
SECTION 2

**INDIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY**

2

In the following chapters we shall examine the way in which Christ has been interpreted in approximately the last two and half centuries by Indian thinkers who were in the forefront in the cultural, social, political and religious changes taking place in India. We focus on three or four leading thinkers, both on their life and their interpretation of Christ. For the sake of uniformity the method we follow in each case is the same: we give an outline of the background of their life and teaching and the main points of their interpretation followed by an evaluation.

One word of caution here. It does not mean that those whom we consider here are the only ones to have responded to the Christian Gospel, nor that they have responded most. It only means that for scientific analysis their writings are preserved and are available. It is possible that later some other writings/theologians be discovered for an objective study.

RAJA RAMMOHAN ROY (1774 - 1833)

We have already seen that the new self-understanding of Hinduism in the last two centuries was primarily on account of its encounter with Christian faith. There is no doubt that such new self-understanding is really new, because it differs considerably from that of classical Hinduism. It is both a reaction to the Western (then basically Christian) influences, as well as their product. This is evidenced by the new sense of Hindu missions.

As religion, culture, politics, society and philosophy were all one bundle, this face-lift of neo-Hinduism affected all these areas. But it is legitimate to say that the primary reinterpretations took place in the social-ethical sphere. There was an increasing aversion to idolatry, polytheism, casteism, joint-family, disregard of woman on the one hand.

At the same time there was an addition of new ethical and philanthropic elements, on the other.

Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) is hailed as the 'morning star of Indian renaissance', 'the Prophet of Indian Nationalism', 'the father of modern India'. He is also the first Indian leader to take Christian faith seriously, and also has responded to it extensively. He was born in a Brahmin family of Bengal. As such, he was very sensitive in spiritual/religious matters, and left home at the age of fifteen in search of truth. In his search in other cultures he mastered several languages – Bengali, Sanskrit, English as well as Arabic and Persian. The latter particularly impressed upon his growing mind the truth of monotheism as well as the rejection of idolatry. The watershed in his life was his witnessing to the agony of his brother's wife, being burnt alive in *sati*. He vowed at that moment to devote all his life to the abolition of this evil practice. For this he took his strength from the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Upanishads. Boyd rightly comments: It was Christian ethics rather than Christian dogma which attracted Ram Mohun Roy, and he saw no reason why a compromise should not be possible between his own Hindu monism based on the Upanishads, and the morality of the Sermon on the Mount.¹

In fact he founded a new religious society based on such a compromise, the Atmiya Sabha (the spiritual congregation) in 1815, which after a few years, and with the influence of Dwarkanath Tagore and Prosonno Kumar became Brahma Sabha (the Congregation of the Brahman). Later it was called Brahmo Samaj (the society of Brahmos) in 1830. In this society, worship was to the one God, with rituals and theologies taken from both Hindu and Christian scriptures. The Society was also concerned with social reform, and published literature for the purpose.

Later in his life Roy visited England to fight before the British Government the cause of a local maharajah (from whom he received the title Raja), but died in Bristol due to illness in 1833. Only recently he has been re-discovered as

the 'Father of Indian Renaissance', and his writings have been published just in 1948.

Roy's writings include: *The Precepts of Jesus* (the full title runs: "The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness, extracted from the books of the New Testament, ascribed to the four evangelists" with translations into Sanskrit and Bengalese), *Appeals to the Christian Public in Defense of the Precepts of Jesus by a Friend of Truth* (18 pages), followed by a second (112 pages) and final (200 pages) appeal.

Roy's Interpretation of Christ

It is clear from the titles of Roy's writings that he was not so much interested in the person of Jesus as in His teachings, the precepts. This is a typical Hindu approach, in two aspects: (1) they place the principles above the person, and (2) they are interested more in Jesus than in Christianity as a religion. Roy did so separate Jesus' teachings as the essence of Christianity:

These precepts separated from the mysterious dogmas and historical records, appear . . . to contain not only the essence of all that is necessary to instruct mankind . . . but also the best and the only means of obtaining forgiveness of sins, the favour of God and strength to overcome our passions and to keep his commandments.²

It seems that for the same reason he rejects the glorified view of John's portrayal of Christ but prefers the more realistic picture of the synoptic gospels. And, if we remember his Unitarian position, it becomes apparent that here Roy is rejecting the deity of Christ and accepting an Arian Christology, that Jesus was no more than a created being, and not the creator. For Roy, the primary argument was that Jesus Christ betrays his "natural inferiority of the Son to the Father",³ because

(1) The Son is dependent on the Father and is his subject;

(2) The Son has submitted his will to the Father, and thus is in moral union with the Father and not in identity of being;

(3) He is the mediator and the messiah as the first-born of all creatures.

So Roy writes,

I regret only that the followers of Jesus in general, should have paid much greater attention to inquiries after his nature than to the observance of his commandments, when we are well aware that no human acquirements can ever discover the nature even of the most common and visible things and moreover that such inquiries are not enjoined by the divine revelation.⁴

Thus the main contention between Roy and the Serampore missionaries and particularly Marshman, concerns the nature of Christ. Roy does not deal with the monistic concept (the Father and the Son are one and the same) nor with the Nicene formula of one essence in three persons, but affirms the moral unity. But he does revere Jesus as the unfallen Adam. Though he affirms the virgin birth and the miracles and even bodily resurrection, yet his emphasis is on none of these, but only on the teachings of Jesus. For this reason, he does not also see the saving significance of Christ's life, namely, of the cross and resurrection. For, he affirms, there is no biblical evidence for such a doctrine of the cross as the all-sufficient means for our salvation, but repentance instead is the only means. He finds divine injustice if God inflicts suffering on an innocent person on behalf of others. It is obvious that this kind of Christology negates also the doctrine of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is not so much a person as 'it' is an influence, or power, of God – it is not self-existent, as it proceeds from the Father as does also from the son. This means that only God (*Brahma*) is to be worshipped, not the creatures, and for Roy the Son and the Holy Spirit belong to this lesser realm. To worship the Son and the Holy Spirit would be equal to primitive Hindu worship!

Apparently Roy was not interested in other aspects of Christian faith, such as the Church, which his follower Keshub Chunder Sen took most seriously. So it is concerning the truth contained in the sayings of Jesus that Roy finds the uniqueness of Christ. Here he was so convinced of

Jesus' example, that there is a story of one Mathura Nath Bose coming to Christ and baptism through the reading of Roy's Precepts!

Evaluation

What can we say in evaluation of Roy's theology? First, he was a watershed in Indian interpretation of Jesus Christ in several ways. He was the first to separate Christ and Christianity, and to reject the latter in preference of the former; the first to criticize the Hindu socio-religious system, and that too on the basis of the truths found in the Bible; the first to emphasize the ethical components of Hinduism; and also the first to start a syncretistic movement, the Brahmo Samaj.

Secondly, it is typical of Hindu interpretations of Jesus Christ to minimize the significance of Jesus' life – his passion, death and resurrection – over against his teaching. The reason is that in the historical understanding of reality, where everything returns again and again to the origin in a cycle, it is impossible to give permanent value to a person, who is a historical reality, only for a brief space of time. The understanding of this world as the realm of Maya, as illusion, is the root cause behind this devaluation of the concrete in preference to the abstract. Hence, Roy and many thinkers after him do not see that Jesus' calling to people was to himself – and that in Jesus the Kingdom of God has come to man in a decisive form. But Jesus clearly claimed to be the object of human faith – "Believe in me", "Follow me", are refrains in the New Testament.

Thirdly, it is plain that Roy's hesitation to ascribe to Jesus the divine nature stems from his allegiance to Unitarianism. Like the Unitarians, he also overlooks Jesus' claims to deity such as his acceptance of worship, power to forgive sins, power over the material world as its creator-Lord, pre-existence, etc. But in the New Testament there is a clear teaching about the person of the Holy Spirit – not only in grammar, but also in revealing his personality in the capacity to have relationship with man, to be grieved,

and to lead, comfort and accompany believers in their struggles.

Finally, the rejection of the orthodox doctrine of atonement – on the cross Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of mankind in their place – takes away the very essence of Christian faith. This is possible when one holds that man is capable of doing what God demands of him, thus denying the fallenness of human nature. Only those who deny the fallenness of man will dilute or throw away the biblical truth that God is holy and righteous, while man sinful. Indeed what Roy says is a mixture of ancient Arianism and Pelagianism. We could also add here that Roy's rationalism is a stubborn stumbling block to the spiritual truths which can be assimilated only by faith and consequent confirmation in obedience (for a different evaluation of Roy's thinking, see M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, pp. 29-36).

KESHUB CHUNDER SEN (1838 - 1884)

Raja Rammohan Roy did start off some of the typical approaches to Christian faith. But he was not a typical Hindu seeker, for ethical and social questions cannot be asked in Hinduism *per se* but rather primarily religious and philosophical questions. Also, Roy's thinking was more in the rationalistic line of the Western thinkers than genuinely Indian. The next leader of the Brahma Samaj, Debendranath Tagore (1870-1905), went consciously and deliberately back into the Hindu tradition, and so had hardly anything worthwhile to say concerning Jesus or Christianity. Thus, the next important Indian interpretation of Christ is his successor, Keshub Chunder Sen. As Boyd observes, Sen is the "pattern Hindu seeker", yet, "one who has found the pearl of great price but is reluctant to sell all that he has in order to buy it", namely, the pearl of Jesus Christ.⁵ This lack of full commitment to Christ is rather the rule than the exception in Indian Christianity, is it not? Imagine the disaster such a lack would bring about in a marriage! Would to God that we had more committed disciples of Christ than

all these scholars and theologians, leaders and evangelists put together!

K.C. Sen and the Brahma Samaj

Keshub Chunder Sen was born (19th November 1838) in Colutolah in Calcutta, as the second son in a Vaidya caste family, to Piari Mohun Sen and Sarada Devi. Losing his father at the age of ten, Keshub came under the vaishnavite influence of his mother. It was during his teen-age that he became dissatisfied with Hinduism, a strong impulse to pray became the driving force of his life. At this time he began to study the Bible, came into contact with missionaries and philosophies. His marriage to a nine year old village girl was traumatic for him and he decided for ascetic life. He joined Brahma Samaj in 1857 signing the membership covenant. This seems to have given him a new identity he was longing for. It was under the tutelage of the Brahma leader Debendranath Tagore that Keshub bloomed in his brahma convictions. Debendranath says about Keshub, "whatever he thought in his mind he had the power to express in his speech. Whatever he said, he had the power to do. Whatever he did he had the power of making other men do."

Such an eulogy by the leader of the Brahma Samaj won for Keshub the self confidence as well as respect from others. Sen brought a revolution in the Brahma Samaj. Originally only Brahmins were to have leadership, and so the ordaining of Sen as the first non-Brahmin *Acharya* (Priest) of the Samaj was not accepted by all the Brahmans. Throughout his life he was a sincere seeker, highly research-minded, pious. At 17 years of age he joined the Samaj and was soon recognized for his gift of oratory. In 1860 Sen formed a Sangha Sabha where spiritual devotions as well as intellectual debates on the contemporary issues in religion and society were the primary agenda. From 1861 Sen worked whole time for the Samaj. He advocated abandoning the sacred thread. He introduced Christian philanthropy into the Samaj and founded the Calcutta College, in 1861, the first college founded by an Indian. His young wife

participated in the ordination service of her husband which became a catalyst for women's liberation at the time.

But on the issues of widow remarriage and inter-caste marriage Sen and Debendranath Tagore separated, and Sen founded the Brahma Samaj of India in 1861 (Debendranath's Brahma Samaj died shortly after this). Sen made *bhakti* the watchword of this new movement which shows the strong influence of Vaishnavist roots all his life. Unlike Roy's Samaj, Sen's Samaj included the Christian elements into its sessions in a fuller way: the use of Scriptures, meeting on Sundays, earnest prayers to *Brahma*, the starting of Brahma missions, to cite a few examples. He also developed Brahma liturgies and annual festivals were introduced. While the former Brahmans accepted divine revelation only in nature and intuition, Sen added that God can be known also in history – a step nearer to incarnation than Roy's rigid position. Soon he became a Brahma missionary, a very successful one too. He undertook a watershed lecture tour of England in 1870, which seems to have confirmed his disillusionments about Christianity. On his return Keshub began announcing his vision of a new dispensation, demanding all accept him as its initiator. At this time he got acquainted also with Dayananda Saraswati and Ramakrishna Paramahansa; due to the fanatical tendencies of the former Keshub could not develop a genuine friendship with him, as he did with Ramakrishna, whom he actually introduced to the world.

However, his autocratic control of the Samaj, his doctrine of *Adesh* (see below) and his attitude towards the emancipation of women brought about opposition from the Samajists. His weak health during the last years of his life was a great handicap for his activities and leadership, and he died, rather a disappointed soul in April 1884.

In his later life, Sen developed an extreme egocentric attitude which stifled his otherwise great spiritual sensitivity. He began the doctrine of *adesha* (message, revelation), that in his time God was exclusively speaking and revealed Himself through Sen as the human instrument. He de-

manded *Vairagya* and expected total allegiance from his followers as devotees. He met Ramakrishna and under his influence started to emphasize the motherhood of God. Later in 1861 he inaugurated the Church of *Nababidhan* (the church of the New Dispensation) with great pomp and show. For the purpose he presented himself with twelve disciples and four scriptures (Christian, Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim) to drive home the fact that like Jesus in his time, he (Sen) was the latest revelation of God, superseding all the earlier ones. He called this band the "apostolic durbar". He also introduced sacrifices, baptism and Eucharist, mystic dances and even magic.

Paradoxically, it is also during this later period that his attraction to Christ increased – even some of his closest friends have written that Sen died a Christian – a debatable opinion indeed. He died in 1884. He was a charismatic personality with great gifts and sincerity, and has given many seed thoughts for Indian Christian theology. Yet neither in thought nor life nor in ministry was he systematic.

Most of Sen's theological writings are to be found in his annual lectures to the Brahmans, which he prepared with meticulous research, especially those given between 1863 and 1866 are rich in content. These have been published in two sets: *Keshub Chunder Sen's Lectures in India* (2 volumes); *The New Dispensation* (2 volumes). Besides these several scores of authors have written about him and his theology: C.F. Andrews, M.C. Parekh, V.S. Azariah, S.N. Banerjea, H.C. Banerjee, G.C. Banerji, Meredith Borthwick, Motilal Das, K.S. Ghose, B. Mozoomdar, P.C. Mozoomdar, F. Max Muller, B.V. Ray, G.G. Roy, P.K. Sen, T.E. Slater, Marquess Zetland and many others. The main writings of Sen include (in English) *The Book of Pilgrimages*, *Brahmagitopanishat*, *The Brahma Samaj*, *Divine Worship*, *Jeevan Veda* (autobiography); he has also written scores of articles in English, and books in Bengali.

K.C. Sen's Theology

The main elements of Sen's theology could be summarized under three heads: God, Christ and the Church.

DOCTRINE OF GOD

Being a Brahmo, Sen was naturally concerned with the doctrines of the Trinity to start with. It is to Sen that Indian Christians owe their use of the term, *Saccidananda* (*Sat* + *cit* + *ananda* = truth + intelligence + bliss) for the Trinity. Boyd suggests that this term is more adequate than the Nicene Formula of one substance and three persons, which is still in Greek philosophical categories. It is to be noticed that more than Roy, Sen accepted this doctrine. In one of his annual lectures he writes,

In this plane figure of three lines you have the solution to a vast problem; The Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost; the Creator, the Exemplar, the Sanctifier; I am, I love, I save; the still God, the journeying God, the returning God; Force, Wisdom, Holiness; the True, the Good, the Beautiful; *Sat*, *Cit*, *Ananda*; Truth, Intelligence, Joy.

Obviously, here Sen is reconciling the Christian Trinity with Hindu *Saccidananda* and Greek philosophical virtues. In this attempt, there is a streak of modalism (of God revealing himself in three modes or times) and thus diluting the distinction of the three persons in the Godhead. In another lecture, he describes the three persons as the Above, the Below, and the Within. No doubt these descriptions are helpful – perhaps more helpful than the ontological language of the Greeks. The crux of the matter in Christian dogma is the precise meaning of the terms “person” and “substance” or “essence” – lacking this, any adequate clarification of the Nicene formula of one substance in three persons is fruitless.

DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

Like most of the Indian thinkers Sen, too, is attracted towards Christ and Christology more than anything else. Sen was the first to discover that the Christ of the Bible is an Asiatic Christ, and thus as being nearer to Indian thought than is acknowledged.

For Sen, Christ and his religion are “altogether an oriental affair”. He writes in a moving passage,

Behold, he cometh to us in his loose flowing garment, his dress and features altogether oriental, a perfect Asiatic in everything. Watch his movements and you will find genuine orientalism in all his habits and manners, in his uprising and down sitting, his going forth and his coming in, his preaching and ministry, his very language, style and tone. Indeed while reading the Gospel, we cannot but feel that we are quite at home when we are with Jesus, and that he is altogether one of us. Surely Jesus is our Jesus.

It is this understanding of Christ that helped Sen to replace the Greek *logos* concept of the gospel of John with the Hindu/Indian concept of *Cit*, the word of creation. The eternally asleep *logos* or *cit* is not just at the beginning of creation but also at the consummation of it at the end. Thus *cit* is the culmination of humanity, of the process of history – the whole creative evolution.

In all this Christology, Sen understands Christ’s unity with the Father neither as metaphysical nor as ontological but as mystical communion.

Unlike many Indians, Sen dwells more upon the humanity of Jesus than his deity! Sen was not tired of describing Christ as the son of a humble carpenter, who grew like any other normal man; yet he was more than a man, because he was “a divine man”, a term which has been repeatedly used in India and elsewhere for Christ since then. In fact this term is Sen’s favourite description of Jesus Christ. This divineness of Christ consists in the fact that he was so filled with God that he destroyed self. Bonhoeffer’s phrase for Christ, “the Man for Others” would have aptly suited Sen’s concept of Christ’s divinity. In one of his lectures he clarifies his *kenosis* theory as follows:

When I come to analyse this doctrine I find it nothing but the philosophical principle underlying the popular doctrine of self-abnegation . . . Christ ignored and denied his self altogether . . . he destroyed self. And as self ebbed away, heaven came pouring into his soul. For . . . nature abhors a vacuum, and hence as soon as the soul is emptied of self, Divinity fills the void.⁶

Sen finds this *kenosis* of Jesus in his utterances such as “I and my Father are one”, “I can of my own self do nothing”,

and "I am in my Father and my Father is in me". The first of these quotations has become the most quoted saying of Jesus in India concerning his own person. Jesus manifested his divinity in his utter self-surrender and dependence upon the Father. Thus for Sen "Jesus is identical with self-sacrifice". It is on this basis that Sen makes forgiveness and self-sacrifice the two foundations of Christian living.

But what does Sen think of Christ's atoning work? Of the Cross and Resurrection? He regards the cross as nothing more than an example of the self-sacrifice. He writes, "I have always regarded the Cross as a beautiful symbol of self-sacrifice unto the glory of God."⁷ It is through the moral influence of his death on the cross as the supreme example of self-denial that Christ turns men from sin to God. Each one can be saved by imitating this example of self-giving. Thus, "Go thou, and do likewise" is the way of appropriating Christ's salvation and no other way is there for Sen. Through Christ, "as through a brother's example, fallen humanity rises sanctified and regenerated."⁸ As journeying god, he becomes human, in order that we may become divine. As such Sen's concept of salvation is more of divinisation than humanization. But in all this, Sen is not thinking so much of individual salvation but rather of the cosmic salvation of all mankind. Hence there is little emphasis on repentance and faith as means of appropriating the salvation. In fact, he seems to have conceived of this salvation as an automatic process or result of Christ's coming, which process he calls christification. There is a danger here, of the possibility that this Christification could mean, in Sen's thinking, the Hindu realization of *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am Brahman).

It is possible, as Boyd gives credit to Sen, that during the latter period of his life Sen came closer to the orthodox concept of atonement, namely that of the efficacy of Christ's death for the remission of our sins. Even the language of substitution is used:

Christ substituted himself for the world . . . Believe in this substitution and we are all one in Christ . . . Behold, I am reconciled to all through the blood of him crucified.⁹

Yet, in all this there is hardly any understanding of the Cross being the penalty for the sins of mankind. As such, the dominant ideas of Sen seems to be that Christ is a mediator in what he *is* than what he *does*, more due to his *nature* than due to his *work*.

Before leaving Sen's Christology, one more element should be noted. He sees Christ wherever he sees something good and noble – be it religion, philosophy or ideology. As such, for him Christ is present in all systems – the concept of hidden Christ which the later thinkers so gluttonously accepted! Sen writes, "Christ is already present in you . . . He is in you, even when you are unconscious of his presence."¹⁰

Like those who advocate a cosmic Christ, Sen also resorts to passages like John, 1:9: "He is the light that lighteth every man coming into the world", Acts, 17:27,28: "He is not far from any of us. In him we live and move and have our being", and 14:17: "God has not left any of us without a testimony concerning himself." This kind of Christology led Sen to a syncretistic religion very near to that of M.M. Thomas' Christ-centred syncretism, but which he called the Church of the New Dispensation.

DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Sen saw himself as divinely appointed and commissioned to be "the leader of the New Dispensation" in which all religions are harmonized and in which all men are summoned to enter as their spiritual home. He claimed special divine inspiration (*Adesha*), equal to that of Moses and Jesus.

In fact, Sen claimed that Moses' was the first dispensation, Jesus' and Paul's the second, and his the third and the final one, which necessarily supersedes all previous dispensations and revelations. This was definitely a deliberate attempt on Sen's part to integrate the Western and Eastern religions into one heritage. He used the symbols of the cross, the Hindu *trishul* (three-pronged spear) and the Islamic half-moon and star as the emblem of his new

indigenous Church. As we saw earlier in the life sketch, he also used the scriptures from these religions on par with the Bible. The goal of this move was the unification of all mankind in himself!

This new church was more intimately related to the Holy Spirit than was previously the case. But in claiming his inspiration as final and superseding all others, Sen is in fact monopolizing the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and not the Holy Spirit controlling Sen! You see, between heresy and orthodoxy there is but a thin line of demarcation, which any of us can cross! Look at what Sen could say under such a misunderstanding of God's revelation:

Keshub Chunder Sen, a servant of God, called to be an apostle of the Church of the New Dispensation, which is in the Holy city of Calcutta, the metropolis of Aryavarta, to all the great nations in the world and to the followers of Moses, of Jesus, of Buddha, of Confucius, of Zoroaster, of Mahmet, of Nanak and to the various branches of the Hindu Church, to the saints and sages, the bishops and the elders, the ministers and the missionaries of all these religious bodies:

Grace be unto you and peace everlasting . . .

And later on the message claims an exclusive revelation to Keshub Sen, and ends with the plea:

Let Asia, Europe, Africa and America with divine instruments praise the New Dispensation, and sing the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

In spite of the opposition from the contemporary bishops – Anglican and Roman Catholic – Sen continued to stand by his claims, and towards the end of his life there was an element even of irrationality in his thought. Needless to say, this new dispensation church died shortly after its founder's death – the usual story of all human enterprises! But God's work will continue, not only in spite of man's obedience, but because of his disobedience!

Evaluation

In evaluating Sen's seminal thoughts, we could say many things both in favour and disfavour of him.

On the positive side: Undoubtedly the credit of using indigenous thought forms, categories and terms for Christian message goes to Sen. *Saccidananda*, Christian *mahavakya*, Asiatic Christ are the obvious examples. More than this, he also gave seeds for posterity to Indianise the Christian faith: the concept of divine-human, hidden Christ, Christ-centred integration, *kenosis* as self-emptying, the emphasis on the Holy Spirit, Christification, are some of the seeds which have yielded harvest with the later Indian interpreters of Christ.

Secondly, while Roy refused to go beyond looking at Christ other than the principle he presents (namely, that of self-giving love), Sen goes one step further and accepts the significance of Christ's person, not just his teaching. In fact it was the power of Christ's person and not his wisdom which most fascinated Sen.

Thirdly, it was a great stroke of genius to see the place of church in the Christian scheme of things, and Sen makes it essential to his own theology. At the same time, he tried to keep his New Dispensation Church away from the western institutionalism and dogmatism, hence his loose organisation. It was a mixture of both Jesus' apostles and the Indian *gurukul* (teacher and disciples living together) system. Compared to the Brahmos, it was surely a step nearer to the Christian church.

Fourthly, Sen was again the first to emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian doctrines. No doubt there is a tendency to lean heavily upon personal mystical aspects, but as a creative thinker he was not free from faults.

And finally, he was also the first to lay emphasis upon the experience of spiritual realities, unlike Raja Rammohan Roy. Not just ethical life, but more than that spiritual experiences made his teachings appealing. For the same reason, against the brahmo philosophy Sen accepted history as a mode of God's revelation.

On the negative side: the first thing to notice is of course his doctrine of *adesha*, as a unique God's revelation, higher

even than Jesus Christ. The disregard for tradition is a major sign of heresy. Even we, every time we attempt to start some Christian ministry from the scratch, without building upon the insights of our forerunners, fall into a similar trap! Before God, a recognition not of self-righteousness but of self-unrighteousness counts.

Secondly, though Sen accepted the significance of Christ, he did not commit himself to Christ – the basic trouble with all self-confident prophets. For a long time he seemed to be in double-mind as to this demand of Christ, but the later developments of syncretistic Church and personal *Adesha* betray the fact that finally Sen was no Christian disciple. This also leads him to an handling of the Word of God selectively to suit his convenience – another modern danger! Sen’s calling his approach “Christian eclecticism” does not alter the judgment.

Thirdly, Sen could not penetrate beyond his idea of Christ as the supreme example of self-giving love to the biblical idea of Christ’s death as God’s provision for the sins of all mankind. The dilution of the substitutionary understanding of the Cross is the beginning of all liberalism and can be a disastrous by-product of attempts of a positive approach to other religions.

Fourthly, the idea of a hidden Christ suggested by Sen is vigorously taken up by many recent thinkers in India such as M.M. Thomas, Raymondo Panikkar, and Stanley Samartha (see later) and also by Westerners like Karl Rahner and Paul Tillich. It must be admitted that to concentrate the whole human-divine enterprise on one man Jesus is an offense to man as man, but the biblical fact cannot be meddled with. “No one comes to the Father but by me” is the only bedrock on which any relationship of the Christian faith with other religions and philosophies and ideologies can be built. We dare not speak more than, or less than, the Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen, confessed as Lord and Saviour. Any vague principles of Christhood or self-giving love will inevitably lead to anti-Christian messages.

For other evaluations one can find many books, but a handy one is that by M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, pp. 67-83.

PRATAP CHANDRA MOZOOMDAR (1840 - 1905)

There is not much too exiting about the life-background of Mozoomdar (1840-1905): He was attracted to the Brahmo Samaj because of the charismatic personality of its Guru, K.C. Sen, and through his inspiration became the most important Brahmo missionary. After the death of the founder of the New Dispensation Church, the Apostolic Durbar refused to have any leader other than Sen himself, or to elect Mozoomdar in Sen’s place. But the bulk of the Brahmo membership however, and Mozoomdar himself, felt otherwise, and so Mozoomdar became the last leader of the controversial Brahmo Samaj.

Mozoomdar was barely able to hold together the crumbling structure, only his loyalty to Sen enabled him to carry on as the leader. He wrote several books: *The Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen*, *The Oriental Christ*, *Heart beats*, *The Spirit of God*, and *Lectures in America* and others Papers. The first two stand as the best known.

Mozoomdar’s Theology

The primary concern of Mozoomdar was to make the Christian Gospel relevant to the “spiritual instincts and national sympathies of Hindus”. Thus, addressing himself primarily to Hindu spirituality, Mozoomdar frames his whole theology in terms of the Spirit. And as the Brahmos rejected pantheism, he explains his system as pan-en-theism, Spirit in all things – in nature, human life, history. He says,

The divine Spirit permeates every pore of matter and of humanity, and yet is absolutely different from both . . . There is no beauty, no wisdom, no faithfulness, no purity, no piety and no self-sacrifice that is not inspired by him. The goodness of all the good is a ray of reflection from him, the greatness of all the great points to his throne on high.¹¹

Elsewhere Mozoomdar says: "the universal background . . . the universal heart of things, . . . is surcharged with the Spirit and presence of God."¹²

Hindu pantheism is expressed in the two *mahavakyas*, *Aham Brahmasmi* and *Tat tvam Asi*. These statements identify everything with God and thus destroy the personhood of both God and man. By contrast, Mozoomdar asserts that his pan-en-theism safeguards personhood in both.

He finds that even Christ can best be explained in terms of the Spirit. Being omnipresent, the divine Spirit manifests himself more in some and less in other human beings, but in Christ the Spirit reveals himself to the greatest degree. The graduation of the Spirit's presence from the lowest to the highest is as follows: nature-life-man-saints-Son of God. Hence, the incarnation of Christ is the most important revelation of the Spirit, as it reveals most of the Spirit.

DOCTRINE OF THE SPIRIT

What is Mozoomdar's understanding of this divine Spirit? For him it is the "evolving principle" in the creative process, source and substance of all things — definitely a Hindu concept! And so he finds a parallelism between Hindu and Christian revelations. In the places of Vedas, Christianity has the Old Testament; in the place of Upanishads, it has the Pauline epistles; and in the place of puranas, it has the Gospel. The doctrine of creation is characteristic of the first, the doctrine of man is characteristic of the third. Of the three divine forces, existence, intelligence and joy (love), he finds that it is joy which is really characteristic of the Spirit. Only in the Spirit is there any possibility of the unity of all mankind. It is the binding factor in the cosmic unity, being active in the creative and recreative processes of this world.

And naturally Mozoomdar equates this understanding of the Spirit with the biblical concept of the Holy Spirit. For him, the questions of Trinity, Christ and salvation all could be effectively resolved by this doctrine of the Spirit. Mozoomdar clarifies that the Holy Spirit is a person who can

have relationships with man, namely relationships of obedience, responsibility. While the Father is far above, and the Son far away, it is the Spirit who is within us. He laments that in Christian theology the Holy Spirit is given only a third place and in the Apostle's creed nothing more than a mere mention! He is neither adored, loved nor worshipped though occasionally some may address him in their prayers. Yet He is the essence of the Christian Gospel; Christ's life and mission are the work of the Holy Spirit.

How is the Spirit related to Jesus Christ? Mozoomdar conceives the incarnation of Jesus Christ as Spirit made flesh. Jesus realised the Spirit of God in himself, and so the uniqueness of Christ lies in his being:

- (1) the most complete and universal incarnation of the Spirit,
- (2) the perfect example of God-man relationship, and
- (3) the indispensable revelation of God.

And all the 'works' of Christ — birth, life, miracles, teaching, death, resurrection, second coming — all these are the spiritual missions of the divine man Jesus. The goal of his mission is to establish a kingdom, a society of the Spirit. Even the cross is understood by Mozoomdar differently: It is God's overruling of the tragedies of life. As such there seems to be little significance of the Cross of Christ as the objective, saving, efficacious event.

What is the role of the Spirit in a disciple's life? Mozoomdar says while the moral laws demand from us the good we cannot do, the morality of the Spirit is that he offers us the ability to do that good. The Christian virtues like love, faith and holiness can be achieved only in the Spirit. This is a welcome reminder indeed.

How is the Spirit related to the Church? He sees that there is such a great perversion in the Church, the least claiming the highest revelation, while their life betrays a lack of the Spirit. For this error we need to teach that the Spirit exhorts. He speaks of several tests, "The impulse of

the heart and the conscience, the unanimity of the Church and the voice of the dead recorded in the Scriptures"¹³ seem to occupy in his mind as the supreme tests. To these he also adds others: "the moral fruits of the Spirit, the power of transmitting the Spirit to others", and "the unity of the community."

Finally, how does Mozoomdar conceive of other religions in his pneumatological framework? He holds that in reality, it is Christ who is the basis for reconciling religions one to another, but all religions are not equal. For no religion has the monopoly of the Spirit, though each religion is the offspring of the Spirit. According to the nature of the people and their spiritual needs, the Spirit developed various religions. Thus, there is a progression in the gradation of all the religions; in the future, there will be one universal religion which will make all other religions obsolete, and this universal religion is Brahmo Samaj! Thus, in Brahmo Samaj, all religions have already been realized, because though Brahmos reject pantheism, they affirm pan-en-theism of the Spirit.

Evaluation

We need not dwell long on Mozoomdar by way of evaluation. His theology is clearly a theology of the Spirit. His emphasis on the third person of the Trinity, though most welcome, has certain disadvantages in the way Mozoomdar presents his understanding. On the one hand, there seems to be a quantitative understanding of the Spirit (some religions manifesting more and others less of the Spirit). On the other hand the ever-emphasis on the Spirit cannot but end in "pneumomonism" – one God understood only in terms of the Spirit, instead of in triune terms of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But other aspects, such as the power of the Spirit in the disciples' day-to-day life, the tests of the Spirit in the Church, the demand for the moral fruits of the Spirit – all these are valuable thoughts indeed.

Beyond this, a couple of comments should suffice. For example, his understanding of the Cross as God's way of

taking away all suffering is far short of the biblical concept. There he affirms that the reality of God is not exhausted by Christ. This explicitly violates the doctrine of trinity and the centrality of Christ. Mozoomdar so develops his pneumatology as if salvation is possible both through Christ as well as through the independent work of the Spirit.

NOTES

1. Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, ISPCK, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 19-20.
2. M.M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, CLS, Madras, 1970, p. 10.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
5. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, p. 27.
6. Kesub Chunder Sen, "India Asks 'Who is Christ'", *Lectures in India*, vol.1, 1879, p. 369.
7. K.C. Sen, *Lectures in India*, vol.1, London, 1909, p. 7.
8. K.C. Sen, *Lectures in India*, vol.2, p. 27.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-94.
10. "India Asks Who is Christ", p. 217.
11. P.C. Mozoomdar, *The Oriental Christ*, Boston, 1883, pp. 41f.
12. Mozoomdar, *The Spirit of God*, Boston, 1894, p. 9.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 69f.