

## The Search for Truth: Trials and tribulations of *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*

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Cardinal Ratzinger, the present Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, published his deep reflections on Christianity and World Religions in a commendable work titled “**Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and world Religions**”<sup>1</sup>. This book is the result of his continuous reflections on *Christianity and its relationship with the World Religions* from the very beginning of his life as theologian – participating in the Vatican Council as an assistant to his mentor Karl Rahner – till the very end of his life as the Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Doctrine. From reading the book one understands how deeply he understood the Indian religions and the Philosophical works of the contemporary Indian philosopher Sarvepally Radhakrishnan and how he deviates from Rahner’s theological outlook towards the World Religions. He profusely refers to the books of Radhakrishnan and understood the core of his argument and reflects upon it from a deeply Christian theological perspective. The human search for truth and the deposit of truth through revelation and the truth value of the World religions are seriously dealt with though the book is a collection of his articles. He observes that “monotheism in India is different from that of Israel, in two ways; firstly, *it is directed toward mysticism, that is to say, it is open to monistic development and thus may appear as a mere preliminary stage to something of more permanence*, that the experiencing of the identity.”<sup>2</sup> He continues in elucidating this mystery and the experience of identity in the following way:<sup>3</sup>

the experience of identity is only the first on the way of mysticism, although of course few get beyond it, so that that becomes the real temptation in mysticism; not until that stage is past comes the far more painful step of separating from oneself and of passing beyond into real transcendence. . . . when it is given to him to journey forth into this mystery of darkness and of faith, all previous mystery of light and of vision seems to him but *an insignificant prelude*. . . .

Why I quoted the Holy Father in the beginning of this article is to present a philosopher, theologian who understood that though as a Brahmin, he did not have the fullness of truth and his Hindu religion was a prelude to truth and tried to preach this truth he encountered in his own Indian cultural terminology. Thus Bhabanikaran Bandopadhyay was a pioneer and luminary who ventured into a hermeneutically fruitful interpretation of Christian faith in true Indian philosophical categories as Justin the Martyr interpreted. However with great enthusiasm this Brahmin intellectual became a catholic as an adult, adored Christ and explored means to bring the whole of India to Christ. However, he was severely misunderstood by the ecclesiastical authorities and their harsh treatment towards him and towards his cherished projects led him astray. Because of this unfortunate turn of events, the Indian Christians lost a creative visionary and an action oriented original thinker who could have become a much grater personality than Vivekananda. This disowned prophet’s<sup>4</sup> method and vision could have transformed the Christianity in India into an Indian Christian existence and way of theologizing as St. Thomas Aquinas had undertaken in the thirteenth century.

Described by Ravindranath Tagore as “a roman catholic ascetic yet a Vedantin-spirited, fearless, self-denying, learned and uncommonly influential”,<sup>5</sup> a pioneer who attempted to

indigenize Christianity; but “a prophet disowned”.<sup>6</sup> He was in the thick of the freedom movement and fought not only for political freedom but also for an authentic Indian Christian Identity. He explored true philosophical and theological positions that can be complimented with Christianity. Like apologetic Justin the martyr, he longed for an Indian Christian philosophy and envisioned to integrate the Indian philosophical systems with that of cardinal Christian doctrines. To decode the western garb and to transplant in the Indian soil of the richness of thought. But his voice was drowned in the humdrum of dissenting commotion; a prophet far beyond his time. In today’s crisis time, his notions and ideas are to resurrected and to be studied. Repressive measures were used against him both by the British Government because he was a nationalist and by the catholic Church because he stood for an indigenised Church. A man in tension – between his patriotism and his newly found religion – Catholicism – a prophet ahead of his times. Known as a Hindu-catholic – his views are radical, revolutionary, and was rejected prophet<sup>7</sup>. Upadhyay stands at the crossroads of the future course of the Indian Christians as a sign post, to be relevant and to be true Indians at this crisis time.

Bhabanicanar Bandopadhyay was born on February 11, in the village of Khannyan in the revenue district of Hooghly, undivided Bengal as the son of police officer Debicharan whose grand father had almost 56 wives. Debicharan was disgustful about such practices and settled in Jabalpur. He built a house there and a shrine was erected in the name of Kali. At home, Durga Puja was celebrated in style. Bhabani was the youngest child of Debicharan and he grew imbibing the western influences of his father. His mother died while he was a one year old boy and his grand mother, the junior wife of his grandfather looked after him carefully. It was she who instilled in him the fondness for the traditional Bengali culture. There were always at home tensions between tradition and modernity. His grandmother was a typical Bengali woman. The Bengali women acted like the Hindu mythological figures influencing men as Parvati and Uma, bride and mother respectively; like Kali and Durga, as protectors, like Savitri and Sita, as dutiful wives, and like Lakshmi, as the harbinger of prosperity. Bhabani was under the shadow of various mother figures and this must have moulded his notions about women. Therefore, he always idealised them. Kali puja was conducted regular at home and since his family belonged to the Sakta tradition, venerated the female deity with a superhuman power. His uncle Kalicharan was also an influential figure in his life. He was an eloquent testimony of the Christian faith. Kalicharan showed him that one could be a Christian and a patriot simultaneously. In the school he came to know about Christ because in the school curriculum Bible study was an essential component. At 13 he had undergone the Upanayana, the investiture of the sacred thread, a ceremony that marks the coming of age of a Brahmin boy.

In his early years as an adolescent student he boiled with patriotism After personally meeting many nationalist leaders and listening to their talks Bhavani wanted to throw away the foreign yoke and found that peaceful means were never a useful one. With the intention of becoming a warrior, he ran away to Gwalior, the old citadel of the Maratha power who fought against the Mugal and the British Empire. He had a strength of mind and virulence of a leader and had always a few friends with unwavering loyalty ready to follow him whatever be the endeavour he might take. His mind worked in an unusual way in comparison with his more pragmatic peers. His sense of caste and its obligations were strong. In a mock battle at the court of Gwalior, he found how emasculated the soldiers were and gave up his dream of freeing the country by force.

From a celibate warrior the next move he made was to become a celibate teacher. He found that moral and spiritual regeneration is the precursor of political regeneration. It was in a nebulous form and became a strong motivating force in his life ahead. He became a teacher in a Free Church school and gave special attention to backward pupils. By this time he met Narendranath Datta – the future Vivekananda - and both became close associates. During this tenure of his teaching and association with the Brahma Samaj, he fell under the spell of Kesabchandra Sen, a protégé of

Debendranath Tagore who saw in him a dynamic leadership potential. Hinduism was perceived at that time as a bundle of falsehood and spiritually debilitating, where as Christianity was considered spiritually uplifting and in accord with the emergent truths of western scientific inquiry. Scientific and religious knowledge would go hand in hand. Questioning the traditional practices of ancestral religion was the style of the time. In defiance of tradition youngsters were attracted towards Christianity which outraged the Hindu sensibilities. They had a contempt for conventional Hinduism. A climate of change, a revivalist reaction and a new Christian renaissance was blowing in Bengal when Bhabani fell under the spell of an influential and intellectual leader, named Kesab Chandra Sen, who looked for unconventional wisdom.

### **Keshab Chandra Sen's Influence**

Kesab Chandra Sen was a member of the Brhma Samaj founded by the reformist Rabindranath Tagore. Kesab was annointed as the acharya or chief religious minister in charge of conducting religious ceremonies in the Samaj. The Tagore-Sen axis was guiding the Samaj with the intention of an egalitarian reform, leading it to a more liberated orientation. Soon differences in ideology sprang between them. For Kesab, Christ was a great man, a distinctly selfless, sincere, prophetic and efficacious leader of par excellence. For Kesab, great men like Christ challenged the social and moral order in which they found themselves and became exemplar not only for their own historical context but universally, for all human kind. Kesab considered that the British rule was a providential dispensation to regenerate India with Christian values. However, he distinguished between Christ and Christianity. Christ, an Asiatic, according to him, has universal appeal; but never acknowledged that he has any divine status. For him Christianity that was offered to India was in doctrine and in style a western import, to denationalise the one who adopted it. This alienating factor of Christianity was fed into the consciousness of Bhabanicaran by his mentor, Kesab.

The Upanishad based conservative, undemonstrative religious consciousness of Tagore could not digest to the unconventional ideologies of Kesab and the Samaj split into two; Tagore founding a new association, namely, the Adi Brahma Samaj; Kesab retaining the older one. However, Kesab wore the garment of the great men he preached about, as if one ordained by God to lead the humanity to spiritual progress. His observation of the gulf between the Christian theory and practice struck him strongly when he visited England. Kesab "returned convinced that the Christian vision needed completion by a distinctively Indian contribution, and then implementation by an Indian".<sup>8</sup> He was fired by the desire of developing a new dispensation 'Navanidhan', an amalgamation of the value systems he derived from different religions and Christianity. In 1872 Kesab organised a missionary conference to reinvigorate humanity through spiritual regeneration. Around September 1881, Bhabani and Narendranath, another idealistic youth who later came to be known as Swami Vivekananda, the spiritual reformer of Hinduism, came under the spell of the vibrant personality of Kesab and dedicated to spread the new spiritual culture. Both of them were introduced to the saint Ramakrishna. Narendranath became the ardent disciple of Ramakrishna, induced a spiritual renaissance in Hinduism and spread its universality. Bhabani was impressed and attracted to Kesab's devotion to Christ and his attempts to integrate the Christian and Hindu aspects. Bhabani became Kesab's most beloved disciple. In 1884 Kesab died and P.C. Majumdar took over the leadership of the new dispensation and Bhabani followed him. In 1893 Majumdar published '*The Oriental Christ*' where he stressed the orientelness of Christ and the role of Christ as a perfect human being on whose model every human being has to develop oneself to become a perfect being. When the boy Krishna's picture was placed in the Concord Club where the group used to assemble for Bible study, Bhabani placed the picture of a mutilated and humiliated Christ who was sentenced to death by crucifixion by Pilate. This action indicated his affection and commitment towards Christ. In 1887, in the faction ridden, conflict studded new dispensation, Bhabani became a zealous missionary.

## Conversion

Meanwhile, Bhabani was called by his friend Hiranand to Hyderabad in Sindh to open a school there. While he was there his father lay dangerously ill in Multan and he went to meet him. The search for religious truth was so intense at that time and hence during a night vigil, he read Joseph di Bruno's *Catholic Belief or A short and simple exposition of Catholic doctrine* and devoured it with at most hunger.<sup>9</sup> The book was not at all ecumenical in tone and differentiated Catholics from the various Protestant groups. After a few days, his father died and Bhabani took the book along with him and resumed teaching. Now the question about the nature of Christ haunted him. For many years he tried to avoid it escaping a direct confrontation. He decided to study deeply on Christ and contemplated Christ in his own mind's inner cave. After intense reflections, Bhabani came to the conclusion that Christ must be truly human and truly divine. His reflections over Christ were poured out in the Church Missionary Society Mission Hall in Hyderabad on the 1889 Christmas day. There during the lecture, he thunderously declared that Jesus was the Sanatna Sadguru, the fulfilment of all Hindu spiritual hopes. Bhabani resigned from the school indicating that "he had become a convert to Christianity and wanted to give up secular work in order to work for that religion".<sup>10</sup> Though, officially he was not converted to Christianity, the information was sent to his elder brother that he became a Christian. In turn his elder brother requested him not to convert himself immediately and wait for until things were clarified directly between them. Bhabani postponed baptism for six months to know more about Christ. In an article entitled "why did not Kesab Chandra Sen accept Christ" Bhabani explained that for Kesab Christ was not divine because he never accepted Christ as the incarnate Son of God. Thus, Kesab could not accept Christ as "the redeemer of the fallen human race". Gradually Bhabani moved to orthodox Christian convictions and commitments. In an article in his magazine *The Harmony*, he distinguished between the popular concept of Christ and his notion of being a Christian. "People here understand by the term, . . . 'Christian', a man who drinks liquor and eats beef, who hates the scriptures of India as lies and her inspired men as impostors."<sup>11</sup> On February 26 Bhabani was baptized by the Anglican clergyman Rev. Heaton. At this moment of conversion, Bhabani, was a believer in the Gospel and a Christian and did not know to which Church he should belong. When he was asked by a census official, to which category he should be placed, he responded that he was an Indian catholic.<sup>12</sup> With his conversion, Bhabani earned the wrath of the entire Sindhi community; before conversion he was their centre of admiration. He gave up the security of his job as token of sacrifice to express his religious conviction. He lived entirely like St. Paul on his own resources. Fr. Theophilus Perrig S.J., prepared him to be received into the Catholic Church and therefore as a mark of respect, he took the Sanskritised name of Theophilus – lover of God Brhamabandhab – to be his new name. Moreover, St. Theophilus was the first Christian writer used the term 'Trinity' and Bhabani had great devotion to the Trinity. Due to these two reasons, he took the name Theophilus. Due to his earnestness to become a true Indian Christian, he used the Sanskrit version of it; Brhamabandhab. As soon as he became a catholic, two of his close associates, namely, Khemchand and Paramanand followed him. Untold miseries they had to undergo due to their conversion and they withstood those trials with heroic courage.

Bhabani was accused by Rev. W.J. Abigail in 1892 that forcefully he converted a young man to Catholic fold who really intended to become a Protestant. Hearing about it, Brhamabandhab publicly challenged him. Bhabani defended Catholic Church vigorously and the accuser had to retract. Bhabani started a journal named *Sophia* in January 1894 through which he defended the catholic church and wrote a series of articles. He wrote an article with the title, 'whether Luther a Reformer?' to respond to the criticisms of the Protestants as well as that of the Hindus. Through this magazine, he campaigned for the Catholic Church. Thus he became an apologetic. He elaborated Luther's position and showed how the catholic Magisterium was the correct one profusely quoting from Bible and Church history. Regarding the sale of indulgence, sarcastically Brhamabandhab wrote that through the new doctrine of 'sola fide' through faith alone, Luther

“gave to all a full indulgence”.<sup>13</sup> For this rebuttal, he studied thoroughly the fundamental dogma of the Catholic Church, its official teaching and the underpinning philosophical thought – Thomism. Brhamabandhab quoted profusely from St. Thomas and other philosophers like Hume and Kant. Thus, he defended the Catholic Church not just from an emotional point alone, but as a rational, thinking person intellectually expressing his beliefs. His philosophical foundation was strongly Thomistic. In the context of an analysis of Hindu and Christian beliefs, he showed that natural reason led people to God and it was a preparation for evangelization. Moreover, he wrote to a Jesuit thinker named Bernard Boedder (a professor at Sotneyhurst College) who published the book *Natural Theology* (as part of a Thomistic study series called Stonyhurst Series) asking clarification on what was to become a central concern of his theology and philosophy. The questions like “how an utterly perfect, self contained Absolute is also a creator God, that is, produces finite being, with the saga of cosmic imperfection, human sin and fallibility this implies”<sup>14</sup> were discussed by them. Boedder’s reply indicated the splendid grasp of Brhamabandhab on these fundamental questions. “You have done a real service to me by your candid and clear exposition of some of the greatest difficulties in *Natural Theology*”.<sup>15</sup> This interaction showed his commitment to Catholic faith and his devotion to truth. Like an intellectual campaign, he went beyond an instrumentalist faith, always cleared his doubts and attempted to integrate his reason with faith into a coherent whole and expressed them for his fellow travellers who were in search of truth. With this rationale, he approached the rich philosophical traditions of India and the foundations of the revealed truth in the Catholic faith. In short he was of the view that if Hinduism was properly interpreted, it must lead to God. He commented that the evangelical crusade by the sectarian missionaries finding nothing positive in the scriptures of India, made “educated Indians thoroughly estranged and she looks upon Christianity as a destroyer and not a fulfiller and perfecter of what is true and good in the country”.<sup>16</sup> He concluded that Christian faith must fulfil, not destroy ‘what is true and good’ in India. Brahmabandhab considered that “with the possible exception of ancient Greece, it is in Hindu thought that human philosophy, or insight into the invisible things of God, has reached its acme”. He continued that<sup>17</sup>

the religion of Christ is supernatural. All the doctrines of Christ, the Holy Trinity, the Atonement, the Resurrection, from beginning to end, are beyond the domain of reason.. . The truths in Hinduism are of pure of reason illuminated in the order of nature by the light of the Holy Spirit. .. But though the religion of Christ is beyond the grasp of nature and reason, still its foundation rests upon the truths of nature and reason. . .hence a true missionary of Christ, instead of vilifying Hinduism, should find out truths from it by study and research. It is on account of the close connection between the natural and the supernatural that we have taken upon ourselves the task. . . to form, as it were, a natural platform upon which the Hindus taking their stand may have a view of glorious supernatural edifice of the Catholic religion of Christ.

In order to become a true Indian Christian, he changed his name from Bhabani to the Sanskrit of Theophilus and dropped the suffix, the venerable and declared that he would be known as Brhamabandhab Upadhyaya. He changed not only his name but also his style. He wore swadeshi saffron clothes like the other Hindu monks and went barefoot. He also hung an ebony cross from the neck. He set forth to indigenise Christianity, to bring educated Indians to Christ and to synthesise East and West in a new spirituality.

### **Uncompromising commitment to the Catholic doctrine**

Problems with ecclesiastical authorities arose when he sought to reconstruct Catholic commitment in terms of Hindu categories for the reception of the Gospel. When this new approach became evident, opposition mounted and the ecclesiastical authorities intervened. However, it is to be said that Brahmabandhab was in search for a dialogue partner with Christianity and the religious authorities failed to understand his aim because of their western bend and suspicion towards

anything Indian. Brhamabandhab targeted his piercing pen and tong against anything that he found objecting the reception of Christ as the universal saviour. He fought against the image worship and the ideas of the theosophical society. He made a lecture tour and everywhere he was well appreciated and his position in the Church was so high. His exposition of Christian faith with a combative programme was to prepare the educated Hindus for the reception of the Gospel.

He also attacked the ‘Neo-Hinduism’ called theosophy. It was also well received among the educated, secular minded Hindus. According to him, Theosophy was an eclectic combination of Christian, Hindu, Occult and Gnostic elements and terminology. With scant respect for the intellectual content of the theosophists, Brahmabandhab attacked theosophy with a gladiatorial style because of its ‘process pantheism’ an evolving principle that acted as the basis for an altruistic life negating a self-fulfilling and immutable God. At times, with the fervour of St. Paul who defended Christ and Christianity against the attacks of the Jewish zealots, Brhamabandhab also declared that he was a Brhamin and rejected Hinduism because of being understood of its folly.

He looked back at the Brahma Samaj which led him to Christ and reflected that it contained superstition and sectarianism. He also did not spare his companion of ester years from critical investigation. According to Brahmabandhab Vivekananda’s “brand of pantheism undermined the propaedeutic truths of Vedic theism”.<sup>18</sup> Swami Dayananda and the Arya Samaj also received the intellectual thunder bolts from Brahmabandhab. This anti-Christian and pro-Hindu Swamiji was attacked and praised. The monotheistic teaching of the Swamiji was praised by him; but attacked his Vedic interpretation of theism. The Arya Samaj teaching about the ultimate destiny of human being was also under the scrutiny of Brahmabandhab. In this aspect he compared it with the Catholic Thomistic concept of the destiny of man so vividly that for him the destiny of man lied “in the beatific contemplation of God, in the possession of the universal good, consists the everlasting happiness of man”.<sup>19</sup>

### **Vedic Theism as a Prelude for Christian Revelation**

As denoted by the Holy Father Brhamabandhb understood the Vedic Religion as a prelude to the revelation of God in history. As many Apologetic fathers considered Greek Philosophy as a prelude to Christianity, Brhamabandhb tried to integrate the theistic concepts into the Indian philosophical categories. According to him, the more ancient the scriptures were, the purer the theistic concept. “In the Vedas we do not find any trace of the immoral legends of the Puranas. . . . still we find them (Vedas) full of sublime conceptions of the Supreme Being, the creator and Ruler of heaven and earth.”<sup>20</sup> He considered that “We are Hindus so far as our physical and mental constitution is concerned, but in regard to our immortal souls we are catholic.”<sup>21</sup> In the article “The Clothes of Catholic Faith” written in 1898 August he stated that “in our humble opinion it is the foreign clothes of Catholic faith that have chiefly prevented our countrymen from perceiving its universal nature. . . Our Hindu brethren cannot see the sublimity and sanctity of our divine religion because of its coating of Europeanism.”<sup>22</sup> He lamented at the method of teaching Christ as “our missionary experiences have shown us how unintelligible the Catholic doctrines appear to the Hindus when presented in the Scholastic garb. The Hindu mind. . . is opposed to the Greco-Scholastic method of thinking. We must fall back upon the Vedantic method in formulating the Catholic religion to our countrymen. The Vedanta must be purged of its errors, no doubt, but this can be done. Were not Plato and Aristotle also guilty of monumental error.”<sup>23</sup>

## **BRHAMABANDHB’S THEOLOGY**

### **Vedic Theism**

Through the four articles published in the first issue of *Sophia* Brahmabandhab argued that the human nature is naturally inclined to monotheistic concept of God, the moral character of human person and the law of retribution according to ones merit or demerit.<sup>24</sup> According to Brahmabandhab, though polytheistic and naturalistic aberrations are in the Vedas, pure monotheistic orientations are also clearly exposed. “Even if physiolatry in the Vedas cannot be explained away, still we find them full of sublime conceptions of the Supreme Being, the creator of heaven and earth. . Hindus must become theists before they can . . adopt the means appointed by God (catholic faith) to raise man above his created nature to the rank of being heir “<sup>25</sup>. Taking example from the Rigvedic Hymn “*Kyom*” (10.121) he elucidates this point. Each mantra of this hymn ends with the question, Who is that Deva (God) whom we should worship with oblation? Basing on some ancient (13<sup>th</sup> century commentator Durga) Brahmabandhab explains that Hiranyagarbha – golden germ as “begotten of wisdom”. Even Christians, along with the ancient Rishi’s, according to him, can chant the mantra because *Kyom* refers to the word of God is pervading everywhere. Quoting Psalm 2.7 – The Lord said to me, ‘thou art my son, this day I have begotten thee” and John 1.1-3 argues that the allusion in the Rigveda is to Christ. Moreover, another striking allusion in the hymn is the sacrificing of the only begotten. So he argued that there was sublime conception of one supreme being, referring to the Christian conception of the divine sonship and the sacrifice of the only begotten. He also discovered Vedic reference to the human sinfulness and divine forgiveness in 7.86.3-5 and 1.25. Thus as ardent Christian and true Indian, Brahmabandhab could relate his faith with the ancient traditions of his culture and religion.

### **Vedantic Theism**

In a systematic study on the comparison between the Christian faith and Vedanta, Brahmabandhab elucidates that there are many similarities between the principal doctrines of Christianity and Vedanta and Christianity could be interpreted in terms of Vedantic categories. “In representing the Vedantic doctrines we shall take the great Sankara as our guide and authority.”<sup>26</sup> However, according to him *Sankara* has to be interpreted with the aid of post-*Sankarite* traditions, namely *Panchadasi*<sup>27</sup> and *Yoga-vasistha*. “Our humble opinion that religious scriptures cannot be understood without the help of traditions. The Upanishds without the interpretation of *Vysa* and *Sankara* are a mere jumble of mystic statements and *Sankara* without *Yogavasistha* and *Panchadasi* is almost unintelligible.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Creation –Out of Superabundance**

From the Upanishads, Brahmabandhab took the concept of creation as the overflow from superabundance.<sup>29</sup> From the Aitereya Up 1.1.1 “in the beginning, the Self, indeed, was this; nothing else whatsoever blinked. He thought, Let me produce worlds”. He interprets this passage as real reference to the one eternal God, the creative and intelligent cause of all beings in whom the world existed ideally. The Platonic concepts that were so methodically integrated into the Christian faith by St. Augustine was vividly expressed in Brahmabandhab’s interpretation.

### **Trinity as Sat-cit-ananda**

The nature of Prabrahman – Supreme Being, His relation with the finite beings, the destiny of human person, sin and salvation are interpreted in Vedantic terms by Brahmabandhab.<sup>30</sup> Moreover he identifies the concept of *Satcitananda*, of classical Vedanta as a description of the ultimate reality corresponding to the Catholic teaching in terms of scholasticism. Sat as Positive Being, Cit as intelligence and Ananda as bliss refers to God as Positive Being, eternal, one, intelligent and supreme bliss. So he identifies Parabrahman as sat-cit-ananda.<sup>31</sup> Brhamabandhab’s mentor Kesab Candra Sen expressed the Absolute Being or the Trinity, as sat-cit-ananda almost

sixteen years before him. However, he is the one who identified and showed that the Christian belief of the Trinity and Satcitanand are identical. That is his greatest contribution.

Brahmabandhab explains that Prabrahman means the necessary being, being whose nature is to exist in and for itself. Such being must be immutable, one, eternal, infinite, conscious, blissful and the first cause. Moreover, he identified the sat with Father, cit as son and ananda with the Holy Spirit or Force, Wisdom, Holiness or The True, Good and Beautiful relating the Indian categories to the scholastic categories. He also explained that the Parabrahman as the plenitude of Being. He further elaborates the nature of God in terms of sat-cit-ananda and Parabrahman. Moreover he expressed that Jesus Christ as the further clarification and affirmation of God as Sat-cit-ananda. Since the Vedantins could not explain the inner life of God and that could not be solved by human reason. He brought up the cause of this failure as the limitation of human reason and thundered that only the revelation of Jesus Christ completes and culminates the revelation.<sup>32</sup>

### ***Maya – Doctrine of Creation.***

According to Brahmabandhab Maya in Vedanta could be explained as St. Thomas *creatio passiva* or passive creation or existential dependence, the divine power that creates multiplicity, illusion, abundance etc<sup>33</sup>. *Maya* concept was introduced by *Vyasa* and *Sankara* to refute the Buddhist school which denied the objectivity of the world and held that this world is a passing dream. Brahmabandhab quotes from *Sankara* to eradicate the wrong notion of *Maya* as illusion. *Brahama Sutra Bhasya* 2.2.28, 29 affirmed the objectivity of the world.<sup>34</sup> Creation is a derived being, receiving its existence from the Parabrahman. According to him, *Maya* expressed a much more rich meaning than the Thomistic equivalent – *creatio passiva*. He elucidates that creation has three explicit factors, namely, there is no necessity on God's part to create, the coming into being of the objects with the implication that they are created out of nothingness, the finite perfections are contained in the infinite in a pre-eminent way. "Now the term creation expressed only the second significance, while *maya* conveys all the three."<sup>35</sup> He quotes from St. Thomas while elucidating these concepts. Brahmabandhab de-feminized and firmly subordinated the concepts such as *prakriti*, *maya* and *sakti* to accommodate them with catholic categories.

### ***Christology***

Holy Father in his exhortation and encyclical stressed to develop a meaningful Christology when the faith is encountering new cultures. Due to the intensity of his love towards Christ, Brahmabandhab created a full-fledged Christology integrating the divine and human nature of Jesus the Christ. Jesus who is both God and human is expressed as Nara-hari, man-God. Christ is also interpreted as *cit*, Wisdom and Logos.

So the Western scholars' much popularised world denying life negating interpretation of Hinduism is transformed into a creative interpretation of Christianity. His life world of Sanskrit and Hindu rituals helped him to perceive the deeper meaning of the Indian categories and his intense desire to link them with the Christian categories is really commendable. Felix Wilfred, one of the prominent theologians of India states that "Indian theology of today is very much indebted to Upadhyaya. In spite of the many limitations imposed by his time and the circumstances of his conflict-ridden personal history, Upadhyaya stands out as an original, creative thinker in the history of Indian theology. . . he gave shape to a new way of thinking for Indian Christians".<sup>36</sup>

### ***Meaningful Hymns***

In India the Hindu religion is propagated not because of the strength of its philosophy; but the celebrative life of great saints like Sankara, Ramanuja, Alwars, Meerabhai, Ramdas, Tukaram etc. They popularised the religion by their enchanting and rhythmic songs and meaningful lyrics



and lived like a Bhikshu. All of them are considered as saints and the stories and the songs have an infectious appeal on the people; these songs were in the lips of the common people and they hummed the tune wherever they went and whatever they did. Brahmabandhab understood this ethos of India and wanted to turn himself to such a saint singing the melodies of the Lord and living like a mendicant. He and his followers chanted the songs on the streets of Kalkotta like Caitanaya and wrote beautiful and meaningful songs about the Trinity and Mary. For unfolding the Christian revelation, he wanted to use the expressions emerged out of the religious consciousness of India. The style and the language are typical of the spiritual song-traditions of India. To the Hindu ears they are no alien; but nectar because the lyrics are pregnant with deep theology and philosophy.

***Song in Praise of Saccitananda***

I adore thee O, Saccidananda

Highest goal

Scorned by the worldly

Yearned for by the saintly

Thou art the Supreme, the Eternal, the one beyond all

Fullness undivided, Distant yet near

Holy in thy treble bond, All consciousness yet unbound

The Mystery

Father, Unborn source of life, Supreme Lord

Unsown Seed of the tree of Existence

Maker of all, wise creator

Our Shepherd

Word eternal, yet unheard

Begotte, yet Person unexcelled

Image of the father, subsisting Thought

Our good Saviour

Proceeding from the union of Sat and cit

Gracious spirit, pure Ananda

Sanctifier, Inspirer, revealing the Word

Our Life-giver

***Hymn to the Word Incarnate – Nara- Hari***

Victory to you, Lord, the God-man

Flowering of the eternal Wisdom

The reflection of Brhaman

With beauty far-transcending

Victory to you, Lord, the God-man

Child of the fair Virgin

Yet Ruler of the Universe,

with your qualities enchanting, yet beyond qualities

Victory to you, Lord, the God-man

Radiant gem in the assembly of the learned

The vanquisher of temptation,

The Chastier of the evil one!

Victory to you, Lord the God-man

The Destroyer of all infirmities,

Love in brotherly service,

Sanctifying the marvellous works!

Victory to you, Lord the God-man

Lifting yourself up in self-offering,

The sacrifice of your life

Destroying the poison of our sin!

Victory to You, Lord, the God-man

Beloved, gentle, the joy of our heart,

Ointment of delight to our eyes,

Victorious Crusher of cruel death.

### ***Hail Mary***

Hail Mary, full of grace, illumined by the Lord

And blessed among women

Blessed is Jesus born of your womb.

Holy Mary, mother of the child of the Gracious One

Make of us an offering and save us sinners, now and at the end-time, Amen.

### ***Way of Life:- Bhikshu: Vision of a Christian Ashram***

In India a spiritual person is always determined by his way of life and the outward expressions. When people thirst for spirituality, they go to meet a Swami and to have his darsan. More than listening to him, it is through the vision of the spiritual person. Hinduism thrives through such saints through out the centuries; Thukaram, Meera Bhai, Alwars, Hari Katha speakers, Sri Sri Ravi Sankar, Mata Amrutanadamayi etc. The Indian Christianity has fewer expressions like these powerful witnesses and has more verbosity with concrete fortifications and mansions. The spiritual men and women live in Ashrams and not in concrete fortifications. Brahmabandhab understood this underpinning philosophy and hence as soon as he converted to Catholicism, he changed his name, assumed a new name and tried to start an ashram.<sup>37</sup> However, he was wholly misunderstood and blocked from all such innovative but true Indian way of living. Even today many did not understand the value of living as a Bhikshu. As an example, Swami Isanad was living as a Bhikshu for all most 25 years and developed a beautiful ashram in Raipur in the state of Chattisghat. However, so unfortunate to say that the local ordinary asked him to be a parish priest and snatched his ashram. Since Swami Isanad could not digest this folly, moved to Nagapur developed another ashram with the support of Archbishop of Nagapur Abraham Viruthukulangara.

### **Trials and tribulation**

In order to propagate the Christian message and to develop an Indian Christian Philosophy, he started a magazine named *Sophia* that lasted for almost five years and many articles were written by Brahmabandhab. There were also many Jesuit intellectuals who contributed articles to the magazine. The readers were not only Christians but also educated Hindus. Later this philosophical magazine became a weekly and had high reputation. Soon the ecclesiastical authorities prohibited Catholics from reading it. In the beginning the Bombay Catholic Examiner supported the magazine and made the following comment taken from the Ceylone Messenger “that excellent journal, *Sophia* edited by a Brahmin convert . . shows . . admirable grasp of Catholic philosophy and theology . . It deserves to be ranked among the best philosophical magazines of the day”. Several Archbishops and bishops gave financial assistance as well as moral support to the magazine. Though Brahmabandhab claimed that there was no political objective, the magazine had the aim of purging the Hindu community of moral and religious errors and to establish rational theism keeping with the Catholic teaching.<sup>38</sup> Brahmabandhab sharply criticised the European inability in discovering the true spirit of India. According to him when they preached about poverty, the people of India could not understand it because their life contradicted their message. A life with boots, trousers and hats, with spoon and fork, meat and wine were incompatible with the supernatural virtue of poverty. “These are objects of luxury to the Hindu”.<sup>39</sup> For him, poverty should be practised like De Nobili, “in Hindu clothing, poverty synonymous with abstinence from meat and drink, living as mendicants in humble dwellings.” Such sharp criticisms and the introduction of Vedic theism and Vedantic theism and the attack on the Graeco-thomistic method of thinking began to ring alarm bells in the ecclesiastical circles. On 12<sup>th</sup> June 1898 Archbishop Theodore Dalhoff S.J of Bombay wrote to Mon. Ladislaus Michael Zaleski, the Apostolic delegate to India, and the highest ecclesiastical authority in India drawing his attention on the projects of Brahmabandhab and requesting his advice on handling him. The Archbishop wanted to know the mind of the Papal delegate on the much publicised actions and writings of Brahmabandhab. Mon. Zaleski was very negative to the innovative methods of Brahmabandhab and wrongly thought that christianising meant Europeanising. Carlos Mercedes de Melo in his doctoral dissertation at the Gregorian University, Rome on the theme “*The Recruitment and Formation of the Native Clergy*

*in India (16<sup>th</sup> –19<sup>th</sup> century): An Historico-Canonical Study*” observed that “Zaleski had kept much of the self-assurance of a medieval autocrat. Rather a ruler than a diplomat or a theologian, he would easily consider views different from his own as heresies and any criticism of ecclesiastical authority as schism . . . he was . . . entirely out of touch with India’s mind and thought.”<sup>40</sup> Because of the reprimanding letter, the philosophico-theological magazine *Sophia* was closed down. The Archbishop of Madras prohibited Catholics from reading *Sophia* because of the direct intervention of Mgr. Zaleski. In the letter to the Archbishop of Madras which was cited in the *Bombay catholic Examiner*, stated that the author – Brhamabandhab – “has but an imperfect knowledge of Christian philosophy and theology . . . Your grace will easily understand the danger of . . . the Christian creed itself being misrepresented when it is done by unqualified persons, and more so, when writers who are not Catholics, treat these questions *ex professio* and presume to supply a new garb to the religion of Christ.”<sup>41</sup> Mgr. Zaleski left nothing to chance and on October 27, 1900 officially declared that no catholic should subscribe to the magazine. Brhamabandhab asked for an ecclesiastical censor which was also flatly refused by Mgr. Zaleski fearing that the censor might support Brhamabandhab. The matter was reported to Rome by Mgr. Zaleski and the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith supported his stance. Thus not only the magazine was closed down, another idea of starting an Indian Christian Ashram was also blocked by Mgr. Zaleski. Though the bishop of Nagapur, Mgr Charles Pelvat appeared to be positive towards the Ashram life, the displeasure of Mgr. Zaleski outweighed the granting and the starting of Ashram life. Brhamabandhab mooted the idea of starting another magazine named *The Twentieth Century*. The first issue came out on 31 January 1901 with Brhamabandhab as one of its editors. Two years later Mgr. Zaleski banned the magazine stating that “all catholics residing in the limits of our Delegation (British India) are forbidden to read, to subscribe to, and to have any connection with the above said monthly review, *The Twentieth Century*.”<sup>42</sup> As last resort, Brhamabandhab made a journey to Europe and went to Rome to meet the Holy Father and to appraise him of his ideas and intentions. He met the Pope’s Chamberlain with great difficulty, but was unable to meet the Pope. He wrote back<sup>43</sup>

as soon as I got down from the train I kissed the soil of Rome . . . I prayed at the tomb of St. peter, the Rock, the Holder of the Keys, for India, for you all, . . . While kneeling down at the tomb of St. Peter, I thought of the Holy Father, the living St. Peter. Oh! How I longed to kneel at his feet and plead for India. I was shown from a distance the window of his apartments. I was tempted to procure an interview . . . but I restrained my desire for I felt that the time had not yet come . . . I am walking the streets of Rome, free and easy, full of fire for our Holy Faith

As man fired with the Christian faith, a Christian who wanted to bring the whole of India to Christ, became disillusioned, became provocative and fell into nationalist politics because of his agenda for Christianising India was utterly rejected and punished. He jumped into the freedom struggle and started another political newspaper, named *The Sandhya*. The first issue came out in December 1904 and it became very popular. The British Government divided Bengal and *Sandhya* protested and this incident intensified Brhamabandhab’s reactions against the foreign rule. He organised meetings and conferences and also brought out another Bengali weekly *Svaraj*. Though he had a very busy schedule, he was ready at the *Sandhya* office at 5.30 A.M every morning. On August 7, August 30, 1907 *Sandhya’s* office was searched and the office manager was arrested and summons were given to Brhamabandhab. On September 3 he was arrested and the trial began on September 23. During the trial he neither wore his saffron clothes nor his wooden cross. He wore his sacred thread once again and when asked in the court to which religion he belonged, he said nothing. Though he had severe pain in the stomach, he did not ask for a chair. The trial continued till October 21 and he could not stand any more and was admitted in the Campbell Hospital – now Nilratan Sircar Hospital – and was operated for hernia. During intense pain he used to call “O, Thakur” meaning Christ. But on Sunday, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1907, at 8.30 a.m he died neither as a Christian nor as a Hindu. Since there was no proof that he died as a Catholic, his body was not

given for a Christian burial by his Hindu followers and friends when the Jesuit Parish Priest and his friend and follower Animanda claimed his body. He was cremated at 4 p.m amidst a huge gathering and he turned into ashes like many of his ambitions. Thus, his spiritual odyssey was controversial through out his life and it did not spare him, even at death. His contributions and methodology are to be reassessed in the new cross-cultural pluralistic religious understanding. As Lipner concluded he is a prophet for today when India and Indian Christians are accused as foreigners and passing through a crisis. “As India and the world look to the future through the turbulent past of its nationalist history and post-independence years, may Brhamabandhab Upadhyay ‘friend of God’ and ‘teacher’ of the people, stand out as a salient marker-religiously, socially and politically – of battles still to be fought and victories yet to be won”.<sup>44</sup> He was like the seed that decayed, sprouted and waiting to bear fruit.

## Conclusion

The life and theology of Brhamabandhab was thus a real search for truth and to express this truth in a true Christian perspective, not alien to his culture so that the whole of India could be gained for Christ. He was a man of conviction, commitment, extreme brilliance, dynamism and above all devoted to Christ. Though like Peter, at the end of his life, due to the extreme amount of problems heaped upon him due to authoritarianism and misunderstanding by the Church leaders, he drifted away from the official Christianity. However I strongly believe that he could not negate his conviction of the truth for which he had worked hard through out his life. He is standing as beacon in the horizon of Indian Christianity, showing the path in understanding and expressing Christ in indigenous ways. Let the truth make him and all of us free.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, trans. Henry Taylor, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Ratzinger, p. 35. Emphasis is added by the author.

<sup>3</sup> Ratzinger, p. 38. Emphasis is added by the author.

<sup>4</sup> C. Fonseca S.J. “A Prophet Disowned” in *Vidyajyoti*, vol. XLIV 1980. G. Gispert-Sauch. “The Sanskrit Hymns of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay” in *Religion and Society*, 19, 1972.

<sup>5</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Car Adhydy*. Bisvabharati Granthalay, Santiniketan, 1934 cited in Julius J. Lipner.

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, Oxford University Press, Chennai, 1999. P. xv.

<sup>6</sup> C. Fonseca, “ “ in *Vidyajyoti: Journal of Theological Reflection*, April, 1980. p

<sup>7</sup> Fr. Alfons Vaeth S.J. *Sadhu Sunder Sing, ein Apostel des Ostens und Westens*, 1928. Pp. 10-11, Cited in Lipner, “Upadhyaya’s life work . . . was ruined by the opposition of the Roman Hierarchy. Narrow minded fanatics not only condemned his ideas, but even forbade him to exercise any religious and theological activity. .

<sup>8</sup> Lipner. P. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Lipner. P. 78.

<sup>10</sup> Lipner. P. 80.

<sup>11</sup> Lipner. P. 84.

<sup>12</sup> Lipner. P. 85.

<sup>13</sup> Lipner, p. 104.

<sup>14</sup> Lipner. P. 116.

<sup>15</sup> Lipner. P. 116&117.

<sup>16</sup> Lipner 125.

<sup>17</sup> Lipner. P. 124.

<sup>18</sup> Lipner. p. 169.

<sup>19</sup> Lipner. p. 175.

<sup>20</sup> Lipner. p. 181.

<sup>21</sup> Lipner. P. 209.

<sup>22</sup> Lipner. p. 211.

<sup>23</sup> Lipner. p. 212.

<sup>24</sup> Lipner p. 179.

<sup>25</sup> *Sophia*, February, 1896.

<sup>26</sup> “An exposition of Catholic Belief as compared with the Vedanta.” *Sophia*, Jan 1898.

<sup>27</sup> Gispert. Pp. 326-335.

<sup>28</sup> *Sophia*, September, 1900.

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<sup>29</sup> Sophia. August, 1900.

<sup>30</sup> An elaborate exposition of Brahmabandhab's position is not meant here. Sophia, February 1897 gives an elaborate exposition on this matter.

<sup>31</sup> Five issues of the weekly Sophia elaborates this comparison. (June-July 1900)

<sup>32</sup> Sophia, December, 1897.

<sup>33</sup> Sophia, June 1900.

<sup>34</sup> Sophia, February, 1899.

<sup>35</sup> Sophia, February, 1899.

<sup>36</sup> Felix Wilfred. Beyond Settled Foundations, University of Madras, 1993. p.36

<sup>37</sup> Gispert. P. 202-205.

<sup>38</sup> Lipner, p. 122&123

<sup>39</sup> Lipner, p. 212

<sup>40</sup> Lipner. p. 215

<sup>41</sup> Lipner. p. 260

<sup>42</sup> Lipner p. 276

<sup>43</sup> Lipner p. 306

<sup>44</sup> Lipner. p. 390.