar. The coming of Dr. Sharadindu Mohan Ghoshal as a lecturer in P.W. Medical College of Patna in 1925, signalled the advent of a rare talent in Patna's cultural domain. He took great interest in the development of dramatic art, and was himself a talented stage actor. He organised the Medical College Dramatic Society and staged the play 'Raghubir' in 1927.¹ It was the first drama staged in the Patna University campus. No female figure appeared on the stage and the feminine roles were competently played by the male students. The effort was immensely successful and Dr. Ghoshal staged three more plays, 'Dui Purush', 'Rama' and 'Bamuner Meye'. In 1928, he himself played the role of 'Dadamoshai' in the drama 'Paropare'. Meanwhile, Prof. Rangin Halder joined as a lecturer in the B.N. College and with great encouragement from the Principal Devendra Nath Sen, organised the College Dramatic Society. With the help of some lecturers and students; he staged the drama, 'Chandragupta' in the College premises in 1928.² Rangin Halder himself played the role of Chanakya and another Brahmo Prof. Nalin Kumar Basu was also in the cast. In 1935, males and females appeared on the stage together for the first time at Patna when the drama 'Alibaba' was staged at the local Elphinstone Picture Palace in aid of the earthquake victims. In 1936-37, with the efforts of two eminent Brahmos of the city, Barrister P.R. Das and Dr. S.M. Ghoshal, the Amateur Dramatic Club was set up. Dr. Ghoshal was the guiding spirit of this club. They staged several dramas, some of which earned great reputation. Dr. Ghoshal directed as well as acted in the drama, 'Reetimato Natak' in which males and females appeared

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1. Anil De, "Patnar Bangla Bhashabhashider Natya Pracheshta," in Bhagawan Majumdar (ed.) *Patalshree*, Patna, 1975, p. 33.
 2. Ibid., p. 37.

together on the stage. This was an important event in the history of drama in the province. Under the banner of Amateur Dramatic Club, Dr. Ghoshal directed 'Kabuliwalla' which was staged at the Lady Stephenson Hall in 1954. It was followed by another successful production 'Dakghar' in 1956.¹

The establishment of two cultural organisations, the Arts and Artists in 1946 and Rabindra Parishad in 1948 was an important event in the annals performing arts of modern Bihar. The Arts and Artists was founded by Anil De, yet another non-Brahmo to be intimately associated with the Brahmo Samaj. A scion of the De family of 'Navin Kutir', located near the Rammohun Roy Seminary,² Anil De was a close associate of Dr. Ghoshal in pioneering Hindi drama in the city. Besides staging Bengali dramas, the Arts and Artists also presented some outstanding Hindi dramas like 'Godan', 'Kaling Vijay' and 'Mahaprem'. Anil De also encouraged children's drama. The story of the foundation of Rabindra Parishad would be discussed later. The important point is that the drama enthusiasts of the city found a fulfilment of their dream through its establishment. Under the sponsorship of the Parishad, Dr. Ghoshal restaged his successful play 'Dakghar'. The famous personality in the world of modern drama, Tapas Sen, was in charge of lighting. Dr. Ghoshal also directed a Hindi play "Chashmababa", under the banner of the Parishad. The Parishad became a convenient means for the Brahmos of Patna to present their dramatic talents. It saw Dipendra Nath Sircar directing 'Sesh Raksha' and Roma Chakravorty directing dance drama 'Bhanusingher Padavali.'

In 1953, Dr. Ghoshal, along with Sister Pushpa³ set up the

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1. Ibid.
 2. The De's have been kind enough to sort out a problem by allowing the holding of Saraswati Puja by R.M.R. Seminary boys every year at Navin Kutir, when the school authorities for obvious reasons disallowed it at the school premises.
 3. A well-known scholar of philosophy and an esteemed person in Patna's literary circle, passed away in 1965.

Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). This society staged two Hindi dramas 'Chor Kaun Hai?' in 1954 and 'Pir Ali' in 1957, both directed by Dr. Ghoshal himself.¹ One Brahmo girl, Shipra Karmakar, the daughter of Bejoy Chandra Karmakar, gave an outstanding performance in the role of Pir Ali's wife. Since then, IPTA staged many more dramas, all in Hindi, under Dr. Ghoshal's guidance. After 1960, we do not find much of a Brahmo absorption with dramatic art in the town. However, the great contributions of Dr. Ghoshal, Prof. Halder D.N. Sircar and Roma Chakravorty must be placed on record.

The Brahmos also played the pioneering role in popularising music, particularly vocal music in Bihar. The early Brahmo Pracharaks, especially the followers of the Navavidhan cult sang devotional songs and Kirtans with Ekatara (the musical instrument with one string). The Vaishnavite features of these devotional songs very much appealed to the listeners. Later on, Brahmasangeet, which included devotional songs written by Brahmo saints and poets, and Rabindrasangeet, the songs written by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore which was popular among the Brahmo Samajis and its impact fell on the large non-Brahmo Bengali community also. The family prayers and Upasanas in the Brahmo homes helped a lot to popularise Brahmasangeet and Rabindrasangeet. This meant a great cultural diffusion as wherever the Brahmos set up a Mandir, it eventually resulted in the spread of Brahmasangeet and Rabindrasangeet. If the orthodox Hindu families did not accept the doctrine of the Brahmo Samaj, some of them certainly took inspiration as well as solace from the songs sung in the Samaj Mandirs and the Brahmo homes. Patna, Hazaribagh, Ranchi, Giridih and Gaya became well known places for the talents they contained in Brahmasangeet and Rabindrasangeet.

At Patna, Brahmasangeet, with emphasis on kirtans were sung since the days of Prakash Chandra Roy and Aghore

3. Anil De, op. cit., p. 40.

Kamini Devi. At Gaya, Hari Sundar Bose and Brajgopal Niyogi initiated the tradition. When Hari Sundar went to Bhagalpur and Brajgopal went to Patna, they carried with them their talent for devotional songs. Rabindrasangeet became popular in Patna with the coming of Sushma Sen, and at Ranchi with the coming Jyotirindranath Tagore. Sushma Sen learnt Rabindrasangeet from Dinendranath Tagore, the nephew of the great poet. At that time the well-known barrister of Patna, Charu Chandra Das (better known as C. C. Das) and his wife Madhuri Devi,¹ helped very much in popularising Brahma-sangeet and Rabindrasangeet. They had four daughters, Gouri Devi, Sati Devi,² Moni Devi and Vijoya Devi,³ who were great Rabindrasangeet talents. They regularly sang during Maghotsava, Bhadrotsava and other cultural functions.⁴ This popularity of Rabindrasangeet was later on enhanced by the Rabindra Parishad. The Parishad also opened a school which is still existing and is a recognised institution for training in the art of Rabindrasangeet. At Hazaribagh too, the Brahma-sangeet and Rabindrasangeet tradition was strong enough. However, they did not have patrons like Sushma Sen and C. C. Das at Hazaribagh. Yet the Hazaribagh Samaj played important role in popularising the Brahmo devotional songs in this place. The Samaj founded Gitanjali Sangeet Mahavidyalaya in the town in 1959. This is the only school of music run by the Brahmo Samaj in the province at present. Though mainly Rabindrasangeet is taught, classes are conducted in classical music too. The institution is affiliated to the Prayag Sangeet Samiti. Most of the teachers of this institution are Brahmos. B. N. Tagore is the present Principal of the Mahavidyalaya.

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1. Daughter of Barodanath Halder, a Brahmo social reformer of the first generation.
 2. Mother of film artist and Rabindrasangeet exponent Ruma Guhathakurata.
 3. Wife of the internationally reputed film-maker Satyajit Ray.
 4. Sushama Sen, op. cit., p. 193, Also see Rangin Halder, "Patnai Brahmosamajer Jahader Dekhiachhi," in Subir Karmakar (ed.) *Souvenir, 150th Anniversary of Brahmo Samaj, Patna, 1979*.

Associations and Halls

The prominent role the Brahmos played in enriching cultural life of Bihar is confirmed by their direct involvement in the foundation of the leading cultural associations and theatre halls in the province. The Keshub Hall and Union Club of Hazaribagh, Rabindra Parishad, the Rabindra Bhawan the Bengali Association, the Indian Medical Association Hall, the Rammohun Hall and the Bihar Bengali Academy all stand as living witnesses to the great contribution of the Brahmos of Bihar to the cultural development of the province.

The Hazaribagh Brahmo Samaj set up the Union Club and Library in December 1882.¹ This is perhaps the oldest cultural association in Bihar after Patna's Suhrid Parishad and Hemchandra Pathagar. It is supposed that Keshub Chunder's daughter Maharani Suniti Devi and his son-in-law Cooch-Behar's Maharaj Nripendra Narayan, helped the project. On 17 November 1883 the club members sent Nripendra Narayan a special felicitation on the occasion of his coronation which mentioned of his valuable exertions for "the development of social unity and brotherly feelings amongst the educated community of Hazaribagh."² The club decided to construct its building in 1884. The sad demise of Keshub Chunder in the same year gave impetus to the idea as it would also serve as a memorial to the Brahmananda. A Keshub Memorial Fund was set up, and considerable amount of donation was raised. With this collected sum the building of the Union Club was constructed and the main hall of the building was named the Keshub Hall.³ Since then the Hall enjoys the glory of being the cultural centre of the town. It not only saw the staging of

1. P.C. Roy Choudhury, *Bihar District Gazetteers ; Hazaribagh*, Govt. of Bihar, Patna, 1957, p.125. Also Amal Sengupta, "Keshub Chandra O Hazaribagh," *Souvenir 92nd All-India Brahmo Conference*, Hazaribagh, 1983, p. 21.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

dramas, variety entertainments and cultural functions since then, but also witnessed some of the great political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas Bose, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and outstanding intellectuals like Brojindranath Seal, Ramananda Chatterjee, Amiya Chakravarty, Bibhuti Bhushan Mukhopadhyaya and Tushar Kanti Ghosh delivering lectures to huge gatherings. In the decade of thirties Maharani Suniti Devi visited Hazaribagh and lectured at the Hall with magic lantern.¹ She also presented a bust statue of her illustrious father which is still preserved at the Hall.

The foundation of the Rabindra Parishad and Rabindra Bhawan was also a significant accomplishment towards which the Brahmos of Patna made noteworthy contribution. The idea was mooted in 1948 when some youngmen like Manindra Samaddar, D. N. Sircar, and Anil De decided to celebrate Rabindranath Tagore's birthday on a large scale. The idea was translated into reality with astounding success. The programme was spread over seven days and saw the presentation of cultural items by groups of Shantiniketan besides the local talents. All the seven days saw packed houses watching Tagore's dance and drama and listening to Tagore songs from celebrated artists and performers. Even after meeting all expenses, the function committee found a surplus of Rs. 500/-. How to spend this Rs. 500/-? This became a problem. And it was this problem that gave birth to the Rabindra Parishad. The general consensus in the function committee was in favour of utilising the money for setting up a permanent cultural association for the propagation and study of the writings, dance, drama and songs of Tagore. Thus was born the Rabindra Parishad.² Dr. Sachin Sen, the then editor of *The Indian Nation* became Chairman and held that position till 1965. Amongst the founder-members were three Brahmos, Dr.S.M. Ghoshal, Pradyot

1. Ibid., p. 22. Also see P.C. Roy Choudury, *Bihar District Gazetteers : Hazaribagh*, p. 125.

2. See the articles of Nirmal Choudhary, Hemanta Kumar Choudhary and Dr. Sachin Sen in Bhagawan Pd. Majumdar (ed.) *Rabindra Parishad Silver Jubilee Souvenir*, Patna, 1973, pp.19-30.

Sengupta, the then Assistant Income-Tax Commissioner and D.N. Sircar. In the first fourteen years of its existence it was housed in the Patna office of the *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, thanks to the generosity of Nirmal Choudhury, the chief correspondent at Patna. Meanwhile, Dr. Srikrishna Sinha, the then Chief minister of Bihar, himself a great admirer of Tagore literature allotted a big plot of land to the Parishad in an extremely suitable area of Patna. A Sub-committee was appointed for constructing the Rabindra Bhawan, that is the building of the Parishad; Dr. Ghoshal became its President and D. N Sircar the Secretary.¹ Now the problem was how to raise funds for the building construction. Here also a Brahmo couple, A. B. Chakravorty, the then Income-Tax officer of Patna Circle, and his wife, Roma Chakravorty, played an extremely important role. Roma Chakravorty was a graduate of the song and dance school of Shantiniketan. She staged several dance-drama shows in which many artists and performers came from Shantiniketan. These shows helped to raise a considerable amount of money. According to a prominent member of the Parishad, Nirmal Choudhury, "This couple infused a new life to the Parishad."² Meanwhile, Dr. S. K. Sinha was kind enough to sanction a grant of Rs. 50,000/- towards building construction of the Bhawan. Dr. Ghoshal, D. N. Sircar and Roma Chakravorty worked tirelessly for one complete year and at last the Rabindra Bhawan was completed in 1962. Today the Rabindra Parishad is the leading cultural association of Bihar and the Brahmos made a remarkable contribution towards its foundation and development. The construction of the Bhawan did not mean the end of the Brahmo connection with the parishad. Dr. Ghoshal continued to be the guiding spirit of the Parishad till his death in 1977. D. N. Sircar and Roma Chakravorty also served as secretaries of the Parishad for long years, and D. N. Sircar was made Vice-Chairman in 1972 and served in that capacity till his death in 1981.

1 Ibid., p.27.

2. Ibid.

The Bihar Bengali Association (called Bihar Bangla Samiti in Bengali) also would not have seen the light of the day without the hard work and unbending tenacity of Dr. S. M. Ghoshal and D. N. Sircar.¹ The very fact that the Bengali Association was housed in the Bankipore Brahmo Mandir, stands as testimony to the close Brahmo connection with the Bihar Bengali Association. The Association was set up in 1958 with the objective to preserve the constitutional rights of the Bengali community in Bihar, to provide for Bengali medium school in the Bengali dominated areas of the province, to encourage the study of Bengali as a subject in the school and to work for the promotion of Bengali art and culture in the province. The association opened its branches in all the districts of Bihar and has done some highly commendable work. D. N. Sircar popularly called 'Montuda' was the guiding spirit and the inspiring force of the Association since its inception in 1958 till his death in 1981. The newsletter of the Association named *Sanchita* was published as its mouthpiece. Happily, it is still continuing with great success. The passing away of D. N. Sircar did not mean the end of Brahmo connection with the Association. Some Brahmos are playing prominent role in the running of the Association even now. They are Kalyan Kumar Poddar of Patna, Deba Parsad Ghosh and Amal Sengupta of Hazaribagh.

It was as a member of the Bengali Association that Dr. S.M. Ghosh and D.N. Sircar proposed to the government setting up a centre of Bengali art, literature and culture in Bihar.² The idea was mooted way back in 1871-72. Dr. Ghoshal and D.N. Sircar brought forth the idea. The subsequent years saw some efforts to attain the goal. The efforts

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1. Bibhuti Bhushan Mukhopadhyaya, "Bangla Samitir Katha," in Gurucharan Samanto (ed.), *Sanchita* (Special Conference Number), Patna, 1983, pp. 5-6.
 2. See the writing of Dr. Dilip Sen, the present Vice-president, Bihar Bengali Association and Prabhu Mukherjee, the present Secretary of the same in *The Indian Nation*, 27 May and 8 June 1983, and the letter of D.P. Ghosh, *Desh*, 29 May 1983.

were crowned with success when the Bihar Government set up the Bangla Academy in 1983. In its establishment the role of the then Chief Minister, Dr. Jagannath Mishra, is also commendable and he showed great interest in the Academy.

The Rammohun Hall and the Indian Medical Association Hall also acted as cultural platform for the city of Patna. The Rammohun Hall being the main hall of the Rammohan Roy Seminary saw great cultural activities since its foundation in 1926. The Baisakhi Sammelan, the annual function of the Seminary was one of the big annual events of Patna. It staged Bengali, Hindi, English, and Sanskrit plays by the students of the school. After the Second World War, the girl students also performed on the stage. They not only participated in the plays but also presented dance numbers. The functions of the Bengali Association are also held regularly at the Rammohan Hall.

The Indian Medical Association Hall was also planned and designed by Dr. S. M. Ghoshal. This Hall remains busy throughout the year with cultural programmes and with staging of one-act plays, Hindi as well as Bengali.

To sum up, the Brahmos played an exceedingly significant role in the cultural life of Bihar. They worked hard for the promotion of dance, drama and music. The Brahmo Samajs also acted as intellectual and cultural forums. This was an excellent case of cultural contact and cultural diffusion.

CONCLUSION

The two foregone studies on the educational activities of the Brahmos clearly bring out a moving fact that the Brahmos took spread of education as an essential part of their religious activity. There were three categories of Brahmos engaged in the promotion of education. The first group comprised of missionaries who fully devoted themselves to educational activities. The second group consisted of Brahmos who had been employed somewhere but devoted themselves to the work of education, either leaving the job or continuing with it. The third category of Brahmos consisted of individuals who were neither missionaries nor employed somewhere, but fully absorbed with the educational activities of the Samaj. Of course, individuals belonging to all the categories were intimately attached to the cause of education.

The spread of education was undoubtedly a noble objective which the Brahmos in Bihar derived from the New Learning and New Awakening in Bengal. In that sense, the promotion of education to them was an ideal to be attained at all costs and with all sacrifices. But at the same time, it must be mentioned that the work of education was also a necessary means for the survival of the Samaj in a conservative society. The

hold of the religious tradition was so strong that the Samaj could not make much of an impact with its religious doctrine. Rather it aroused strong opposition. Therefore the Samaj had to get involved in the work of education to justify its existence. Wherever in Bihar the Samaj opened its Mandir, a school became its essential part. The schools did not arouse direct opposition of the orthodox people. At worst they did not receive children from these. But children from liberal families and educationally backward families flocked to these schools in fairly large number. In course of time these schools proved their worth and children from orthodox families were being sent there. So the process of gradual social transformation was very much on.

A noteworthy point about the Samaj's work in the sphere of education is that it made pioneering effort in promoting modern education. The study of liberal subjects and science in a secular environment was very much patronised by the Brahmos.

The Samaj cannot claim much of credit in the sphere of college education. In fact, there is no college in the province under Brahmo management. But in two instances the Brahmo role in promoting college education is noteworthy. The Bihar National College of Patna would not have survived without the hard work, perseverance and dedication of Devendranath Sen. In that sense, he can be regarded as the founder of the college. Similarly, most of the credit for the establishment of the Sundarwati Mahila Mahavidyalaya of Bhagalpur must be attributed to Kshitish Chandra and Urmila Banerjee. Though the Brahmos did not run a college, some of them very much helped in the furtherance of the scholastic tradition of some of the colleges of Patna University and other universities of Bihar. In several cases the Brahmo scholars and educationists played the role of faculty-builders. Many Brahmos with their high academic and intellectual attainments held, and are still holding, important positions in the various faculties of the Patna University as well as other universities.

An extremely important aspect of the Samaj's work in the field of education is its emphasis upon female education. This has been the most noteworthy aspect of the Samaj's endless endeavour for female emancipation. It, along with other non-government agencies like the Christian missions and the Arya Samaj, played a vital role for the spread of female education in Bihar. This was done by it in the face of opposition from a conservative society which not only assigned women's place in the kitchen, but also put her within the veil.

The Samaj workers took this as a challenge and responded to it with courage and determination. Under their initiative and patronage female education made steady progress in the province. An interesting point is that the Samaj set up both middle and high schools for girls. In many areas where parents did not send their daughters to school after an advanced age, the middle schools proved very useful. The girls' high schools, established and managed by the Samaj, were equally successful. The accomplishment of the Samaj can be measured from the fact that none of the girls' schools set up by it proved defunct, rather their enrollment of students increased with every passing year.

The Samaj took the lamp of learning not only to women but also to the downtrodden and the deprived sections of the society. At several places including Patna, Gaya and Hazaribagh it ran schools purely for the purpose of educating the low caste children.

The Samaj played a significant role in promoting library movement in the state. This is indeed an important aspect of the Samaj's efforts for educational development in Bihar. Wherever it set up its school, a library followed inevitably. As the Samaj's schools possessed a liberal and non-sectarian character, its libraries included books on science, social sciences and other liberal subjects as well as on religion and philosophy.

The urge to have repositories of knowledge, however small, has always been strong among the Brahmo Samajis.

Lastly, the Brahmo scheme of education put emphasis upon the all-round development of boys and girls. It attached importance to religious and moral education as well as physical education. Sound mind in a sound body appeared to be the ideal which the member of the Samaj strove for in Bihar.

**CONSTITUTION OF THE RAMMOHUN ROY
SEMINARY, BANKIPORE**

as adopted at a meeting of
the Governing Body of the

SADHAN ASRAM SEVA SAMSDAD

(then called 'Sadhan Asram Seva Section'
held on 19th April, 1934)

A. THE FOUNDERS AND THEIR OBJECTS

1. The Ram Mohun Roy Seminary at Bankipur was founded on the 1st February 1897 by the Bankipur Branch of the Sadhan Asram.
2. The Sadhan Asram is a religious institution with headquarters at the 210/6, Cornwallis Street, Calcutta, and branches in certain places in India. The educational, social and philanthropic work of the Sadhan Asram is carried on by an Association registered under Act XXI of 1860, named the Sadhan Asram Seva Samsad. The Rammohun Roy Seminary is an institution affiliated to the Sadhan Asram Seva Samsad.

3. The object of the Rammohun Roy Seminary (as laid down by Pandit Sivanath Sastri, the founder both of the Sadhan Ashram and of the Seminary, in the first prospectus of the Seminary), is "to impart to its students a thoroughly good secular education, along with such moral instruction, based on the universal principle of natural religion as will make them honest, earnest, and God-fearing citizens in after life."

B. CENTRAL RULES OF MANAGMENT

4. Subject to Clauses 5 to 14 below, the entire management of the Seminary, including the appointment, dismissal and salaries of assistant teachers and other employees, full control over its income and expenditure, and the exercise of all such powers as are, ordinarily required to be exercised by Managing Committee of school, shall be in the hands of Managing Committee consisting of not less than 7 and not more than 11 members, to be appointed annually by the Governing Body of the Sadhan Asram Seva Samsad.
5. The Managing Committee shall always include the Headmaster (ex-officio), provided he holds that post substantively, and a Representative of the staff (other than the Head Master). To be elected by those teachers who are of at least on years' standing in the Seminary, from amongst those who are of at least two years' standing and have been confirmed on its staff according to Clause 13.
6. The appointment of the Managing Committee of the Seminary, of its Secretary and if necessary of a Treasurer, shall be made annually by the Governing Body of the Sadhan Ashram Seva Samsad. The appointment of other office-bearers shall be made by the Managing Committee, subject to the approval of the above Governing Body.

7. The appointment of the Head Master, and the framing of general rules of management shall be in the hands of the Sadhan Ashram Seva Samsad.
8. The above Governing Body shall stand in the position of Trustees to the Seminary. All properties received or acquired for and on behalf of the Seminary shall be vested in the above Governing Body.
9. The buildings and premises of the Seminary may be utilised by the Managing Committee for other than educational purposes only with the sanction of the above Governing Body. Worship of idols or images shall, however, in no circumstances be permitted in the buildings or premises of the Seminary.
10. Debts for meeting the current expenses of the Seminary may be contracted by the Managing Committee only under the following conditions :—
 - (a) The managing Committee may, without referring to the Governing Body of the Sadhan Asram Seva Samsad, contract a debt not exceeding Rs. 200/- in any one month.
 - (b) The total of such outstanding debts shall at no time exceed Rs. 500/-.
11. In conducting the affairs of the seminary, the Managing Committee shall keep in view the Objects of the Founders and the ideals of Brahmoism, and nothing must be done as may run counter to those objects, or to the ideals of Brahmoism.

In the appointment of teachers, other qualifications being equal, preference is to be given to Brahmos.
12. Details relating to school discipline and teaching, such as arrangement of clases, preparing the time table, class

promotion, selection of candidates for the Matriculation Examination, etc. shall be in charge of the Head Master acting under the guidance of the University and the Education Department.

13. The selection of teachers for filling vacancies in the staff shall be made in the first instance by the Head Master. The final appointment, and the confirmation of such appointment shall rest with the Managing Committee.
14. All other business of the School, including the preparation of scales of expenditure, and promotion, leave, suspension of dismissal of teachers, etc. shall be conducted by the Managing Committee.

Provided that a teacher once confirmed shall not be dismissed except at a meeting of the Managing Committee attended by two-thirds of the total number of members, and by a resolution voted for by three-fourths of the members present.

C. THE MANAGING COMMITTEE

15. The Managing Committee shall be appointed for one year viz. from the 1st April of one year to the 31st March of the next years. But it shall continue in office until the next Managing Committee has actually taken over charge.
16. Vacancies occurring in the Managing Committee during the year shall be filled up by the remaining members, subject to the confirmation by the Governing Body of the Sadhan Asram Seva Samsad.
17. The Secretary of the Managing Committee shall keep Minutes of the proceedings of all meeting of the Managing Committee, signed by himself, and confirmed by the signature of the Chairman of the next meeting.

18. All funds raised and all moneys received for the Seminary shall be employed solely for the purpose and objects of the Seminary.
19. The Managing Committee shall cause true accounts of all income and expenditure of the Seminary to be kept, and such accounts shall be presented before the meetings of the Managing Committee at least once a quarter. The accounts shall be properly audited at least once every year.
20. Reports and accounts of the Seminary and copies of important resolution of the Managing Committee, for the two half-years April to September and October to March, shall be forwarded by the Managing Committee to the Governing Body of the Sadhan Asram Seva Samsad.

D. RULES OF BUSINESS

21. For the present the rules framed by the Government of Bihar for Managing Committees of aided schools in respect of quorum, notice, frequency of meetings and the general conduct of business, shall be followed.
22. Should however, at any time such Rules become unavailable, the meetings of the Managing Committee shall be conducted in accordance with the following rules :—
 - (a) The Secretary may at any time call a meeting by a Notice of at least two clear days. Four shall form a quorum. Meetings shall ordinarily be held once a month, except during vacations.
 - (b) At the meetings of the Managing Committee all questions shall be decided by the vote of the majority. The Chairman shall have a casting vote, in addition to his vote as a member, in case of a tie.

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2. File of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Patna, preserved at Rammohun Roy Seminary Library.
3. File of the Hazaribagh Brahmo Samaj, preserved at the Samaj building, Hazaribagh.

No more files could be located. It is supposed that they have been destroyed or misplaced. Contacts were made with the old Brahmo families but regrettably, they could not be found out. As a result proceedings of the Brahmo Samaj meetings at several Samajes of Bihar remain unavailable.

B. Interviews

Numerous Brahmo and non-Brahmo individuals who had been or are associated with the Brahmo Samaj activities at various places of Bihar have been interviewed. Some ladies and gentlemen who once had close association with the Brahmo Samajes

of Bihar and now living outside Bihar, chiefly in Calcutta, have been contacted for numerous informations on the Brahmo Samaj movement in Bihar.

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INDEX

- Acharya, Dr. Prankrishana 26
- Aghore Paribar 8, 13, 46, 54
- Aghore Prakash Shishu Sadan 53, 56
 - control over building 55
 - financial crisis 55.
 - recruitment of teachers 58
- Anand Bazar Patrika* 103
- Arnold, tradition 29
- Associations and Halls 101
- Baisakhi Sammelam 31, 105
- Bandyopadhyaya, Ajit Kumar 26
- Bankipore Brahmo Mandir 13
- Banerjee, Raja Sahib Chandra 78
- Bankipore Girls' High School 35
 - Finance problem 37
 - subject taught 39
 - Managing Committee 43.
- Basu, Nalin Kumar 63
- Bengali Association 104
- Behar Herald* 90, 91
- Bengal Renaissance 2
- Bhagavat Gita 18
- Bhais, Five 14
- Bihari society 12
- Bihar National College, Patna 107
- Bihar Bengali Association 104
- Brahmo (*passim*) Converts 3
 - missionaries 3, 90
 - Dharma 4
- Brahmo Sangeet 99
- Brahmoism 2, 3, 5,
- Brohmo Samaj, Culture centres 88
- Chakravarti, Gurudas 14, 15, 16, 24
 - Satis Chandra 14, 16, 18, 24, 90
- Cheap School movement 84
- Civil Disobedience 31
- Children's School and other institution 73
- Chatterjee, Bankim Chandra 39
- Chhotanagpur Girls' High School 68
 - faced critical times 70
- College and University education 59
- College education 84
- Das Gupta, Anusuya 45
- Devi, Aghore Kamini 7, 8, 14, 36, 37, 38, 53, 95
- Distinguished Brahmos 63
- East India Company 5
- Educational work at Hazaribagh and Ranchi 75
- Education Department 49
- Eminent Personalities 34
- English Society 6
 - Utilitarian 11
- Fakhruddin, Sir Saijid 27, 33

- Faucus, C.E. Director of Public Education 29
- Female education, emphasis upon 108
- Gaya Brahmo Samaj 8
- Ghosal, Sardindu Mohan 48, 97
- Giridih High School 67
—financial difficulties 67
- Gitanjali Sangeet Mahavidyalaya 100
- Ghosh, Dr. K.D. 77, 79
—Aurobindo 77
—Labanyabala 87
- Gabardhan Das, Damodardas 23
- Guha, Rajanikanta 3, 14, 15, 18
- Gupta, Sushma Sen 55, 56, 57
- Hamilton, Sir Frederick 5
—insulted Raja Rammohun 5
- Hari Sunder Bose, Bhakta 9
- Hazaribagh, Samaj 76, 101
—children's functions 96
- Holy Family Church 55
- Important luminaries 46
- Indian Medical Association 105
- Indian Nation, The* 33
- Indian Peoples Theatre Association (IPTA) 99
- Indian Spectator, The* 40
- Intellectual Centre 89
- Jethwani, Hiranand 40
- Kadam Kuan, High School 48
- Kahars 57
- Khan, Khuda Bakhsh 20
- Keshub Memorial Fund 101
- Khuda Bakhsha Library 13
- Library movement, promoting 108
- Magadh Mahila College 63
- Manchester College of Education 18
- Mesurier, H. Le 21, 23
- Minto, Lord 6
- Mokshda Girls' High School 77, 80, 83, 85
—Headmistress, Satya Priya Bose 80
—Secretary of 81
- National Cadet Corps 82
- Natural Religion 15
- Nehru, Pandit Jawaharlal 56
- Niyogi, Brijagopal 44, 45, 95
—Niranjan 45
- Pargiter, F. E. 61
- Patna College 60
- Patna University 107
- Pedler, Richard 21
- Poddar, Kshetramohan 26
- Prakash Dev, Bhai 17
- Prince of Wales Medical College 62
- Proselytization, not uppermost 11
- P.W. Medical College, Patna 97
- Rabindra Parishad 98, 102
—Bhawan, 103
- Rabindra Balika Vidya'aya 45, 49
—early progress 47
—Constitution of 52
—construction of building 51
—Managing Committee 49, 50
—inauguration ceremony 52
- Rajnarain Bose Library 91, 92
- Rammohun Roy Seminary, The 14, 15, 29, 93, 110
—Hall 105
—Constitution of 110
- Ravindra Sangeet 99
- Ravindranath, Gurudev (Tagore) 99
- Roy Prakash Chandra 7, 8, 13, 53
- Roy, Raja Rammohun 1, 5, 6, 18
—witnessed rationalistic spirit 1
- Sadhan Ashram Seva Samsad 110
—managing Committee 111, 112,
—rules of Business 114
- Sadhan Ashram, Patna 4, 13

- calcutta 16
- Bankipore 20, 110
- Sahay, Harbans 19
- Samaj (Brahmo Samaj, *passim*)
- Sarkar, Hemchandra 16, 18
 - Jadunath 61
- Sastri, Pandit Sivanath 14, 16, 56
- Search light, The* 33
- Sen, Keshub Chandra 1, 7, 35
 - D.N., principal 46
 - Mrinalini (poetess) 79
- Shantiniketan 102
- Sinha, Satyendra Narain 49
 - (Mrs.) Kishori 49
 - Sachchidananda 91
- Srirang Behari Lal 16, 26
- Sundar Singh, Bhai 17
- Sundarvati Women's College 85, 107
- Tableaux vivants, Drama and
- Music 94, 95, 96
- Thicket, R. 26
- Thoburn, Principal 37
 - Miss 41
- T.N.J. College 86
- University, Patna 60
- Upanishads 18, 64
- Urmila Devi 82, 83
- Utopian 17
- Vidyasagar, Ishawar Chandra 1
- Vedas 64
- Western Philosophy 24
- Winternitz, M. 61
- Woodburn, Sir John 21
- Western knowledge and education 2
- Yadavas 57

