

Second Annual Christmas Lecture 2022

Saturday, December 17, 2022

By

Rev. Fr. Dr. J. Felix Raj, S.J.



PARASMANI

Centre for Research & Social Outreach

Ratan Pally, Santiniketan
(A Unit of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata)

Second Annual Christmas Lecture 2022

Date: 17.12.2022

Venue:

**Parasmani
Centre for Research and Social Outreach
Ratan Pally, Santiniketan**

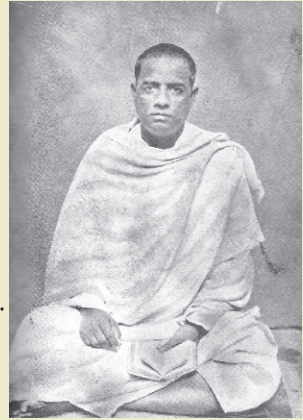
Programme Schedule

- 11 : 00 a.m.** : Registration of invitees
- 11 : 30 a.m.** : MC welcomes the guests
- 11 : 35 a.m.** : Inauguration : Vande Satchidanandam
and lighting of the lamp
- 11 : 40 a.m.** : Talk on ‘Brahmabandhab Upadhyay
– A prophet for all seasons’
by Rev. Fr. Dr. J. Felix Raj, S.J.
- 12 : 20 p.m.** : Q/A Session
- 12 : 30 p.m.** : Vote of Thanks
- 12 : 40 p.m.** : Rabindra Sangeet
- 12 : 45 p.m.** : Lunch

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) A Prophet for all seasons

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay

- Theologian, Editor, Revolutionary and Nationalist Leader.
- Born : February 11, 1861.
- Original Name: Bhawani Charan.
- Died : October 27, 1907.
- He was baptized a Roman Catholic in 1891.
- He called himself a 'Hindu Catholic.'
- Editor of Sandhya newspaper.
- He was arrested on September 10, 1907 on a charge of sedition.
- He was only 46 years old.
- Brahmabandhab Upadhyay was contemporary to Animananda and friend of Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda.
- He along with Animananda started the school in Bolpur in 1901 on the request of Rabindranath Tagore.



Rabindranath Tagore described him as a “Roman Catholic ascetic yet a Vedantin - spirited, fearless, self-denying, learned and uncommonly influential”. Christian and Hindu, holy man and savant, prophet and revolutionary, Upadhyay was a paradoxical figure who played a key role in the struggle for independence, along-side Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghose and others.

His fiery convictions and passionate rhetoric won him many admirers but branded him a dangerous revolutionary in the eyes of the British colonial establishment. He was an ardent nationalist, who died while under arrest for sedition on October 27, 1907. His life can be divided into

five periods: 'Early Life' (1861-1881), As a 'Hindu Reformer' (1881-1890), As a 'Christian Witness' (1891-1901), 'Mission abroad' (1902-1903) and As a 'Nationalist' (1904-1907).

If Subhas Chandra Bose is considered a forgotten hero, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay is a forgotten prophet of India's search for nationhood and modernity. Born a Brahmin, Bhawani Charan, as his original name was, typified the new Bengali middle-class: educated, upper caste and Hindu. Yet his conversion to Roman Catholicism and his revolutionary ideas for merging Christian doctrines with an Indian idiom marked him out as exceptional.

Brahmabandhab was a fiery patriot from an early age. Under the influence of Keshab Chandra Sen, he joined the Brahma Samaj and went to Sindh to preach his new faith. But, in Sind, he met Reverend Kali Charan Banerji under whose influence he was converted to Christian faith. On February 26, 1891, Rev. Heaton, a clergyman of the Church of England, baptized him. But soon he decided not to attend the Church services on the ground that he did not belong to the Church of England.

In September 1891, he was baptized by Jesuit Fr. A. Bruder, S.J. at Karachi and became a Catholic. His conversion was followed by a number of others and so created a storm in Sindh. He chose St. Theophilus as his patron saint, whom he called Brahmabandhab. Theophilus is a Greek word meaning lover of God and Brahmabandhab means the same.

He took this name because St. Theophilus is famous in ecclesiastical history as the first to use the word Trinity and Bhawani Charan resolved to be the first in India to sing the praises of the same Triune Sachchidanandam in the sacred tongues of the Rishis. His Catholic faith did not denationalize him in the least; rather it brought him into closer and closer relationship with Hindu Samaj day by day.

Influenced by Swami Vivekananda, he retraced his steps back to Hinduism. To propagate Vedanta in the West and to enlist the sympathies

of European savants in his cause, he travelled to Europe in 1902. He gave a series of lectures on Hinduism there. He wanted to win over the authorities of the Church to his side. “If Europe could be made to pay homage to Hindu thought, why not India to Christian message?”

He visited Rome, made his confession, knelt down at the shrine of St. Peter and St. Paul, and sent up a fervent prayer for India. In England, he met Cardinal Vaughan and narrated to him the tale of the pent-up sorrows of years. The Cardinal was touched and gave him permission to ventilate his ideas in the Tablet magazine. Brahmabandhab had carried a letter of recommendation from His Grace, the Archbishop of Calcutta which read: “We declare that Brahmabandhab (Theophilus) Upadhyay, a Brahmin of Calcutta is a true Catholic, of good character, burning with zeal to preach the Good News....”

He started a monthly Catholic journal, ‘Sophia’ in 1896 and dedicated it to the honour of St. Francis Xavier. He wanted it to be an honored instrument in carrying out his glorious work for the freedom and welfare of India.

“Brahmabandhav Upadhyay was the first national leader to demand total independence for India from the British. He was also the first to envisage a union between Hindustan and Christianity.” — **K.P. Aleaz**

The beginning of Santiniketan (Today’s Visva-Bharati University):

Brahmabandhav Upadhyay and his friend, Animananda founded the Sarasvata-Ayatana in the tradition of the Vedas in Simla Street (Swami Vivekananda’s birthplace), Calcutta in 1900. Their idea was to revive the ancient sacred tradition of ‘acharya’ and ‘shisya’. There were twelve boys with Animananda as their teacher. The boys sat on mats. They paid no fees; the teacher received no salary; knowledge could not be purchased.

One morning, Rabindranath Tagore, who was then hailed by Upadhyay as the ‘Visva Kavi’ (World Poet of Bengal) visited the new

school and Upadhyay himself received the honoured guest. Tagore was highly pleased with the school. Later Upadhyay visited Santiniketan on Tagore's invitation. The vast fields, huge Sal trees and the quiet abode captivated him.

With Tagore's request, Upadhyay who called Tagore the GURUDEV, decided to shift the school at Simla Street to Santiniketan to open an ashram with Animananda as the teacher. Tagore, known as Rabi Babu, himself received Animananda and his twelve boys at Bolpur in December 1901. Tagore's two sons, Rathindranath and Samindranath joined the other boys.

Animananda did not like the idea of going to Bolpur, as that would mean missing his daily Eucharist Mass, which he prized above the whole world. But on Upadhyay's insistence, he agreed on condition that he would be allowed to come down to Calcutta, every Sunday, to attend Holy Mass. The generous welcome of the poet, and the free atmosphere which he created, removed all hesitancy and Animananda put his heart and soul into the work.

That was the beginnings of today's Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. This wonderful collaboration between a poet and a philosopher was not meant to last. Brahmabandhab's political sentiments proved too strong to allow him to remain for long. His and Animananda's connection with the school at Santiniketan ceased about a year after its starting.

Upadhyay's contribution:

The main contribution of Upadhyay to Indian Christian theology lies in his explanation of the Christian doctrine of trinity as Saccidananda and the doctrine of creation as Maya. God the Father is the Sat – Being, the Son is the Cit – Consciousness or intelligence, and the Spirit is Ananda – Joy, fulfillment. This vision comes through a beautiful Sanskrit hymn, Vande Saccidanandam Vande (“I bow to Him who is Being, Consciousness and Bliss...”), which he composed and is today widely sung in Christian Churches all over India.

Upadhyay's Swadeshi was altogether different. His political sentiments proved too strong to allow him to remain in pure educational work. He was the first man in our political history to suggest complete independence for India. He wrote in the Sandhya;

"I swear by the moon and the sun that I have heard in my heart this message of freedom. As the tree in winter gets a new life with the touch of the breeze of spring, as you feel joy at the return of love, as the heart of a hero dances to the call of the trumpet of war, so a feeling has throbbed in my heart. But Independence will mean both freedom from our slave complex and freedom from gerrymandering politics."

"Our minds have been conquered. We have become slaves. The faith in our own culture and the love for things Indian are gone. India will reach Swaraj the day she will again have a faith in herself. Ramakrishna had gone in that line. So did Bankim. So did Vivekananda. The whole mass of our people must now be made to appreciate things Indian and to return to our ancient way. That is Svadesh as opposed to Bidesh."

That is why he deprecated the begging attitude of Indians and proposed his Swaraj-Garh: "I see the fort of Swaraj built in various places. There shall be no connection with foreigner. These forts will be purified by the incense of sacrifice, resounding with cry of victory, filled to overflowing with corn and grain."

"Vivekananda lit the sacrificial flame or revolution, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay in fuelling it, safeguarded and fanned the sacrifice."

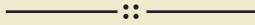
– **Julius Lipner**

Writing a historically and theologically sensitive biography of Upadhyay, Julius Lipner gives us a new perspective on the typical coordinates of Bengali cultural identity. Lipner demonstrates forcefully that the issues with which Brahmabandhab grappled are still vitally important, and merit sustained study.

To quote Lipner: "Upadhyay is one of the enigmas of modern India, and a potential embarrassment to those who invoke him. A religious reformer

and revivalist, a self-confessed Catholic-Hindu, political activist and social commentator, he is also difficult to categorize neatly. Perhaps for these reasons there has been a tendency to relegate him to the shadows of modern Indian history or to interpret him in procrustean fashion.”

I suppose, a prophet like Brahmabandhab is less known because of his Christian leanings. He must be known and studied by all. Lipner’s work, *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay: The life and Thought of a Revolutionary*, is a rich and worthy contribution in this respect.



Brahmabandhab Upadhyay Collection at The Goethals Indian Library and Research Society, Kolkata :

1. Short Treatise on the Existence of God by B C Banerji (Upadhyay Brahmabandhav), Karachi, 1893. (32H/2).
2. Transcription of an Autographed letter of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay to Fr. Billard and Lacombe, dated 10 Feb. 1898. (Xerox copy only).
3. Sophia, A monthly Catholic Journal, June-Dec 1900 (2 copies-bound), Jan-Dec 1894 (Vol. I), Jan-Oct 1895 (Vol II), Vol. II-IV (1895-1897), (2 bound copies) Vol. 5 (1898), Vol. 6 (1899)
4. The Twentieth Century Vol. I (Jan-Dec. 1901). Editors: N Gupta and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay.
5. Swami Upadhyay Brahmabandhav: A story of His life by B. Animananda. 1908? (6B/124).
6. Infinite and the Finite by Upadhyaya Brahmabandhav: 3rd Edition 1918.
7. An Indian Ashram: The Boys’ Own Home (Founded by Animananda) 1924. (38DB/114).
8. An Indian Nation Builder by Animananda (A biography on Brahmabandhav Upadhyay) revised in 1946. Rewachand Gyanchand (Animananda) was the pupil of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay. (6B/123).
9. Jote. Vol. 51. January 1947. No. 1.
10. The Blade: Life and work of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay by B. Animananda. Roy & Son. Calcutta. 1949 [511-UB-731a(A)] 2 copies.
11. ‘Sanibarar Chiti’ (1961-64). 3 articles about Brahmabandhav Upadhyay in Bengali.
12. A Teacher of Genius B Animananda by P Turmes, SJ (2 copies). (6B/130). Xavier Publications. Calcutta. 1963.
13. Religious Views of Swami Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya: The first Indian Christian Theologian by Anil Mitra, SJ. 1970. St. Mary’s College, Darjeeling. (6B/407)
14. Time line of the life of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (encapsulated) by Timothy C Tennent. University of Edinburgh. 1997.

15. Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, *The life and thought of a Revolutionary* by Julius J Lipner, OUP. Delhi. 1999 (6B/306)
16. *Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay* by Julius Lipner & George Gispert-Sauch, United Theological College, Bangalore. 2002. 2 volumes. 30B/257(1), (2)
17. *Upadhyaya Brahmabandhav: The political years* by C Fonseca, SJ (6B/191).
18. Panchadasi – text, translation, commentary by B. Upadhyay.
19. *Samaj* (Bengali) by Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. (6B/122).
20. *Upadhyay Brahmabandhav- Miscellaneous articles by and on Upadhyay Brahmabandhav*, in 5 volumes Titled *Varia* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Languages: English & Bengali.
21. Six large Folios (Preserved-Laminated and Encapsulated documents) containing articles, correspondence and writings by and pertaining to Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and Animananda.
22. Aleaz, K.P. (1979), "*The Theological Writings of Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya Re-Examined*" (PDF), *Indian Journal of Theology*, April–June
23. Lipner, Julius. "A Case-Study in 'Hindu Catholicism': Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (1861-1907)." *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 72 (1988) 33-54. [Amaladass and Young 374.]
24. *Lipner, Julius (1999), Brahmabandhab Upadhyay: The Life and Thought of a Revolutionary, Delhi: Oxford University Press India*
25. *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay* (ed. by J.Lipner and G.Gispert-Sauch), 2 vols., Bangalore, 1991 and 2001.
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29. Lipner, Julius J. "Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907) and his Significance for our Times." *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 71/3 (2007) 165-184.
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31. Fernando, Leonard. "Brahmabandhab Upadhyay and Sind Catholic Community." *Studies on the History of the Church in India: Festschrift for Dr Joseph Thekkedathu, SDB*. Ed. Joy Kaipan. Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 2011. 184-202.
32. De Smet, Richard. "Upadhyay's Interpretation of Sankara." *Understanding Sankara: Essays by Richard De Smet*. Ed. Ivo Coelho. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2013. 454-462.

A Sanskrit Hymn by Brahmabandhab Upadhyay

Vande Vande Sachidanandam
Vande Sachidanandam, Vande Vande...
Bhogi laanchita yogi vaanchita
Charamapadam, charamapadam
Vande Vande Sachidanandam
Vande Sachidanandam

Parama puraana paraatparam, Parama...
Purnam akhanda paraavaram, Purnam...
Trisanga shuddham asanga buddham, Trisanga.
Durvedam
Vande, Vande, Vande

Pitra savitra paramesham ajam, Pitra...
Bhava vraksha bijam abijam, Bhava...
Akhila kaaranam ikshana shrijana, Akhila...
Govindam
Vande, Vande, Vande

Anahata shabdam anantam, anantam, Anahata...
Prasuta purusha sumahaantam, Prasuta...
Pitra swarupa chinmaya rupa, Pitra...
The Substance of the Father, Form of knowledge
Sumukundam
Vande, Vande, Vande

Sachidor melana saranam, saranam...
Shubha-shvasit-aa-nanda-ghanam, Shubha
Paavana-javana-vaanivadana, Paavana...
Jeevanandam
Vande, Vande, Vande

(English version)

Worship, worship (the One who is)
Being, Knowledge, Bliss
whom the worldly dismiss but the ascetics yearn for
The highest goal, the highest goal
Worship, worship (the One who is)
Being, Knowledge, Bliss

The Supreme, Ancient, Higher than the high
(Who is) Fullness, Wholeness, Beyond, yet nigh
The Pure Threesome, Unrelated Wisdom
Hard to comprehend
Worship, worship, worship

The Father, Impeller, Highest Lord
The Unborn tree of being, Seedless Seed
The universal Cause, beholding creation,
Tending over it
Worship, worship, worship

The Word unsounded, Infinite,
The Begotten Person, supremely great,
The Substance of the Father, Form of knowledge
Our Saving Friend
Worship, worship, worship

The One who from the union of Being and knowledge does
flow, does flow
The Sacred Breath and Cloud of Joy,
cleanses, moves swiftly, speaks the message
Life intends
Worship, worship, worship



A short profile of Father Felix Raj

Dr. John Felix Raj, SJ (born 1954) is a Jesuit priest in Kolkata. A Professor of Economics with a dynamic personality, he is the founder Vice-Chancellor of St. Xavier's University, Kolkata (SXUK). He was the Rector and Principal of St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata (SXC).

Besides his educational initiatives, Dr. Raj was also the Founder-President of SNEGAM, an NGO that provides quality education to underprivileged children and promotes the education of female children. His initiative, 'College to Village and Village to College' at SXC and SXUK is a novel effort in transformative education.

His selfless work in the field of social development through education has made him the recipient of fifteen awards including Banga Bibhushan and Shiksharatna from the Government of West Bengal. A prolific writer, Fr. Raj has authored and co-authored eleven books. He has also published numerous papers and articles in journals and newspapers.