

CHAPTER TWO

The Deification of Science, Humanity, and Reason: Brahmo Secularism

IF Unitarianism appealed exclusively to the religious-minded liberal reformers, other, modern ideas from the West had a wider appeal among nontheistic as well as theistic reformers. In the first place, varieties of Western ideas seemed to flow easily into the port of Calcutta, which was the capital of British India and a veritable laboratory of intercivilizational encounter between the East and the West. Radical ideas that challenged the bases of the traditional world order in Europe and America were a form of intellectual cargo unloaded on the docks of the great metropolis, along with the other industrial and commercial products. Moreover, under British Orientalist cultural policy in Calcutta between 1772 and 1830, a congenial atmosphere had been created for the dissemination of European thought, along with an institutional structure and technological means to facilitate this dissemination. By serving as avenues linking the regional elite with the dynamic civilization of contemporary Europe, the Orientalists contributed to the formation of a new Indian middle class and assisted in the professionalization of the Bengali Hindu intelligentsia.

Thus, at a period that roughly approximates Rammohun Roy's lifetime, Calcutta had entered the orbit of London's intellectual climate and boasted an intelligentsia sophisticated about the ways of the West. By 1830, Calcutta had Hindu College, the only Western-styled institution of higher learning to be found anywhere in what is presently known as the third world.¹ It had several printing and publishing establishments, turning out thousands of copies of Western scientific and other textbook sources in Indian-language translations;² it had three colleges with modern scientific laboratories, each with a full curriculum of science courses.³ Calcutta had a free public library as early as 1816.⁴ By 1830, Calcutta had three major Bengali newspapers that carried foreign and local news.⁵ Suffice it to say that through the efforts of British officials, mis-

sionaries, and free lance humanitarians, organizations and associations proliferated together with a network of communication media that functioned to expose the nascent intelligentsia to the currents of progressive thought in the West.

Between 1826 and 1831, a young teacher at Hindu College named Henry Vivian Louis Derozio inspired a whole generation of Westernizing radical intellectuals known historically as Young Bengal.⁶ Under him, students read John Locke on civil liberty and natural rights; Rousseau on the justification of a representative democracy; David Hume on the bankruptcy of metaphysics; Voltaire on the supremacy of reason, enlightenment, and good taste; Bentham on the reformation of the legal system to achieve the most happiness for the largest number; and last but hardly least, Tom Paine on liberty and the flowering of the human spirit.⁷ Derozio was a pioneer among a distinguished coterie of nineteenth-century Calcutta academicians who, however distant from the shores of England, championed the fashionable ideas of progress while they shared with the Western humanist enthusiasts an optimistic vision of mankind's future.

It should be stressed that humanism or the deification of man in place of God, and not the idea of progress, sharply divided the secular intelligentsia from the Unitarians. Unitarians and Brahmos with a Unitarian bias, though they attacked the orthodox tradition, advocated social improvement, and struggled for progress, did so as theists in the name of God. As we shall see, many of these liberal theists and some deists glorified science and reason. Is this a contradiction? I think not. In the first place, before Darwinism challenged the fundamentalist Christian concept of genesis, science and religion were neatly compartmentalized in the world view of many progressive Christians. In the second place, we in the twentieth century are inclined to misread secularism into the methodology of science, the philosophy of science, and even into the psychohistory of the scientific mind and personality. Too infrequently are we reminded that the paradigms of history are relative, that science may have metaphysical roots, and that scientific geniuses such as Newton and Einstein were religious men.

Though Unitarianism can claim no monopoly on the flow of thought into the ranks of the Brahma Samaj, few Brahmos until the 1930s accepted an unqualified humanism or a materialist conception of life and society. (The same may be said for the Unitarian movement itself, which is today divided into liberal theist and humanist camps.) Nevertheless, Brahmos not only appropriated sci-

ence and reason in a very special and positive way, but deified them. Brahma scientists were among the first modern scientists in contemporary India; Brahma philosophers waged a relentless struggle to denude Hinduism of its "excesses" at the same time as they reconstructed the "authentic" Hindu tradition by endowing it with an intellectual respectability on a par with other major religious traditions.

This is not to say that a secular humanist intelligentsia played an insignificant role in the process of reform or modernization in Bengal. There were two types of secularists: the Westernized man aping his European counterparts, and the indigenous humanist who repudiated the tyranny of religion from sources within his own tradition. Both formed coalitions with the Brahmos to promote social reform against conservative opposition. These humanists maintained their distance from Brahmoism primarily on theistic grounds. Indeed, the sharp cleavage that exists today among the Indian middle-class intelligentsia between secular and religious reformers has its roots in the nineteenth-century cleavage between humanists and Brahmos.

The Westernized Bengali humanist of the nineteenth century imbibed the identical antireligious bias of his European counterparts, not simply because such literature was readily available in Calcutta, but because he was conditioned by his educational background to do so. It was no accident, for example, that Derozio should profess secularism and the philosophy of man's perfectibility to students at Hindu College. From the beginning, when the college charter was drafted, the Calcutta *nouveaux riches* founders insisted that the college not teach Hindu theology and metaphysics but concern itself primarily with "the cultivation of European literature and European science." According to the official account in the *Presidency College Centenary Volume*, "the most striking feature of the Hindu College was its determined effort to impart secular education."⁸

But even before the sons of Calcutta's new elite entered Hindu College, they went to a preparatory school known as Hare's School. David Hare, the principal, was a Scottish philanthropist who had settled permanently in Calcutta and involved himself in various educational experiments. Hare was an outspoken atheist and secular rationalist. When Lal Behari De, later a Christian convert, sought admission to Hare's School after having spent some time in a mission school, he was told quite candidly by Mr. Hare that boys who had studied in a Christian institution were never allowed into

his school for fear that the new arrivals would contaminate the other students.⁹ Not until the Brahmo Samaj started its own schools in the 1840s did a single educational institution in Bengal offer students a rational and systematic exposition of their own faith.

The Christian religion was, of course, taught in mission schools. But again the actual historical situation does not necessarily follow what may logically be believed to have taken place. The best mission school in Calcutta after 1830 was Duff's School, named after the fiery, controversial, Presbyterian missionary Alexander Duff.¹⁰ To be sure, Duff converted many Bengali intellectuals from good families. But at his school he did not stress either Christianity or religion. By offering Western education free of cost, he made his school popular, and by introducing an effective Socratic mode of teaching he liberated the minds of his students, and hoping to prepare them to accept an alien faith.

It would be a gross injustice to Duff if we pictured him as surreptitiously using the educational process to seduce impressionable minds away from Krishna to Christ. His was a subtle technique to inspire thinking, and it was precisely in this role of missionary educator that he achieved his remarkable success as a religious Westernizer. Lal Behari De, one of his converts, has described the Duff method of instruction in some detail. Duff aimed first to bring out what was in the mind of the pupil by interrogation, with the hope that logical error and misinformation could be "purified" through self-awareness. "We were taught," wrote De, "the clear conception of an idea and secondly, the expression of that conception in words." No notes were encouraged in class "under the apprehension that they might lead to cramming." De's contrast between Duff's method and the subsequent method of Calcutta University after 1857 is significant: "Today it is different. The students of the present day never open their mouths in the classroom—unless, indeed, it is to make a noise. They take down the professor's words, commit them to memory—often without understanding them—and reproduce them in the examination hall. A copying-machine could do the same."¹¹

I am suggesting two important things about Duff's method of education that had tremendous influence on Bengali intellectual life throughout the century. First, by wedding Trinitarian Christianity to a scientific attitude and rationalism, he became an effective opponent of Unitarians and Brahmos, while also converting many former disciples of Derøzio. Second, by stressing science and

reason at his school and at his Scottish Church College, he unwittingly produced secularists. The intellectual atmosphere in Calcutta was at first more conducive to secular reformism than to religious reformism. When Duff first arrived in Calcutta in 1830, Rammohun Roy welcomed him. Rammohun's greatest foe was the "godless atmosphere of the intellectual life" in Calcutta. The younger generation learned to despise not only Hinduism, but Christianity as well. Theism was on the defensive. To emancipated intellectuals of nineteenth-century Europe, Christianity had become as odious a stumbling block to reform as capitalism among twentieth-century intellectuals. Such antireligious movements as Benthamite Utilitarianism and early Comptean Positivism were not long in crossing the seas to Calcutta, where a segment of the intelligentsia readily consumed the new ideas.

The irrelevance of God (in agnosticism and atheism) and humanism were not in themselves new ideas in the West. Momentous historical changes, accompanied by a radical transformation of the physical environment through technological and industrial innovations, brought these ideas into predominance. The potentialities of man's progress in this world through the incredible achievements of science accelerated the process of this-worldly asceticism begun centuries before with the Protestant reformation, and gradually secularized it. Indeed, in this sense, and from a twentieth-century perspective, Unitarianism itself may be viewed as a half-way house between Christ and Marx.

It is important in this context to reiterate a point made earlier in relation to Rammohun Roy's adaptation of rational and social Unitarianism in Bengal. His environment never underwent the changes that Europeans experienced in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. The significant fact about Roy and other Bengali intellectuals was that they were ruled by foreigners and were compelled to maneuver in a colonialist situation. Therefore, as must be stressed once more, the Bengali intelligentsia was able to participate only intellectually in the modern movements of the time, because however much British imperialism disrupted the old traditional order, it did not propel the society forward along the lines of material and social development.

On the other hand, as should be most apparent in this book, this did not mean that the intelligentsia operated in a vacuum or that their ideology was academic and socially useless. It meant that they had a far more difficult challenge than their European counterparts trying to implement new currents of thought in a novel way

to produce positive change. How and what they accomplished is a study of historical importance, for it was their ideological contribution, as a result of their own peculiar situation in history, that later provided independent India with its fundamental cultural presuppositions and guidelines.

But it is often overlooked that while secular humanism in nineteenth-century Bengal was stimulated by Western contact, its most effective proponents were indigenous modernizers rather than Westernizers. It cannot be stressed enough that though Calcutta was exposed to the same modernistic ideas as London, its situation was completely different from London's. In short, such radical notions as secularism, humanism, and rationalism had to be reinterpreted to fit the Indian situation. It is precisely in this context that Vidyasagar's life and career can be understood, and the apparent paradoxical nature of his role and the ambivalence of his reformist thought made plausible. As we shall see later, Vidyasagar was Bengal's most learned Sanskrit scholar, but also her most successful social reformer; he was an ardent rationalist, but spent most of his time justifying that rationalism from Hindu texts; and he considered himself a good Hindu—dressed, ate, and acted accordingly—yet was known to be a dedicated humanist and a professed atheist.

To trace the chief source of indigenous secularism as against the Westernized variety, we must once more refer back to the early nineteenth-century Orientalist legacy, which contributed so much to the making of the modern Bengali mind. In 1823, the British Orientalists founded Sanskrit College, not as a means of perpetuating the Hindu tradition, but as an educational experiment in cultural fusion. To appreciate Vidyasagar and other humanist pundits like him who were students of Sanskrit College, and their intellectual syncretism, one should read the twofold aim of the institution written by its founder, H. H. Wilson: "to preserve from decay and degradation a system of science and literature held in pious veneration by the great body of its subjects, deeply interwoven with their domestic habits and religious faith . . . but . . . to combine with this the still more important one of opening new sources of intellectual and moral improvements by the gradual admission of . . . European science and learning."¹²

Contrary to its image in the historiography of modern Bengal, Sanskrit College proved to be a fascinating experiment. Together with the traditional Sanskritic studies of rhetoric, sacred literature, law, and grammar, Wilson initiated a science curriculum of me-

chanics, hydrostatics, optics, astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, anatomy, and medicine.¹³ In 1828, Dr. Tytler, the anatomy professor, introduced anatomical dissection to his class, and before long the "students not only handled the bones of the human skeleton without reluctance, but in some instances themselves performed the dissection of the softer parts of animals."¹⁴ It should be added that almost half of the student body chose to study English and the sciences, even though these were not required subjects. Among them was Vidyasagar.

Besides social reform and the idea of progress, it was scientism and rationalism that brought indigenous modernizers like Vidyasagar and Vidyabhusan together with theistic Brahmo progressives. Faith in science and in reason were so crucial to all Bengali liberals until well into the twentieth century that I think we are justified in looking upon these leading ideas as the most fundamental and characteristic features of Hindu modernist ideology. To the Bengali intelligentsia, science connoted certain values: unity over diversity; the compilation and successful application of useful knowledge about man, society, and the universe; the search for natural laws; optimism about the role of science in progress. Rationalism in Bengal connoted the supremacy of reason in every area of human endeavor, including religion. We have already observed how rational religion was a pillar of the Unitarian faith. But a tendency was manifested late in the nineteenth century through which certain philosophical and theological Brahmos mercilessly subjected faith and the spirit to analytical scrutiny and system building. These rationalists were charged with having lost their theism along with their Unitarian faith, and were disparingly referred to as "Brahmo Scholastics."

As the Hindu reformation drifted into the twentieth century, deep factional cleavages had formed within the ranks of the progressive intelligentsia. Even before the shocks of World War I, the Great Depression, fascism, and other forms of totalitarianism, liberals in the West and in Bengal found themselves increasingly polarized from within. Humanism versus theism, reason versus faith, collective harmony versus individualism—these were some of the major issues that cried out for reconciliation and synthesis.

As intimated, straightforward secular humanism did not exist in the Brahmo Samaj. Rammohun Roy's Unitarian paradigm of rational theism, however domesticated, had never been seriously challenged within the Samaj. Nevertheless, a qualified humanism did emerge that was deeply influenced by Western positivism and

deism, as well as by science and rationalism. The earliest figure to combine these ideas meaningfully as an ideology of salvation for an ailing Bengali society and culture was Akkhoy Kumar Dutt (1820-1886).

Dutt's educational background is noteworthy. He learned his English first from a missionary school outside of Calcutta. His father's fear about missionary influence, and the happy coincidence of the establishment of a cheap but good school in Calcutta backed solely by prominent elitist Hindus, prompted him to shift the boy to the metropolis. The Oriental Seminary started in March 1829 by the educator Gour Mohun Addy¹⁵ was the earliest privately run, first-rate, Hindu-supported modern school in Calcutta open to all castes. It offered Western mathematics, the sciences, English language and literature, and most of the other eagerly sought-after foreign subjects.

Interesting with reference to the later intellectual development of Dutt was his favorable reaction to science and the scientific method, which he first acquired in college. This is clearly seen in his choice of subjects as a student at the Calcutta Medical College, which he appears to have attended just after the inception of the institution in 1835. There he studied chemistry, geology, geography, and other natural sciences.

In 1839, Dutt had emerged from the life of an anonymous squalor-beset intellectual by joining Debendranath Tagore's newly formed Tattvabodhini Sabha. It is a credit to Debendranath's broad sympathies as a leader of the reformation movement that he could recognize and support a young intellectual whose openly proclaimed rationalism, deism, and scientism were so alien to his own highly mystical and intimate theistic faith. In 1840, Tagore gave Dutt a teaching position in the recently established Brahma school, where he taught the natural sciences and translated textbooks on physics and geography into Bengali.

In 1843, Debendranath chose Akkhoy Kumar to be editor of the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, a position in the Brahma Samaj that the young man filled with considerable distinction until 1855. It was the perfect vehicle for the searching intellectual who refused to stop learning. Though the paper served primarily to keep the increasingly far-flung Brahma members abreast of Samaj news in Calcutta, under Dutt it served equally as an education gazette informing the reading public of happenings in the arts and sciences. The *Patrika* also helped elevate the language by widening it to accommodate a vast range of new knowledge and information.

To Akkhoy Kumar, the *Patrika* was important for helping him to

clarify his thinking and to evolve an ideology. His editorials represent the intellectual strivings of a thoroughly emancipated thinker, groping for ways and means of applying European secular ideas to his immediate historical situation in Bengal. The fact that Dutt, a Brahmo, was engaged in such a quest indicates that the reform movement was not restricted to theists.¹⁶

To understand Dutt's thought, it is important to note that he was not, as often alleged, an atheist. In general, his concept of God resembled that of the eighteenth-century deists who saw the Almighty as the supreme watchmaker. Only an Absolute Being could possibly conceive something as intricately complex in its interrelationship between parts and whole as the clock-like earth.¹⁷ The world was therefore neither accidental in its creation nor purposeless in its operation. One can understand God's plan by discovering the laws of nature, which show how all things are harmoniously interrelated, and this knowledge can be used to improve human relationships and bring the kingdom of God on earth.

In the application of this philosophy to conditions around him, Dutt stressed three points in particular: that the approach to God was not through prayer or monistic union, but through the study of the sciences and natural laws upon which they were based; that a complete understanding of these natural laws or "God's scripture" would reveal the total harmonious interrelatedness of the universal elements; and that in terms of social improvement, the interdependence of classes and groupings was analogous to physical interrelatedness, whereas the goal was to discover those ethical principles that would bring about the most perfect organic relationship between social units and the total society.

The first proposition led Akkhoy Kumar to disown the Vedanta as the revealed source of the Brahmo Samaj. The second proposition led to an article of faith in unity over diversity, which he continually confirmed and which led him farther and farther away from nationalism, toward internationalism.

As early as 1843, about the time of the Brahmo oath-taking ceremony, Akkhoy Kumar was trying to convince Debendranath that if the Samaj were effectively to reform Hindu society, it had to abandon the supporting prop of Vedantism and supplant the worship of God per se with a scientific understanding of His wonderful creation. "We were poles asunder," Debendranath would recall in 1858, "as I was seeking to know my relations with God while Dutt was seeking to know the relations of man with material objects."¹⁸ The best Dutt could do at the time was to cast doubt in the mind of

Debendranath whether the Vedanta or any other classical Hindu source did actually contain a message of pure monotheism. According to Satis Chakrabarty, Akkhoy Kumar consistently opposed the notion that any Vedic source was revealed, until 1850, when Debendranath finally concurred with his judgment.¹⁹

Dutt's scientific bias and insistence that there were natural laws of universal applicability drove him into a position of advocating that the Brahmo Samaj put less stress on national character and more stress on "the religious impulses common to all men." Brahmoism, if it would emancipate itself from the artificial barriers imposed between peoples by "religious fanaticism" and other factors, could offer itself to the modern world as a scientifically constructed "natural religion." The quest for a universal science of religion through the Brahmo faith, which became a leading idea throughout the century, finds its origin in Akkhoy Kumar Dutt.

In 1848, Dutt's principles of a natural religion were as yet rudimentary, but they were certainly powerful enough to persuade Tagore of their validity, thus changing the course of Brahmo history. According to Akkhoy Kumar in 1854, natural religion was first and foremost for the people of all races because "all human beings are the children of God and the worshipper of God considers this earth to be his home and all human beings to be his brothers." Second, a natural religion was based on the need to understand God through His design in nature, and not by sectarian worship in mosque, temple, or church. In his third principle, Dutt interposed the ethical ingredient within the universalist context by urging that there were no revealed scriptures as such, because the true religious impulse was "expressed universally as a moral doctrine urging that good be done to others." His fourth, fifth, and sixth principles were exceedingly important, for they clearly reflected the genesis of a Brahmo ethic: "The asceticism of self-inflicted torture is a perverted and crude practice. . . . There is no injunction of the Brahmo religion to renounce the world. God desires all of us to live together. He has given us qualities like friendship, kindness, love and affection. . . . Religion has no connection with ostentation. All true worshippers of God practice meditation, devotion, acquire knowledge and do good deeds."²⁰

In 1855, the very year Akkhoy Kumar suffered a mental breakdown and physical paralysis from which he never recovered, there appeared in print his *Dharma Niti*. The book was not so much a manual of ethical precepts and aphorisms as it was the culmination of an ideological quest to apply his notion of natural law to ethics,

with the end of harmonizing social relationships and promoting progress. His main points were: the reaffirmation of his deistic faith that the word of God lies in His creation; the discovery of ethical principles governing that creation, which God intended as the real determinant for social improvement; and the responsibility of man to apply these ethical principles to politics, economics, and other aspects of society for the progress of the human race.

The contradictory interpretations of Dutt's rationalism stem largely from his view of a God who after creation left the affairs of men to themselves. Thus, Dutt has given later writers the impression of atheism by virtue of the fact that in his scheme of things man plays such an important role in shaping his own destiny. Actually, as Professor Pronob Ranjan Ghose has correctly asserted, Dutt never surrendered God's majesty to man's usurping power, but argued instead that "happiness" lay only in the intellectual path of discovering the natural laws of God and in the moral path of applying those laws.²¹ To Dutt, therefore—and this point cannot be stressed enough—science and morality were not playthings for man's disposal but were part of the divine plan, design, or "riddle of existence."

What is especially significant about the *Dharma Niti* from the outset is the author's unqualified universalism. Though Dutt made ample use of Bengali examples throughout, he was really talking about one God, one divine plan, one human race. "All human nature is the same," he said, "in the Nature of Morality." Akkhoy Kumar felt no apparent need to assert his cultural integrity by coloring his philosophy with nationalist agitation.

Indeed, it is precisely here that Dutt was able to make his most important impact—on none other than his close associate in the Tattvabodhini Sabha, Vidyasagar. Having discovered the natural laws of morality (with the acknowledged assistance of Coombes, Comte, and other Western intellectuals), Dutt was next faced with the problem of using them to improve society. As an ethical determinist, he tackled the much larger problem of social reform through political and economic change. The social body was an organism, not in the classical sense of cyclical history with its pattern of birth, growth, and decay, but in the biological sense of homeostasis. Consequently, Dutt reduced the social organism to its most characteristic unit, the family, arguing that it was from this vantage point that change must be initiated.

For Dutt, the proper education of all family members was the means to achieve social reform, and the aim of that education was

the fully developed "well-rounded human being." Through education, he wrote, "we learn the physical and mental rules of God," and that education "molds our behavior, enlightening us as to our moral responsibility to one another." Ultimately, by "behaving well with others and creating conditions for their happiness, we beautify human society."

The educational system he recommended was one that aroused scientific curiosity, above all, so that when the student "fixes his eyes to the sky he remains engaged in studying the wonders of the endless universe." History, geography, and the anthropological study of peoples will arouse such "intellectual curiosity."

"Human society," wrote Dutt, "is like a machine and its pluralistic sub-units or sub-cultures are the wheels." If humans pull away individualistically from the social organism by refusing to acknowledge their dependence on others, then society will resemble a malfunctioning machine. But if humans develop their own potential, while at the same time assisting others in society to help themselves, then their society will progress. Said Dutt, "it is far better for the human being to live in society than alone," and within the basic family unit "marital love and companionship must prevail for all to all."

It is at this point in Dutt's argument that the immediate Bengali situation was offered as an example of a social organism functioning contrary to natural law. The social ends in Bengali society are derived from a lack of true moral education in the family. Child marriage is a moral violation of the child by the father. It is a "great sin," said Dutt, while the "punishment for disregarding God's principles" was clearly evident in "the decadence of our society." The harsh treatment of widows and the exploitive institution of Kulin polygamy were gross violations of natural law, which destroyed "family harmony" and undermined any attempt at social improvement.

Without belaboring the point, there emerges from the author of *Dharma Niti*, far more than from any other previous Bengali writer, the rational justification for making female education and emancipation the central issue of Hindu social reform. As Akkhoy Kumar reviewed the social evils in the Bengali family, he found that almost all were derived from the servile and oppressive condition of the women in the household. Here then must social reform begin, and it must begin through education. The Hindu husband may be learned, but if he is truly moral, how can he tolerate her present degenerate state of illiteracy? He may "value knowledge," but "if

his wife remains illiterate she can neither satisfy him nor relate harmoniously to him." An illiterate mother, instead of transmitting "enlightenment to her children," perpetuates superstition. All subsequent social evils thus stem from a lack of moral consciousness by the husband, and all subsequent reform will take place when the husband realizes the need for true equality between himself and his wife in "the meeting of minds and in friendship."²²

Vidyasagar was born in September 1820, two months after Akhoy Kumar Dutt. It is remarkable that these two giants of the Hindu reformation and Bengal Renaissance, who were the most outspoken humanists of their generation, differed so widely in their caste background, education, profession, and cultural self-image. Dutt, who was more profoundly influenced by Western secular philosophy, managed to accommodate himself to Brahmotheism. Vidyasagar, who immersed himself in the study of classical Hindu civilization, remained a devout atheist, rationalist, and humanist throughout his life.

Both Dutt and Vidyasagar started their formal schooling at nine years of age, the former in a mission school at Kiddapur and the latter at Sanskrit College, Calcutta. On the surface, it would appear that the two young men were moving in totally different directions. The Calcutta Sanskrit College, however, noted earlier as being originally an Orientalist institution, was not intended to promote traditional learning, but to fuse modern education from the West with Sanskrit learning in the hope of producing something new that was both indigenous and progressive. Both Vidyasagar and Dutt were excellent students, hard working, and avidly curious about the world. It was at the Oriental Seminary that Dutt first displayed that "insatiable thirst for knowledge" which became a characteristic feature of his mature life. He was later remembered as the student who "eagerly grasped every kind of information within reach."²³ This was no less true of Vidyasagar at Sanskrit College; he was an excellent student and voracious reader. These qualities are documented in a letter by G. F. Marshall, secretary of Sanskrit College, dated January 4, 1841, praising the young man for his twelve years of "great success" as a student and certifying his qualifications for a degree.²⁴

As for Vidyasagar's scientific orientation, a search through the Sanskrit College records has turned up two relevant documents for the year 1839. The first is a letter of July 13 by the lecturer in "natural philosophy" to the secretary discussing the teaching of natural sciences at the college.²⁵ The second is a letter to Marshall, dated

November 21, announcing the prize-winning essay of the year by an Ishwar Chandra Sarma (Vidyasagar) on the topic of comparative science. Though I have not been able to find the essay itself, an outline is enclosed in the letter. With the title "On Natural Philosophy," Vidyasagar compared a "correct account of the several theories of Geography and Astronomy in the puranas with the Copernican System."²⁶

Vidyasagar represents the ideal result of the union between traditional culture and the Western learning, which Sanskrit College only realized partially in a handful of graduates whom Amal Tripathi has aptly called "traditional modernisers."²⁷ In 1851, when appointed principal of Sanskrit College, Vidyasagar began his first serious effort at reforming the tradition according to Western rational precepts. In this case, it was the college curriculum, which he altered after a hard, critical, and pragmatic review. Courses in language, literature, law, and philosophy had been taught mechanically; students were made to memorize passages verbatim; the content was always inflexibly the same, the duration of the study invariably unaltered. Vidyasagar ruthlessly accomplished what no Orientalist had dared to try—he transformed the ritualistic corpus of Sanskrit learning into an updated and rational scheme of Sanskrit education. He reintroduced English, which the Bentinck administration had dropped in 1835, and introduced Bengali, the living language of the people. He cut out what he considered "false" content, or traditional sources that conflicted with the truth. For example, Sanskrit treatises on mathematics, science, and philosophy were dropped. Simultaneously, he deleted "useless" Sanskritic sources or methods of learning, substituting such things as essay writing for rote learning, and English texts for certain dead wood from higher Sanskrit courses.

Vidyasagar's object was clearly to use rationalism to modernize the Sanskritic tradition. After making English a compulsory subject for eight years, and introducing Western philosophy into the *Darśana* (Indian philosophy) course, he said, "students wishing to transfer the Philosophy of the West into a native dress will possess a stock of technical words already to some degree familiar to intelligent natives." He also contended that "young men thus educated will be better able to expose the errors of ancient Hindu philosophy than if they were to derive their knowledge of Philosophy simply from European sources."

Vidyasagar's was a nineteenth-century view of objective truth. He was positive he would find it if the means he employed to pur-

sue truth were sound and rational. He favored the modern learning of the West not because it was Western, but because the West had broken away from an uncritical, unthinking reverence for tradition. And he sought to use the Western achievement to revitalize his own civilization. He was never a nationalist, but always a rationalist.

In 1852, Dr. J. R. Ballantyne of Benares Sanskrit College visited Vidyasagar in Calcutta. His aim was to convince Vidyasagar that teaching the truth of India and the truth of Europe separately, leaving the student "to determine for himself whether the principles inculcated in these correspond to one another, or altogether conflict, or correspond partly," often frustrated the purpose of reconciling the two major traditions. Ballantyne seems to have been less concerned with truth as it is, and more concerned with presenting truth in such a way as not to offend the sensibility of the Indian students. Thus he had prepared his own books, which he called *Synopsis of Sciences*, or commentaries designed to "bridge the chasm" between Indian and European cultural attitudes and "to interpret the mind of Europe to that of India."

Vidyasagar's reaction was interesting, in that he refused to concede the priority of cultural deference as an integral part of the educational process. Ballantyne had juxtaposed Vedanta with Berkeley's *Inquiry* to show similarities in idealist philosophy. Vidyasagar's response was that the Vedanta was bad enough without reinforcing its false assertions and spurious reasoning with the help of Berkeley. If Vedanta were to be retained at all in the Darsana course, it would be only to have its life-negational presuppositions demolished by the philosophy of the modern empiricists. Nor would he budge from his own method of placing the two philosophic and scientific systems side by side. His own words show clearly that not Westernization but rationalism was the underlying purpose in his choice of method: "Truth is truth if properly perceived. To believe that 'truth is double' is but the imperfect perception of truth itself—an effect which I am sure to see removed by the improved courses of studies we have adopted at this institution."

In the 1850s, Vidyasagar also launched his campaign to emancipate the Hindu woman from her basic disabilities and traditionally imposed slavery. He accepted Rammohun Roy's conclusion that only by freeing women and by treating them as human beings could Indian society free itself from social stagnation. Vidyasagar's contemporary, Akkhoy Kumar Dutt, had done likewise. But if Rammohun argued from the vantage point of the Unitarian social

gospel, and Dutt from that of the positivist ethic, Vidyasagar approached the problem as an indigenous modernizer. To be sure, Vidyasagar deplored inhumanity as a rationalist and humanist, but winning over other pandits to his way of thinking meant proving it from the classical sources. Rammohun had also gone to the sources, but he had reinterpreted them by refashioning the Vedanta in the mold of the Unitarian rational faith, asserting that monotheism was the central factor in the authentic Hindu tradition and golden age. Vidyasagar's pragmatism and atheism not only set him apart from Rammohun, but explains his lifelong ambivalence to the Brahma Samaj.

In 1853, Vidyasagar discovered a sloka or verse from the *Parashara Samhita*, an ancient legal text in Sanskrit, which favored widow remarriage. Parashara had stated three alternatives for the widow—remarriage, sati, and an ascetic life. Since sati had been abolished by law in 1830 and the rigors of asceticism were no longer feasible, remarriage was the only suitable alternative. This was only part of Vidyasagar's technique for changing social values from within the system. He knew that to the pundits, the earlier the scriptural source, the more authority it commanded. But he also sought to demonstrate on ethical grounds that it was inhuman to prohibit child widows from remarrying. Vidyasagar was extremely effective. His ideas were incorporated into a Widow Remarriage Bill that became law on July 26, 1856. In the same way, Vidyasagar attacked the evils of Kulin polygamy, the denial of female education, and child marriage. Throughout he implied that evil and unscrupulous Brahmans had probably falsified the ancient texts to satisfy their own brutal inclinations.

Like Akkhoy Kumar Dutt, Vidyasagar formed an alliance with the Brahma Samaj through its associative organization, the Tattvabodhini Sabha. An enlightened attitude to reform was the basis of the alliance. The Sabha had been formed by Debendranath Tagore in 1839 to combat Trinitarian missionary influence and to provide an umbrella society for alienated young intellectuals, both humanist and theist. Evidence suggests that Vidyasagar and Dutt attracted to the Sabha a number of secular-minded members of Young Bengal.

Kali Prosanna Singh, the fiery young zamindar whose Calcutta palace was a stone's throw from Debendranath Tagore's, in Jorasanko, has realistically described the factionalism in the Tattvabodhini Sabha. He has explained how "as young people we had to make a name for ourselves and so we began to cast about for

a means of becoming famous." To "achieve this end" we began to "write, to edit papers, establish clubs"—and "become Brahmos." Soon "we would be invited to attend meetings of the Tattvabodhini Sabha and to take part in the discussions." The position taken on issues such as widow remarriage put us "in factional disputes," and before long we found ourselves "waiting on famous leaders of the factions like Debendranath Tagore, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Akkhoy Kumar Dutt."

Sociologically, Kali Prosanna represented a class of zamindars whom Debendranath, for one, greatly prized as recruits to the Brahmo movement. Obviously, zamindars brought wealth and status into any organization of the period, nor must it be forgotten that Rammohun Roy and Debendranath Tagore were also zamindars. These facts about class interest are no doubt important, but they in no way explain why a landholding intellectual such as Kali Prosanna Singh drifted into one camp and not into another. Kali Prosanna was also a member of Young Bengal, educated at Hindu College, who reacted against "imitation of foreign manners" and subsequent "denationalization." In many ways, he moved along the same path as Rajnarayan Bose into cultural nationalism, which he best expressed in his ardent defense of Bengali language and literature.²⁸

But in terms of factional affiliation in the Tattvabodhini Sabha, it was not Rajnarayan that young Kali Prosanna hailed as his *dolpati* (faction leader) but Dutt and Vidyasagar, neither of whom, interestingly enough, was a landholder or blessed, in the early 1850s, with much wealth or privilege. Rather, both were at the time noted for their "Brahmo puritanism" based on "plain living and high thinking." Moreover, the young people who clustered about these two towering intellects were equally attracted by their rationalism, their scientific curiosity, and their passion for reform. Former members of Young Bengal, in particular, were influenced by the curious fact that these two "Brahmos" were conspicuously indifferent to matters of religious faith.

Though I have no evidence to prove it, my impression is that the humanist faction began to dominate the Sabha sometime after 1855, under Vidyasagar's leadership. It was then that Debendranath the theist confronted Vidyasagar the atheist. Not social reform but religion became the key issue between them. It was then that Debendranath befriended the young liberal theist, Keshub Chandra Sen, who became Vidyasagar's most serious rival among the younger generation. One source contends that the reason De-

bendranath dismantled the Tattvabodhini Sabha in 1859 was that he felt the "atheists" had taken over and were acting in a way detrimental to Brahmo interests.²⁹ We do know that in 1858 Vidyasagar had become secretary of the Sabha and editor of the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*.³⁰ In 1859, Debendranath abolished the Sabha, and transferred to the Brahmo Samaj the printing press, the newspaper, and other properties of the defunct organization. At the same time (1860), Debendranath and Keshub Chandra became joint secretaries of the Brahmo Samaj.³¹

After the incident, Vidyasagar seems to have drawn closer to other liberal pandits who, like himself, were graduates of Sanskrit College. One such was Dwarkanath Vidyabhusan, a professor of literature at the college and its assistant secretary. The circle of little-known pandit reformers also included Taranath Tarkabachaspati, Modan Mohun Tarkalankar, and Sirish Chandra Vidyaratna.³² Sivanath Sastri, a later graduate of Sanskrit College, first imbibed his liberalism from this group of humanists before exposure to Unitarian ideas. Sastri's uncle was the above Vidyabhusan, who was among Vidyasagar's closest friends. From 1855 on, Vidyabhusan actively assisted Vidyasagar's female reform campaign—especially in the area of widow remarriage. But when, in 1866, the young Sastri announced that he would follow Keshub Sen, Vidyabhusan exploded. "He tried to reason with me," Sivanath said later on, "and told me I was suffering from monomania or religious madness." Vidyabhusan's dislike of Keshub's intense religiosity was evidently so extreme that he continually ridiculed the reformer and his disciples. He predicted that under Keshub's leadership, Brahmoism would "reduce itself into a sectarian cult."³³

Though most of the other pandits managed to accommodate themselves to the revival of orthodoxy and conservatism later in the century, Vidyasagar lived out his remaining years as "the lonely Prometheus,"³⁴ forever challenging God for the sake of improving man's condition. According to Tripathi, he grew weary "of the pundits who sold their souls for a mess of pottage." He continued to distrust the Westernized intelligentsia who acculturated themselves adequately to the trappings of European civilization, but who lacked the convictions of a truly rational and modernist mentality. As for religion, he distrusted all theists to the very end. And as Tripathi has, I think, rightly pointed out, "if he had any religion, it was the religion of humanity." In brief, "his ceaseless activity to alleviate human suffering or to improve the human condition was

rooted in a belief in the perfectibility of man and man's responsibility for his neighbour."

Vidyasagar, who was essentially an educationist and reformer, never systematized his humanism as a philosophy. This was done by a Brahmo, curiously enough, in the twentieth century, Brajendranath Seal, who represented a shift from liberal theism to secular humanism. Seal, who died in 1938, was like Vidyasagar an educator, a devotee of science and rationalism, a student of comparative studies, and a very convincing advocate of the religion of humanity. And like Vidyasagar, he spent most of his mature life evolving intellectually as a result of his eternal quest for truth. Only infirmity and disease shortly before his death brought to a close Seal's indefatigable pursuit of systematic knowledge and a synthetic view of unity and diversity in the world.

In view of the fact that Brajendranath gave up his Brahmo religiosity for scientific positivism, it is noteworthy that his father, Mohendranath Seal, was one of the earliest disciples of Comte in Bengal.³⁵ It is regrettable that available biographical data on Brajendranath neither suggest how this influence affected the young man nor reveal why he originally turned to Brahmoism as a college student.

When Brajendranath studied at the General Assembly Institution, his teachers were amazed at his mathematical aptitude.³⁶ In 1878, he was admitted into the college department of the same institution. Here among his classmates and friends was Narendra Nath Dutt, the future Vivekananda. Both of them evidently attended Sadharan Brahmo meetings, but whereas Brajendranath stayed with that community as an initiated member, Naren Dutt went on to Keshub's New Dispensation, and later beyond that to found his own movement. According to Seal, a bond between himself and Vivekananda as college students was their interest in European philosophers. They read Mill, Comte, Spencer, and Hegel not out of idle curiosity or for course requirements, but to gain understanding and insight into problems of faith, evil, and progress.³⁷

In 1884, Brajendranath secured his M.A. in philosophy and was appointed assistant professor at City College, Calcutta. His first major work, which took him twenty-four years to complete (1883 to 1907), was a book, *New Essays in Criticism*, in which he expressed partiality for English romantic literature. But he was not so much interested in the creative side as he was in applying Hegelian philosophy to literary criticism. Between 1884 and 1896, Seal shifted

from college to college, restlessly in pursuit of academic responsibility and a secure financial position commensurate with his potential genius.³⁸ During that period he published virtually nothing.

Then in 1896, the Maharaja of Cooch Behar, notorious son-in-law of Keshub Sen, invited Seal to become principal of the recently established Victoria College. And here, finally, Seal attained stability, peace of mind, and time for studious reflection. It was in Cooch Behar that Brajendranath was able to finish his *New Criticism* and was able to begin his first cantos of the *Quest Eternal*, a philosophic epic that traced his own intellectual development. At Cooch Behar he began exploration of the "positive sciences of the ancient Hindus," which led ultimately to his contributing a chapter on that subject in Prafulla Chandra Ray's *History of Chemistry in Ancient India*.³⁹ It was from Cooch Behar that Seal first acquired a reputation abroad, and in 1902 he was first considered seriously for a post as professor of philosophy at Cambridge University, England.

One good reason for Brajendranath's growing reputation was that by means of liberal support authorized by the Maharaja in the form of travel grants he was able to go to Europe in 1899, 1906, and 1911. In 1906, for example, he attended the International Congress of Orientalists in Rome, and in 1911 the Maharaja arranged a handsome grant to take Professor Seal to London to give the inaugural paper for the First Universal Race Congress.

When, in September 1911, Brajendranath heard that the Maharaja had died suddenly while also visiting England, it seemed as if the world had collapsed around him. A letter to the Diwan's Office of Cooch Behar State dated March 22, 1912, indicates that without the Maharaja's patronage, his financial situation had suddenly worsened.⁴⁰ On December 20, 1912, Seal tendered a letter of resignation from Victoria College, in which he blamed bad health for his decision. What is revealing in this long letter justifying his termination of service is the prevailing mood of despair about his future career and about the completion of "research projects." He seemed pessimistic about his chances of finding a post at London, Cambridge, or Calcutta Universities. What most dismayed him was whether he would ever again find a position that would afford him the time to carry out his research on cultural history, on developing a "philosophical system of the universe," and on perfecting a "synthesis of all the modern advances in Science."⁴¹

This was a critical period in his life, which some believe to have been resolved by his alleged repudiation of the Brahmo faith and by his conversion to "Godness humanism."⁴² A manuscript copy of

a later book by Brajendranath published as *Comparative Studies in Vaishnavism and Christianity*, and written just at this time (1912), reveals less a lack of religious feeling and more a groping for a comparative methodology free of the stranglehold imposed by Westerncentric academic scholarship. Here, in the brilliant introduction, Seal exposed the excesses of Western imperialism, which he combated not as a militant nationalist but as a cool man of reason.

In contrast to most of the Sadharan Brahmo philosophers, by 1911 Seal had rejected Hegel largely because of the German's unilinear philosophy of history, which traced "a single flow of progress" through time from East to West. To Seal, Hegelianism was typical of the Westerncentric notion that "all other races and cultures have been a preparation for the Greco-Roman-Gothic type," which is now the "Epitome of Mankind, the representation of Universal Humanity, the heir of all the ages." Therefore, any comparison between Christianity, Vaishnavism, or any other religion by a Western scholar would necessarily be one "between a rudimentary and a developed organism." For Seal, this attitude "seems to be a mischievous error due to an essentially wrong conception of the philosophy of history and the evolution of culture and an essentially perverse use of the historico-comparative method."

What Seal proposed instead as an antidote for imperialist comparative studies is based on the proposition that "historical comparison implies that the objects compared are of co-ordinate rank and belong more or less to the same stage in the development of known culture." Moving in the direction of cultural and historical relativity, in which traditions evolve in parallel patterns, Brajendranath argued that "every code, language, myth or system, has its own history—its origin, growth and development—a study of which is essential to a proper understanding of its function in society, its place, meaning and worth."

His concern was with the different types of cultures that appeared to develop in similar patterns of historical development. In opposition to the Hegelian view, Seal maintained that Chinese and Hindu cultures have "passed through most of the stages observable in the growth of the Hebraic-Greco-Roman-Gothic civilization." The same may be said for Islamic civilization. Thus humanity is "a circle of which the center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere." To be sure, each culture is "diversely embodied, reflected in specific modes and forms." But "in spite of multiformity

and in spite of the diverse ethnic developments all very real, all very special, there has been a general history of human culture and progress, the unfolding of a single ideal, plan, or pattern, a universal movement."

The task of the comparative historian was to take the different departments of the major cultures and work out their histories "in the same general historic plan and in obedience to the same general law of progress." His own work on Vaishnavism and Christianity was a step in that direction, in which two comparable religions in diverse cultures underwent similar historical development. Though Christianity has been treated historically and has undergone considerable change and continuity over its long span of history, Vaishnavism, which is an equally complex phenomenon with over two thousand years of history, has yet to be studied intensively using the same objective modes of historical inquiry.⁴³

In such a manuscript, Brajendranath Seal explored unity and diversity. According to D. M. Bose, this interest in comparative history ran side by side with a growing appreciation of the positive sciences; the belief being that they were far better equipped than religion to guide mankind into a higher level of human relationships.⁴⁴ Bose argues that from 1911, Seal had elevated humanity into "a modern hero," an attitude attributed to Comte's influence.

In 1913, fortunately for Seal, the worst fears reflected in his letter of resignation from Victoria College never materialized; he was given the post of King George V professorship of philosophy at Calcutta University. For the next eight years he taught, traveled, labored on his projects, published from time to time, and always absorbed new funds of knowledge and theory from a countless array of sources. He was so knowledgeable about so many different things that he was described as a walking encyclopedia.

In 1921, he was appointed vice chancellor of Mysore University, a position he held until 1930, when he was compelled to retire due to bad health. In 1926, he was knighted.⁴⁵ With the exception of a classical syllabus of Indian philosophy for student use in 1924, and his slim volume on *Rammohun Roy: the Universal Man*, there was little during his Mysore period to trace his ideological development. The most significant aspect of the Rammohun Roy study was Seal's strong attachment to the great men throughout history who have sought ways of reconciling cultural encounters by synthesis. As Seal himself put it: "This indeed is the meaning of progress in history. For history is a confluence of many streams, bringing together

conflicting cultures, conflicting national values and ideals, and those who can find peaceful solutions of these conflicts are the true heroes of latter-day Humanity."⁴⁶

In the 1930s, while living in a state of forced retirement due to his failing eyesight and general physical deterioration, Brajendranath finally had the opportunity of bringing his research projects to a conclusion—though under the condition of decreasing mental effectiveness. In 1936, bedridden and blind, he appears to have completed his *Quest Eternal* at last, one of the few modern Indian epics of the Faustian man in search of the meaning of existence. The book is so rich in symbolism taken from the literary traditions of both East and West that only a highly sophisticated analysis in a cross-cultural perspective would do justice to the full meaning and import of Brajendranath's poem.

What Brajendranath has done in this poem is to divide man's eternal quest for understanding into two dimensions. The first or historical dimension delineates how a world view is shaped by an ancient, medieval, and modern ethos. The second or cultural dimension suggests how a world view is shaped by the specific forms and values of human configurations. Therefore, in a far more world-encompassing and challenging arena of conflicting forces than Goethe's *Faust*, the book it most resembles, Brajendranath created as his hero the prototype of cosmopolitan man in quest of unity through a pluralistic universe.

The ancient ideal is of the "birth of the Godhead" and of the "Maid Eternal," quite possibly representing the male and female principles in all archaic religions. Brajendranath did not take his illustrations from any one tradition of early mythology, but from major ones in both East and West. The universal religious impulse predominates in the ancient ideal, while historical consciousness remains dim in an outlook of historical drift and cyclical recurrence:

The human mysteries,
They dance of Love,
They dance of Death,
Thy Graces, Pities, Charities,
Are as the desert Sphinx impressive
Implacable as Fate!
O World-drift cyclical!

From man's humble position in ancient society, where he remains prisoner of his fate, Brajendranath moved into the more ag-

gressive quest of the wizard knight seeking truth in the medieval cultural context. The medieval ideal here is not to be confused with a figure in the actual chronological period of the middle ages. In fact, his Wizard knight resembled modern man in search of scientific rationalism in the world of nature. He conducted his search in the name of the "Magician Commonwealth of Reason" and won the "Zodiac shield of the Sun for his victories over Untruth." After meanderings for truth, and maintaining himself as a pure devotee of the Commonwealth of Reason, the Wizard knight's quest ended in failure. The pursuit through reason had led to mere reason and not to the truth of self:

But all quest of knowledge blest,
Himself it cannot save!
O mercy! from illusion free
This knowledge loses life!
For Beauty and Love, Pity and Alone,
Are Still with illusion rife.

This led Brajendranath into a quest for wisdom which he called "modern," and which featured the hero in the role of the "homeless wanderer . . . in search of a Wisdom that is able to master Death." But death here is not "death in a physical sense" so much as "that dark power in life who frustrates our goals and strivings." The hero wandered through the "realms of Soul, of Nature, and of Man in History," but found everywhere "the leaguered powers of brute Matter and blind Sense." In complete despair he heard voices in colloquy:

Is this Man's kingdom?
Man, bound, manacled.
Sold in the mart
And fattened for the yoke.

This modern section of the epic is most fascinating because it seems to suggest that Brajendranath Seal had abandoned rationalism, scientism, Marxism, or any other salvation ideology of the "coming kingdom of man," which he also depicted as the "Finale of the evolution of the Spirit." All "isms" of this sort are but "a vain dream." His hero learned ultimately how "the Forces of the prime" in "conspiracy with the stars" humbled man continually, so that "on Earth's soil, an increasing barrenness." Thus said the hero, "I urged no pygmy proletariat war," nor "cursed a tyrant Punch upon the puppet stage."

Before the Lord; the hunt resounds,
 Death chases Life
 Life, Death.

The hero then changed his perspective until the "dimensions of the original problem are now enlarged." From an individual's quest of life and wisdom he passed to the "problem of redemption of Humanity as a whole." He questioned his despair by asking, "is the darkest hour born before the dawn?" The great man of the future he believed is a "new Prometheus" or universal man whose dream is to "redeem Humanity from the bondage of the gods." The hero called to the universal redeemer:

Oh come, Prometheus, come out of the shadow
 Of ages, out of the Deep,
 The dark, dark Deep!
 Arise and lead from Darkness to Light,
 Arise and lead from Death to Deathlessness!
 Arise and lead from Untruth's snares to truth.

But the faith in a charismatic hero to save humanity also proved a futile hope. The hero internalized the question to find spiritual strength in the victory over death. Much agony had passed with time between Vidyasagar's unfettered optimism and Seal's restrained faith in the religion of humanity. Seal's epic ended, disappointingly to some, on a note of hope through collective suffering. Perhaps Seal had returned to God in his final years. His hope was shrouded in a mysticism illuminated only by what he called the "One Suffering God." After enduring world war, totalitarianism, and genocide, Seal thought of the nineteenth-century religion of humanity as a oneness with the human race, achieved by "universal sympathy and compassion for the drama of divine suffering."

Ottoman, Ottoman
 Unbound thyself, and rise!
 Learn:
 Psyche's curse is annulled,
 And Prometheus has unbound himself.⁴⁷

If the alliance between secular humanism and science was always a delicate one in Bengal, that between liberal theism and science flourished. In fact, among scientists themselves, as we shall see—at least those within the Brahmo community—science seemed to justify and intensify their religiosity. The exceptions began to appear

in the twentieth century, in the 1930s, when Marxism rather than theism satisfied a younger generation in quest of a secularized ideology of salvation for India. It should also be pointed out that many of the humanists before them who championed science—Dutt, Vidyasagar, and Seal—were themselves not scientists as such.

So pervasive were certain aspects of scientism in nineteenth-century Bengal that Brahmos often justified their rational religion in the name of science. The “science of religion” was not an uncommon expression in Brahma writings. What they meant was the discovery of natural laws about religion from the comparative study of religions carried on without sectarian bias, and leading to a unified concept of the religion of man. And as good scientists, in the spirit of positivist sociology, they could apply what they learned either to the reformation of existing religions or to the creation of a new faith. Since Brahmos were influenced by Unitarian cosmopolitanism, there is an overlap in their writings between religious universalism and scientific unity.

In an important work by Rajnarayan Bose of the Adi Brahma Samaj (1863), the science of religion, Unitarian universalism, and the importance of national identity were all interwoven to prove that Brahmaism was the most advanced and rational religion of all in the nineteenth century. It is also revealing as a document in reply to a Christian critic.

Rajnarayan began with a defense of intuition, placing himself in the position of accepting from whatever culture all genuine theistic impulses as equal. If that be the case, he asked, then why must we insist so much “on the acceptance of a book of revelation as necessary for salvation?” On the other hand, Brahmos have not ignored religious diversity or the particular aspects of each national faith. Indeed, the Brahma policy of accepting all faiths as diverse expressions of a universal need for religion was done in response to modern times, while the alteration of Brahma doctrine put their religion well ahead of Christianity as a progressive faith. Brahmaism was, in fact, the prototype for the next stage of religious evolution in the world. Therefore Brahmos, far from playing intellectual games, were performing God’s work in the nineteenth century, and it is their faith that would certainly supercede narrow sectarian Christianity. Why were Brahmos superior to Christians in the quest for a “modern” religion? Rajnarayan’s reply was that Brahmos now had the key to the “science of religion.” This science was predicated on the belief in “unity in essentials, variety in non-essentials and toleration for all.”

Rajnarian the nationalist hardly ignored the diversity of the Hindu tradition, and at one point said candidly that "Rammohun's catholicity had to be corrected by a more Hindu aspect." Nevertheless, it was the universal, scientific, and unifying aspect of natural religion that was paramount. In India it had expressed itself through Brahmoism, which sought to reform Hinduism. The natural religious characteristic of Brahmoism could do the same for other creeds. Natural religion, Rajnarian wrote, "by which the Jew applying it to his Bible, the Hindu to his Sastra, the Greek to his Plato, the modern European to the New Testament, the Muhammedan to the Koran, and so forth, mankind might gradually become more united in a brotherly eclectic feeling of piety and reverence, mutually allowing variety of customs, and consenting out of former creeds to reject the weeds and keep the flowers."⁴⁸

If Rajnarian Bose used science in the sense of religious reformation, Keshub Chandra Sen went so far as to justify his new synthetic ideology of salvation or New Dispensation in the name of "science of religion." His argument is interesting in light of his differences with Vidyasagar, who was also an advocate of science. It suggests once more the fact that religion and science were as natural together as humanism and science.

In a public lecture on "God Vision in the Nineteenth Century" given in 1880 to defend his new religious system, Keshub distinguished between his own rational and scientific religion and the dark age of misguided religion, which "shrouded the world in superstition." It has been a long night for the world, which "has slept for long ages dreaming dreams and seeing visions." Night was the time when "the magician waves his mysterious wand and fascinates and enthralls the senses, and when 'priests' . . . hold the human soul in hopeless intellectual bondage and spiritual servitude."

"Thank goodness," said Keshub, "the hideous night of superstition and priestcraft has gone by." We are now living in "the age of science." Does that mean disregarding God? No, because "God cannot be banished from your minds." There is a science of religion just as there are other sciences. But it is neither the "painted fiction of ancient mythology nor the polished abstraction of modern metaphysics." Science is "complete unity" and the science of religion is "religious unity." Keshub concluded that: "It is our task to apply the unity of science to God because that is all science is but reduction to unity and order. God is all around us . . . all that you

are required to do is to take off the huge dial from its face. Then you will see the secret spring of the machinery which keeps the universe in working order."⁴⁹

If Brahma religious leaders found it necessary to defend their religion along scientific lines, Brahma scientists found it equally necessary to defend their scientific careers as being in no way contradictory to the faith they shared with other members of the Brahma community. The common factor among them all was their acute rational outlook, always inseparable from their devotion to progress. Thus, to understand the birth of science in modern India, it is perhaps necessary to trace their lives as individual people trying to develop as scientists in the Indian colonial situation.

As the pioneer of modern science in India, probably no other name has been so well remembered as that of Jagadish or "Jessie" Bose. Bose was born in 1858 in that birthplace of Brahma heroes, Vikrampur, near Dacca, East Bengal. He enjoyed a privileged boyhood as the son of the remarkable Bhagaban Chandra Bose, one of those early members of the Western-educated Brahma society of Dacca. As headmaster of the Mymensingh Zillah School, the elder Bose inspired and indoctrinated many an East Bengali youth with the tenets of the Brahma faith.⁵⁰ He is perhaps best recalled for his distinguished career as a civil servant. He was also an entrepreneur who invested money in various ventures ranging from tea plantations in Assam to an industrial weaving concern in Bombay.

In 1863, Bhagaban sent his son Jessie to a vernacular school because he believed that a boy should learn Bengali before English.⁵¹ Four years later, Jessie was admitted to Hare School in Calcutta, where his English education began in earnest. Then in 1874, while his father served as personal assistant to the commissioner of Burdwan, Jessie entered St. Xavier's College. While there, and under the guidance of Father LaFont, professor of physics, Jessie received his first impulse to become a scientist. In 1880, at twenty-two years of age, Bose received his B.A. and the blessings of Father LaFont, who urged him to pursue science as a career.⁵²

Upon graduation, Jessie's parents were inclined to send their boy to England for medical training. Finally, they agreed to support his own desire to continue his studies in the natural sciences. Significant at this stage in his life was the enlightened attitude of his Brahma parents. In contrast to many a Hindu young man in similar circumstances, young Jessie experienced no grief resulting from a broken-hearted superstitious mother worried about cross-

ing the forbidden seas, or an angry father concerned primarily with the prospect of losing caste. In fact, his mother willingly offered the sale of her jewelry to send the young man to England.⁵³

Jessie was fortunate and bright enough to win a national science fellowship to Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1881. Rather like his brother-in-law, Ananda Mohun Bose, Jessie Bose left behind him at Cambridge a brilliant record.⁵⁴ Like Ananda Mohun, also, Jessie was a diligent worker with good study habits and a burning desire to succeed.

Back in Bengal, Jessie entered the Government Educational Service and was appointed as officiating professor of physics at Presidency College. The fact that Jessie Bose was placed in the Class IV bracket of the service, at a salary grade two-thirds of that received by a European in a similar position, gave him his earliest humiliating experience at the hands of British imperialism.⁵⁵ He was unwilling, however, to be discriminated against for his race, and courageously refused to accept his salary for three years. Finally, the government reversed their policy and accepted him as an equal.⁵⁶ When we consider that at this very time Jessie was responsible for paying off his father's debts incurred by investment failures, the young man's heroic character and stature seems remarkable indeed. Moreover, during the same time, Jessie was a target for the racist director of public instruction, Sir Alfred Croft, who once declared that "no native was fit to teach the exact sciences."⁵⁷

In 1887, Jessie married Abala Das, the very talented and well-educated daughter of Durga Mohun Das.⁵⁸ It was a critical year for Jessie; he had wanted to begin serious investigation of electric radiation, but had discovered no laboratory in Presidency College to carry on his research. Nor were there mechanical facilities at his disposal.⁵⁹ The system, which had relegated Calcutta University to the status of bureaucratic clearing house for examinations and degrees, thwarted the young man who desperately wanted to do original research.

By 1892, Bose managed through his own efforts to carry on limited observation of electric waves. Two years later his perseverance began to show results. The government finally agreed to give him an annual grant of 2,500 rupees to defray his expenses as a research scholar. On November 30, 1894, Professor Bose, who taught twenty-six hours every week, dramatically announced that he had now "dedicated himself to pure knowledge."⁶⁰ In 1895, he gave his first scientific paper before the Asiatic Society of Bengal on the "Polarization of Electric Waves."

The paper is of enormous consequence, since it revealed the findings of his research on wireless transmission, establishing the later claim of his friends that he and not Marconi had laid the groundwork for the breakthrough in radio transmission. From one source, back in 1894, Bose "operated his transmitter in Dr. Roy's lecture room sending energy through closed doors guarded by Father LaFont across the next room to Professor Pedlar's classroom." Bose met Marconi in September 1896, and the two were in regular contact with one another.⁶¹

In 1896, the government of India dispatched Bose to England to give papers to learned societies. Bose availed himself of the opportunity to acquiring an M.A. from Cambridge and a D.S.C. from the University of London. Bose's papers on such topics as "On the Determination of the Indices of Electric Refraction" and "On the Determination of the Wave Length of Electric Radiation" won him support from the physicist Lord Kelvin of the Royal Society, who arranged for their publication in journals. Of immense importance to others was Bose's work on the detection of molecular change in matter under electrical stimulation. Such research led to the invention of highly sensitive electrical receivers used on ships and lighthouses for communication and transmission of danger signals at sea.

When, in 1900, Jessie Bose was selected by the Government of India to be a delegate to the International Scientific Congress in Paris, he had already achieved considerable success and fame. Because he was such an unusual phenomenon in the India of his time, Bose could easily have settled back comfortably and rested on his laurels. But as a this-worldly ascetic deeply committed to hard work and the need to achieve, Bose now entered a totally new field of research as if he were a young graduate student enthusiastically tackling his first experiment.

In Paris, and then in London, he developed a thesis about the similarity of the effect of electrical stimuli on inorganic and living substances, and like a graduate student he found it necessary to defend each idea against the weighty criticism of his senior colleagues.⁶² More disturbing to him was the anger of many physiologists who did not respond favorably to a trained physicist shifting into their area of speculation. Another problem was that Professor Bose had begun to address himself to the differences between living and inanimate beings, which to the scientific materialist was suggestive of Hindu mysticism.

According to those who knew Bose well, such as Rabindranath

Tagore, the scientist's new line of inquiry was as much prompted by Brahmo religious sentiment as by anything else.⁶³ Ramananda Chatterji, a fellow Brahmo and close friend of Bose's, has written that questions were now being directed at the nature of life itself. "How do lifeless atoms combine to form living matter?" Chatterji reported Bose as asking himself at the time. Another question was whether there was "anything really without even a primal form of life?" Chatterji concluded that such questions were asked by a "theistic Vedantist demonstrating religious conviction through inductive scientific methods."⁶⁴

Bose, on a prolonged leave of absence in Europe, did not return to Calcutta until October 1902. As much a technologist as a scientist, he went beyond inductive methods to prove that so-called inanimate objects such as plants responded as much to pleasure and pain as did animate creatures. He coined his current research interest "differential sensibilities,"⁶⁵ and he was determined to prove his contentions through delicate mechanical instruments designed for the purpose. In Calcutta, at his laboratory in Presidency College, the indefatigable Professor Bose labored to produce the technology necessary to demonstrate the divine spark in everything that exists on earth. It is reported that by the time of his death, Bose had invented fifty machines to carry out his purpose.⁶⁶ Some of his instruments could actually record the growth of plants, and one such, the balanced crescograph, was adopted by the American government for agricultural research. One of his machines, which he named the morograph, could record the "critical point of death of a plant."

In 1907, after bringing out a volume on comparative electrophysiology, Bose was sent by the Government of India once again on a scientific deputation to England and America. In February 1908, Bose stood before members of the United States Department of Agriculture in Washington and summed up his work on "The Growth Response of Plants." He also delivered lectures to science faculties in major American universities. He was less flamboyant than Vivekananda, but his return to India in July 1909 was every bit the return of a national hero. Even to the militant Tilak, for instance, Bose's moderate nationalist stance was overlooked in favor of the image of the national hero who had redeemed India's unfavorable image as scientifically backward in the family of nations.

Between 1909 and 1914, when Bose went on his fourth scientific deputation to England and America, he continued to work furi-

ously, inventing new machines and refining his theory.⁶⁷ One instrument, called the Resonant and Oscillating Recorder, actually induced nervous paralysis in a plant. Americans were extremely interested in these remarkably sensitive machines. Bose's books were adopted as physiology texts in some places, while his lectures formed the basis for new courses.

Bose retired from his professional duties at Presidency College shortly after returning to Calcutta. He was then fifty-seven years old, and in the eyes of his contemporaries, perhaps, ready at last to diminish the pace of diligent application he had set for himself. Patrick Geddes believed he was summing up Bose's achievement in "exploring the border region between physics and physiology . . . to find boundary lines vanishing and points of contact emerge between the reaches of the Living and Non-living."⁶⁸

But Jessie was hardly prepared to retire from his calling as a research scientist. In fact, the government awarded him a grant of 150,000 rupees to be paid annually for continuing his work. In 1917, when the British conferred knighthood upon him,⁶⁹ Jessie also built an institute named after himself at a cost of five lakhs of rupees in order to pursue the questions that suited him best.

His wife has reported that throughout his active life, which ended only with his death in November 1937, Jessie was a pious Brahma who began each day with a prayer and lived strictly according to the ethical precepts of his religion.⁷⁰ During the last years, he spent much time at his second home in Darjeeling, where he had established a branch of the Bose Institute.⁷¹ In Darjeeling, also, he formed a circle of Brahma compatriots who discussed intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual matters with him; the *adda* included Rabindranath, Nilratan Sarcar, Ramananda Chatterji, and Brajendranath Seal.⁷²

Bose's speeches and lectures throughout the 1920s stressed Brahma universalism and scientific unity. In 1924, while summing up the achievements of the institute since its inception, he said that the reason he had turned to bridging the gap between organic and inorganic life since 1900 was to realize in scientific terms the underlying unity of life.⁷³ Though a national figure and hero to many, Bose was hardly a nationalist. Unity and not diversity seemed to be his predominant theme, as in a lecture of 1925, when he spoke movingly of the unity of scientific achievement through the interdependence of peoples and cultures. His Brahma-inspired universalism was clearly expressed in the following:

Nothing could be more vulgar or more untrue than the ignorant assertion that the world owes its progress of knowledge to any one particular race. The whole world is interdependent and a constant stream of thought has throughout the ages enriched the common heritage of mankind. It is the realization of virtual dependence that has kept the mighty human fabric bound together and ensured the continuity and permanence of civilization. . . . Science is neither of the East nor of the West but international.⁷⁴

A somewhat different kind of response by another Brahmo scientist is that of Prafulla Chandra Ray. Ray was also an East Bengali, born in a Jessore village on August 2, 1861.⁷⁵ Like Bose, Ray had a Western-educated father who, back in 1846 while a student in Krishnagar College, sat at the feet of Ramtanu Lahiri, the famous Brahmo sympathizer. Moreover, P. C. Ray's father was an enlightened zamindar, owning an enormous library filled with Brahmo books and other progressive literature to which the boy was exposed at a tender age.

In 1870, after four days of travel by rail and steamer from Jessore, the nine-year-old Prafulla Chandra arrived in the metropolis of Calcutta for the first time. Like Bose and most sons of the privileged Westernized elite, Ray was sent to Hare's School for his English education.

He was fond of the Unitarians, whom he first read in his father's study back in Jessore. Like most of the better-known Sadharan progressives, he, too, revered Theodore Parker and for the same reason, that rational religion and social reform were inseparable. It was the acceptance of the Unitarian social gospel by Brahmos that attracted him to the community in the first place. And as he himself revealed, "it was the social aspect of the Brahmo Samaj that specially appealed to me."

As in the case of Jessie Bose, one looks for P. C. Ray's Brahmoism not in church activities as such, but in his professional calling. Ray's first exposure to his future career as a scientist came as a result of attending lectures in chemistry at Presidency College as an external student. In 1881, Ray successfully competed for a Gilchrist Scholarship, which paid his way to London University. When he reached London in 1882, he was warmly received by a Bengali delegation led by Jessie Bose. We might add that, as in the case of Jessie's mother, Prafulla Chandra's mother was also enlightened enough not to raise any objection to her son going abroad.

After six years at London and Edinburgh, P. C. Ray returned to Calcutta with a doctorate in inorganic chemistry. And like Bose years earlier, he encountered racism and other features of the British colonialist attitude. Indeed, Ray had no job at first, and only through Professor Bose's help could he find a temporary assistant professorship at Presidency College that paid 250 rupees a month. Later, as a Gandhian nationalist, he would recount with extreme bitterness the blatant forms of discrimination against Indians—mostly Bengalis—within the Educational Service. In 1888, for example, he recalled that within the Departments of Geology, Trigonometrical Survey, Meteorology, and the Forest Service-Telegraph, out of 211 top appointments, only three were held by Indians.⁷⁶ He would also relate that after seven years of service he received the same salary of 250 rupees, and that nine years later he was drawing a salary of 400 rupees per month.⁷⁷

In the next few years, Prafulla "threw himself heart and soul into Brahma activities," serving on various committees.⁷⁸ It was a difficult time for him both professionally, as he tried to achieve something as a scientist, and physically, as his health broke down. Chronic indigestion ultimately drove him out of Calcutta and Bengal to hilly Deoghar, in Bihar, where he met the old Brahma Rajnarian Bose, who then was enjoying his last years in retirement.

In the 1890s, Ray decided to extend his interest and zeal beyond the confines of the classroom into the world of business. He bought an acid factory in 1893 for 800 rupees, which he paid off in installments. There, with the cooperation of Brahma medical practitioners such as Nilratan Sirkar, he prepared prescriptions for druggists "from indigenous drugs whose active principles were extracted according to up-to-date scientific methods." After considerable ups and downs, including the death of his partner from the plague in 1898, P. C. Ray persevered until he was able to establish the successful firm known as the Bengal Chemical and Pharmaceutical Works. An inventive chemist, he prepared a new mercury compound in 1896, and as a devoted and gifted teacher, he left behind him a coterie of brilliant students. Ray's scholarship was seldom free of profit-making considerations or the political exigencies of nationalism. In 1900, for example, it was Ray who first used China clay to produce fine pottery, and the same Ray who displayed courage as a Gandhian against the protestations of his own bhadralok Brahma colleagues.

Intellectually, he left behind him a monumental *History of Chemistry in Ancient India*, which took fifteen years to complete and which

has not yet been surpassed for its careful scholarship and technical virtuosity. He dismissed the notion that he wrote the book to supply ammunition for national glorification, but said he intended to supplement the scholarship of "Orientalists who have worked on all departments of Hindus of old but for one branch, chemistry."

As someone deeply religious and openly antimaterialist, Ray was as much a Brahma scientist as Jessie Bose. Religion and science were not incompatible, but on the contrary, Ray looked upon them as two sides of the same philosophic quest for truth. Science is a discovery of operational laws and not the search for natural causation. In one article, Ray argued that there was "a limit of scientific research," and that men of science often forget that "the discovery of law is not an adequate solution to the problem of causes." "When all the motions of the heavenly bodies have been reduced to the dominion of gravitation," said he, "gravitation itself remains an insoluble problem." His contention was that

The mind of man which can track the course of the comet, and measure the velocity of light, has hitherto proved incapable of explaining the existence of the minutest insect or the growth of the most humble plant. . . . An impenetrable mystery lies at the root of every existing thing. . . . We know nothing or next to nothing of the relations of mind to matter, either in our own persons or in the world around us; and to suppose that the progress of natural science eliminates the conception of a first cause from creation by supplying natural explanations, is completely to ignore the sphere and limits to which it is confined.⁷⁹

One of the principal reasons why Brahma scientists could defend religion, and Brahma religious leaders could justify science, is that Brahma religion had become so free from superstition, so amenable to rational reform, and so intellectually appealing to liberal theologians that the more emotional Brahma enthusiasts began to complain that Brahma religion had everything—except the religious impulse. Before long, the Sadharan Brahma leader, Sivanath Sastri, himself no stranger to the rational spirit, felt the need to single out for attack the "philosophy cult" within the Samaj, which had reduced theism to dry rationalism and theology.⁸⁰

The "philosophy cult" of radical rationalists was one of the fruits of Rammohun's attack on the excesses and abuses of popular Hinduism. The worship of images, the absence of congregational worship, caste rigidity in the performance of Hindu rituals, and above all, erotic "indecent" coupled with primitive outbursts of medieval

Vaishnavism—all these aspects of popular religion were judged by Brahmos to be excrescences on the true Hindu faith (Brahmoism). If Brahmos found it hard to change Hindus, they found it comparatively easy to perform the necessary reformist surgery in the religious practices of their own community.

The more Hindus clung to their "primitive" ways, the more sophisticated Brahmo rationalists jeered at their backwardness. In 1883, P. C. Majumdar sailed around the world, everywhere faithfully recording his daily impressions in a diary which he then published upon his return to India. Probably no Asian up to that time had left such a sophisticated account of life in the West. Majumdar commented on a variety of observations, including urban life in Chicago, the female emancipation movement in America, "pluralist society" in America, and the "modernization" of Japan. On occasion his comparative assessments betrayed feelings about popular Hinduism. As for example, his attitude to American Negroes: "In the absence of intellectual culture they break forth into visions, trances, shouts, and violent bodily movements." In fact, they reminded him of the Vaishnavas in his own country: "It will be at once perceived how closely allied all this is to the Hindu Vaishnavas. The negroes have both the virtues and vices of the Vaishnavas. And for that reason they are very much looked down upon by the other more intellectually organized sects."⁸¹

One interesting letter written in 1910 by Rabindranath Tagore on the theme of the true Brahmoism is further evidence of this attitude. In an unusually derisive tone, Tagore defended the older rational and classical form of Brahmo worship against the emotional Brahmoism introduced into the movement by Bijoy Krishna Goswami. "Emotionalism is not Brahmo spiritualism," wrote Tagore. In a manner reminiscent of Protap Chandra Majumdar, Tagore said that he saw "little difference between the activities of African witchcraft and our own emotionalism." He refused to believe that Bijoy Krishna's neo-Vaishnavism ever led to any significant truth. In fact, the contrary may be true, since Goswami attained not "spiritual stability" but "madness." Rabindranath condemned Shaktism in the same breath with Vaishnavism: "The last goal of Shaktism and Vaishnavism is emotionalism. . . . We can achieve nothing lasting by drinking wine or playing on the *khol* or by smoking *ganja*. When we try to create an excitement in ourselves by disregarding the outer world completely, then we can imagine ourselves anything or anyone such as Krishna. To avoid the rightful protest of the outer world, we declare such religious outbursts as

meaningless. . . . Instead we should try our best to spiritualize the outer world."⁸²

In 1897, when Sivanath Sastri was elected Samaj president, he drew up a set of institutional reforms that he felt were necessary to recapture the old Brahmo religious inspiration. But the same congregation that voted him into office rejected his recommendations, forcing him to resign the presidency and leave Calcutta. The congregation invited him back in 1900 by making him president, but in 1903 internal ideological divisiveness and increased tension compelled Sastri to resign again.⁸³ The problem lay with the faction of radical rationalists who had banded together to form a neo-Vedantist circle. They had become most articulate and influential in Samaj affairs, and saw the problem of Brahmo religious identity in a totally different light from Sastri. The Vedantist intellectuals, who could be found in both the Sadharan and Keshubite branches of the Samaj, were largely professional philosophers holding university positions. P. K. Roy, Sitanath Tattvabhusan, Hiralal Haldar were the most famous within the Sadharan Samaj, whereas the three Sens—Benoyendra Nath Sen, Mohit Chandra Sen, and Promathalal Sen—were most conspicuous among the younger generation of New Dispensation philosophers.

As highly Westernized professional intellectuals, these men saw the hope of Brahmoism in theology, and worked to produce a distinctive Brahmo philosophy. Most of them were advocates of neo-Vedantism, which they equated with neo-Hegelianism as two contemporary philosophies that could be used effectively against the countervailing contemporary scientific materialism. As trained scholars and technical philosophers with an extremely rational bent of mind, they distrusted the religions of feeling manifested in neo-Vaishnava cults.

Perhaps the most distinguished of all was Dacca-born Prosanna Kumar Roy, who in the 1870s established for himself one of the most brilliant records of any Indian studying in a British university.⁸⁴ In 1876, he was the first Indian to receive a D.S.C. from London University. He had also been a student at the University of Edinburgh and the Royal School of Mines.

In 1877, he returned to India and entered the Government Educational Service. Despite the usual discrimination against Indians in the predominantly white European faculties of Indian universities, Roy advanced himself from assistant professor of philosophy at Patna College to full professor at Calcutta University. Roy was by reputation a superb teacher, and an active Brahmo who in scores of

lectures and seminars at City College, and at the Students Weekly Service, sought to convey to the young a high regard for rational religion, moral discipline, and intellectual achievement. Roy championed more "thought and reflection" among Brahmos, which could help arrest the tendency to emotionalize religion. He was an advocate of formal theological training for Brahmo ministers, which would "induce habits of deeper and more scientific metaphysical study," "join the older and younger Brahmos through intellectual pursuits," and lead to "an understanding of common interest."⁸⁵

A Brahmo theology was one of those persisting ideas among many well-intentioned Brahmo leaders that had never gained full acceptance among the congregation, nor was ever institutionalized. In 1859, Debendranath Tagore and Keshub Sen had started a theological school, but without reconciling among themselves and their followers the conflict between individual religious experience and systematic knowledge. The scheme thus collapsed. Writing about the incident in 1907, the Brahmo neo-Vedantist, Benoyendra Nath Sen, said that had the theological school been continued with the full support of all, the schism of 1866 would surely have been avoided.⁸⁶ Keshub had made two further attempts at founding a theological school—one in 1867 and the other in 1871—but both failed for ostensibly the same reason as the earlier failure.⁸⁷

By 1876, Keshub and his ascetic followers had retreated almost full circle to an antitheological position, preferring instead to construct a serious study of comparative religion in the atmosphere of ecstatic devotion and deep religious conviction. Gour Govinda Ray, who was Keshub's most outstanding intellectual luminary in the circle of ascetics, candidly disavowed theology as greatly inferior to religious inspiration.⁸⁸ But to a neo-Vedantist like P. K. Roy, recently returned from England, the contrary was true. In a lecture on "Philosophy and Theology," Roy argued that no major religion had ever been sustained without a systematic theology. Theology was the philosophy of a religion which gave the community a sense of awareness and the faith a durable structure, enabling it to survive the vicissitudes of emotional religiosity.⁸⁹

Charles Dall, the American Unitarian missionary who was a member of Keshub's Brahmo Samaj in the 1870s, also argued that a theological school was urgently needed to "avert emotionalism and mysticism among Brahmos." "Don't kill reason to save faith," he warned Keshub in 1877, "because a serious religion requires

that its preachers and missionaries be exposed to sound and effective thought by hard, systematized and protracted study."⁹⁰

Of all the proponents of the theological position among the Sadharans after the schism of 1878, none was more effective a spokesman and prolific a writer than Sitanath Tattvabhusan. Born in a Sylhet village in 1856, Sitanath later endured persecution and loss of ancestral property when he chose to become a Brahmo. Arriving in Calcutta for the first time in 1871, he immediately joined the other young students who sat at the feet of Keshub Sen in the Brahmo Niketan. It was in 1873 as a scholarship student in Keshub's theological institute that he first developed an interest in the philosophy of religion.

He recorded in his diary that despite lack of formal training in philosophy before joining the theological institute, "his mind was irresistibly drawn towards philosophy . . . having become inwardly entangled in the meshes of reasonings and argumentation." It was contact with the "saintly Keshub" that stirred up this "abiding inspiration." When Keshub's school failed, Sitanath went to the General Assembly's Institution in 1875.

By 1879, when Ananda Mohun Bose gave him a teaching job at the City School, Tattvabhusan had already formed what he called a "philosophical position." He had transcended his intellectual struggle between theism and skepticism by placing the Brahmo faith squarely in the tradition of the Upanishads and the Vedanta. In his diary, he wrote that the Brahmo Samaj should now make a "systematic study of the scriptures," which are philosophically so "similar to neo-Hegelianism."

In 1883, when the Sadharan Samaj established an Institute of Theology, Tattvabhusan was chosen its secretary. He recalled later that only his own Herculean efforts kept the school alive as long as twelve years. Lectures, even among other philosophers, reflected individual interpretations, whereas the attempt to construct a systematic philosophy or theology of Brahmoism failed completely. Though the faculty was distinguished, a good library was accessible, and the school never lacked financial support, a consensus was never reached as to what Brahmoism was.

This did not prevent Sitanath from carrying on the task by himself. During these years, he labored strenuously to transform Brahmoism into a fixed and formal theology. He reviewed the writings of previous Brahmo thinkers, but however much he admired their "high ideals of spiritual life," he could find "no knowledge in them properly so-called." Gradually, it dawned upon him why "so many

well educated people in my country did not join the Brahmo Samaj": Brahmos "ignored philosophy" and preferred the dogmatic assertions resulting from "divine inspiration and dispensations." The only solution to the problem was to "build religious faith on philosophy."⁹¹

From 1888, when he wrote his *Brahmo Jijnasa* (Inquiry into the Philosophic Basis of Theism), to 1909, with the appearance of his *Philosophy of Brahmoism*, Sitanath worked out his theological system for the Brahmo religion. Natural religion or intuition, which had characterized national Brahmoism since 1850, Sitanath repudiated for its useless spontaneity, which "amounts to saying I believe because I believe." Nor did the argument from self-evidence appeal to him, because "what seems self-evident to you does not appear so to me." For Tattvabhusan, the key to the "metaphysics of theism is self-knowledge," and the most perfect philosophy for spiritual progress toward self-knowledge was the Vedanta, with its foundation in the profound Upanishads.

The Vedanta allowed for individual separation and realization, and at the same time it demonstrated the need for an individual to merge into a larger whole, unity, or Divine Nature. Thus, it reconciled the apparent dichotomies between monism and dualism, polytheism and monotheism. "You must see that the consciousness of God," wrote Tattvabhusan, "reveals your difference from as well as your unity with Him." He added: "With all your unity with the Light Eternal, you are unfortunately a small spark of it and that your relation with the Father of spirits is not merely a natural relation, but a moral one and spiritual one, making it possible for you to feel the sweetness and tenderest emotion for Him."

Brahmo morality ought to be based on Vedantic notions of the hierarchy of unities. Tattvabhusan argued that the more narrow the moral identity—as, for example, the individual to himself—the lower "the stage of ethical development." Ethical development is an idea of expanding conscience and consciousness. The individual develops by extending his morality to include "domestic life," tribe and nation, humanity (universal brotherhood), and beyond humanity the "Universal Father or Universal Source of which humanity itself is a partial manifestation." This concept was, according to Tattvabhusan, the basis of the Upanishads, which he quoted from freely to prove that this scriptural source of the Hindus contained as sublime a moral code as did the scripture of any other major religion.⁹²

In 1912, Tattvabhusan attacked Vaishnavism quite openly, to the

point of arguing that "Krishna, the great idol of the country—idol alike of the ignorant and the learned must be broken." It is "the greatest obstacle to the promotion of the true religion." He was convinced that "no intellectual light is to be expected from Indian philosophical waters of medieval times." Elsewhere, he concluded about Vaishnavism that "far from teaching anything beyond what the Upanishads teach, it has led the natural religion in a quite wrong direction." What were the shortcomings of the Vaishnava faith? According to Tattvabhusan, "it reveals in imagination and makes it, instead of insight into the divine nature, the basis of religion. When it shakes off the imaginative drapery . . . it has nothing better to give than monism pure and simple. It does not see the philosophical basis of *bhakti*—the true nature of God. Its *bhakti* is based primarily on imagination and therefore never reaches any notable depth . . . the most repulsive feature of this religion—very prominent in the *Bhagavata*—is its sensuality and disregard of ethical distinctions."

This anti-Vaishnavism was written by one born and brought up in a Vaishnava family who was carefully instructed in its tenets by an uncle, Debiprasad Datta, a pious Vaishnava of the Ramayat sect. When Sitanath abandoned the Krishna-Chaitanya faith, he evidently remained consistently unshaken in his Vedantic outlook until his death. To the end, he believed that Debendranath Tagore, "by discarding Vedantism . . . which in the primary sense is what I understand and accept as Brahmoism . . . had made a great mistake . . . one which had done and was doing a good deal of harm to the Brahmo Samaj." That damage, which Tattvabhusan had dedicated his intellectual and spiritual life to undoing, was that "it had led to a neglect on the part of Brahmos of our ancient scriptures, and was thus discouraging scholarship and causing spiritual sterility. It has also created an unnecessary gulf between the old and the new society, leading many Brahmos to call themselves non-Hindus and to cease from taking a just pride in the glorious literary and spiritual achievements of the Hindu race."⁹³

The bitterness of failure and frustration which underlies much of Tattvabhusan's autobiography seems to suggest a certain prevailing resistance, by Brahmos to the intellectualization of their faith and the crystallization of its main ideas into a commonly held theology. Back in 1896, Tattvabhusan had been elated when the foreign Unitarian, Sunderlund, visited Calcutta and recommended to Brahmos that they seriously contemplate theological training. Encountering resistance, Sunderlund offered the Brahmos schol-

arships for qualified young men to study systematic theology in the Unitarian colleges of England and America.⁹⁴ Several Brahmos from all over India did receive scholarships and were trained abroad. Enough support for theology was generated by members of the three Brahma groups in Calcutta to prompt the establishment of a theological seminary in 1907, but once more the project failed.⁹⁵

Tattvabhusan's crusade made him the target of abuse from religiously inspired Brahmos, who began to accuse him of representing "the rise of scholasticism in the Brahma Samaj." According to one such writer, Tattvabhusan would have the Samaj give up "justification of faith, right of private judgment, priesthood of every believer, and all other achievements of the reformation." "Formalism will never surpass spontaneity of the Spirit," the writer argued, but will only lead to "scholasticism among a few." Sitanath was singled out as the philosopher wishing to replace "our regeneration of faith with the solid rock of logic." Through him and those like him, "dry intellectualism" has crept into the Brahma ideal.⁹⁶

Much of this criticism seems to have come from the New Dispensation branch of Brahmos, who were quick to point out that sterile intellectualism differed little from secular humanism. But, in fact, the younger generation of Keshubite Brahmos did support Tattvabhusan because they too saw the need for a Brahma theology. Though the Keshubite philosophers were more inclined to use theology to find a compromise between "faith and reason," their approach to the problem was philosophic, and the end they sought was not that different from Tattvabhusan's. Benoyendra Nath Sen, in particular, who was a much younger man than Tattvabhusan, struggled throughout his comparatively short life to wed the Brahma's passion for inspiration with the obvious need to structure Brahma thought into a distinct theology.

Born in Calcutta in 1868, Benoyendra Nath received an excellent Western education under the encouragement of his enlightened Brahma father, who had not only been initiated into Brahmaism by Debendranath Tagore, but had married Keshub Sen's sister. Benoyendra was a brilliant student who stood first in his class throughout his educational career. His English was superb, and he soon started mastering the intricacies of European philosophy.

Sen received his B.A. from the General Assembly's Institution in 1888, with honors in English and philosophy. In 1890, he received

his M.A. from Presidency College, and immediately began his teaching career at Behrampur College under the tutelage of the famous Brahmo philosopher, Brajendranath Seal. In 1893, he moved to Presidency College as a lecturer in history, establishing there a favorable reputation for himself as a devoted teacher.⁹⁷

In the Brahmo Samaj, Benoyendra Nath allied himself with the two other famous New Dispensation philosophers, Promothalal Sen⁹⁸ and Mohit Chandra Sen,⁹⁹ to update the church's organization and doctrine as well as to promote unity with the other Brahmo groups. Benoyendra Nath's generation saw no conflict between science and reason on the one side and faith on the other. Religion had to be purified through reason to rid it of emotional excess, superstition, and dogma. On the other hand, the basis of Brahmoism was its unyielding faith in the divine nature of reality, against the opposite position held by fanatic advocates of "godless materialism." The answer lay in a humanism framed in a religious context. Benoyendra Nath's position was therefore somewhere between Sivanath Sastri's and Sitanath Tattvabhusan's.

What separated Sen from Sastri was his professional philosopher's orientation; and from Tattvabhusan, his reluctance to reduce the rich diversity of the Hindu philosophic tradition to a single reverence for the Vedanta. In 1905, Benoyendra Nath went to Geneva to attend a world conference of liberal religions organized by the Unitarians. His paper dealt with the problem of religion in modern India. While arguing the need for more theology, he warned against "dry rationalism" that would stifle the spiritual impulse. Ever since 1895, he had wrestled with the problem of how not to divorce the abstract idea and symbol from the spiritual experience. Could the Vedantic or any other philosophic system capture the meaning of a vital spiritual act? According to Benoyendra Nath, "symbols are valuable as representing a spiritual fact." The danger of dry intellectualism was real when "facts became simply facts of the intellect without being also facts of the heart." The only justification for theory in religion was: "the presence of some exalted emotion, some deep, mystic, spiritual experience which transcends the ordinary methods of embodiment in simple prose."¹⁰⁰

Rather than reject the Vedanta, Benoyendra Nath chose it as the most perfect Indian embodiment of the intellectual ideal. His lectures on the Vedanta that he gave in 1900 appeared to support Tattvabhusan on the validity of the Upanishadic tradition.¹⁰¹ Sen's argument was that the Vedanta represented the very highest "intel-

lectual ideal" because it was such a successful attempt to synthesize the central truths of the Upanishads. But without the essential religious experience, even the Vedanta was simply a dry and sterile intellectual exercise. Brahmoism was not a philosophy or theology but a faith that conformed to reason—a rational faith.

Benoyendra Nath's attempt to heal the breach between religious enthusiasm and philosophy in order to preserve a common Brahma identity did not succeed. Perhaps it would have been different had Benoyendra Nath lived longer—he died in 1913 at the age of forty-five. Ultimately, neither the Vedanta nor a rational faith could sustain itself against the inroads of secular humanism. Like Unitarianism in the twentieth century, Brahmoism lost theism and then its rational faith.