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Acharya Brajendra Nath Seal's Insights on Spiritualism and Humanity: Exposition and Reality

ABSTRACT: The proposed paper is intended to highlight A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal and his philosophy of life in particular. Fact remains that he was a man of great mind and not only got in touch with different branches of knowledge, but also analyzed human mind as well as the universe as a whole. He wrote a good number of articles and a few books; and whatever may be the number of his works, it remains to say that he was really a typically representative Indian. At a moment whenever we are concerned very much about the intellectual anarchy, the thoughts of A.B.N. Seal may open a new dimension as to the relief we may seek for at this moment. He developed his "Jivan Darshan", stood for "Manav Samghati" (Unity of Mankind), and above all professed humanism and spirituality from his scientific insight. A.B.N. Seal was attracted to the personalities like Raja Rammohan Roy, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Keshav Chandra Sen, and so on; and at the long last, he talked about Universal Religion and Universal Man. He has rightly been called a child of Bengal Renaissance and this is justified when he not only stood for human solidarity, but also could declare "I am a man (hence) nothing human is alien to me. I lived in the spirit of these sayings". The entire paper is based on some of the original documents and contemporary writings and observations about this man and very likely, it may strike the mind of some people who are not alien to the ideas of spiritualism and humanity.

KEY WORDS: Philosophical Mind; Intuitive Power; Universal Humanism; Man in the Universe and Universe in Man; Religio-Spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

To discuss or to analyze philosophical ideas, and also to recount the great services of a personality like Acharya Brajendra Nath Seal (henceforth A.B.N. Seal), causes as a difficult task and particularly in the academic world, who are by and large much more acquainted

with the ideas and thoughts of the stalwart. To be honest, I do not belong to the academic discipline of A.B.N. Seal, but I definitely believe that whenever I am to deal with his works and ideas, reflected in various academic spheres, I am in many ways paying my homage and respect to the A.B.N. Seal.

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We know that A.B.N. Seal was born on 3rd September 1864, at Rammohan Shah Lane, Kolkata, India; and left this world on 3rd December 1938 (Gupta, Gupta & Gupta, 2016). Obviously, the year 2014 happened to be the 150th birth anniversary of this great personality and from different corners of India, many academicians and institutions paid their tributes in a notable manner. I do believe that A.B.N. Seal College, Cooch Behar once known as Victoria College, where he served as a Principal from 1896 to 1913, had remembered the man as per expectation.

Examples of such tributes and homages are not uncommon and rare; and when the date of his death occurred, a person none other than S. Radhakrishnan wrote in *The Statesman*, dated 4th December 1938, as follows:

He was great as an educationist, philosopher, and political theorist, but the more impressive point was his *simplicity* of disposition and largeness of heart [...] this is not the moment to recount the great services, which Sir Brajendra Nath Seal has rendered to this country and its culture. He was known in his time as the greatest servant. His prodigious learning in many branches of knowledge was the admiration and despair of lesser minds. Generations of students in Bengal sat at his feet and received his inspiration. As Principal of the Cooch Behar (Victoria) College as the first George V Professor of this University (Calcutta) [...] at a time, when the post graduate courses were being shaped in Calcutta, as the Vice Chancellor of the University of Mysore, he rendered in estimatable services to the cause of education (cited in Hawley, n.y.).

Incidentally, we may thereby recall here another statement by Khan Bahadur M. Azizul Haque, Speaker of the then Bengal Legislative Assembly and Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University, who on the very day, dated 4th December 1938, reported to *The Statesman* in the words:

The death of Sir Brajendra Nath Seal removes from the field of Indian philosophy a bright star of imperishable lustre. A typically representative Indian, an outstanding personality in the intellectual world, a man of international reputation, he was closely associated with all aspects of our educational and cultural works. At a time when India is almost at a phase of intellectual anarchy, the best way of paying our tributes to the memory of this great scholar and a

great man would be for the youth of this country to follow his inspiration and to contribute their quota to the intellectual regeneration of this country (cited in Sarkar, 2014).

These two quotations clearly show the intensity of homage paid to this noteworthy intellectual of our country and particularly the phrases or words used like “educationist”, along with simplicity of disposition and “largeness of heart” by Radhakrishnan and a “typically representative Indian”, and outstanding personality in the intellectual world and his “death at a time when India is almost at a phase of intellectual anarchy”, etc. by Sir Azizul Haque are worth our attention. Because these are some extraordinary terms and recognition by such personalities may draw anybody’s consciousness. In the year 1938, if there was intellectual anarchy, it is easy to understand the loss of the nation with the death of Sir A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal.

ABOUT A.B.N. SEAL

Merit and Intellectual Signs. From his childhood, A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal was inadvertently a meritorious student. Most of us know that when his primary education was over, he got admitted in the Assemblies Institutions (at present Scottish Church College) in the school section. It is said that he was inclined towards Mathematics rather than other subjects in the syllabi. Without going into the details of his academic career, it is apt to say that he completed his Ph.D. in 1910, and the title of his thesis was “Mechanical, Physical, and Chemical Theories of Ancient Hindus”.

Interestingly, this Ph.D. thesis was published with the title *The Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus* (1915). This work may be considered as an extraordinary contribution in the world of knowledge. In the words of M.M. Chakraborty, the writer of the Preface for the first *Sansad* edition, July 2001, said as follows:

Seal brings to the Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus actually grew out of chapter contributed by Seal to Ray’s (P.C. Ray) Second Volume of (*History of Hindu Chemistry*); when Ray urged Seal to draw the attention of European historians

of Chemistry who have their eyes fixed to Greece as the perennial fountain of knowledge (Chakraborty, 2001:v).

Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray also writes as follows:

At this time (1908), I began to feel that I was under an obligation to the public to present to it the promised second volume of my *History of Hindu Chemistry*. Accordingly, I resumed my study of some new MSS of Sanskrit alchemical *Tantras*, which had come to my possession. I was also fortunate in securing the co-operation of Dr. Brajendranath Seal, whose encyclopaedic knowledge was equal to the task of contributing the section devoted to the atomic theory of the ancient Hindus.¹

It is not quite difficult to make a comprehensive survey of A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal's thesis under consideration, but it is undoubtedly an excellent contribution of Dr. A.B.N. Seal to explore the splendor that has been reflected in the book. There are 7 chapters in aggregate and not only mechanical, physical, and chemical theories of the ancient Hindus, but also there are analyses about different forms of matter, Hindu ideas of mechanics, Hindu physiology and biology, plant-life, and last but not the least about Hindu doctrine of scientific methods.

In this chapter, particularly, one may come across test of truth, fallacies of observation, the *Nyaya* doctrine of inference, condition of a legitimate truth, and so on. There have been scholars who have tried to critically look at the book and the contents, which is a clear indication of A.B.N. Seal's temperament as an universalist and humanist. The last chapter of the book covers about 37 pages and the contents in fact identify the philosophical background as well as the analysis about the ultimate aspiration of the human being. It is not only a chapter on Hindu doctrine of scientific method, but a serious aspect is about test of truth, confidence of the human being, observation of this universe, and the

evolutionary process from Buddhism to the various branches of Indian philosophy (Roy, 2013:35-38).

In fact, A.B.N. Seal had a great prospect as a philosopher. It has been said that:

As a world famous philosopher, Seal was one of the pioneers in the field of comparative study of religion and philosophy, and also in the science of statistics. He systematized the humanism of the *Brahmo* philosophical thought and became a secular humanist. Like Vidyasagar, Seal was a great educator, staunch believer in cause of rationalism and scientific enquiry, a polymath in his own way and aye at the same time a preacher of humanism as religious doctrine as opposed to organized religion (cited in Pradhan, 2015:334).

Knowledge-Building Process. In fact throughout his life, A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal seems to have sought to comprehend the intricacies of faith, human progress, and spiritual insight into the works of various scholars; and specially he got imbibed by the works of John Stuart Mill, August Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Hegel; but his specialty was that he developed a natural aptitude for mathematics and logic, which according to some scholars, it was a kind of encyclopaedic and scientific insights, having got greater control over the knowledge of mathematical, physical, and chemical concepts; and in doing that he must have surpassed all of his contemporary thinkers in the process of concentration in Indian philosophical notions (Verma, 2002:397).

It is a philosophy which recognizes the value and dignity of man and makes him the measure of all things. On the other hand, by the basic principle in the form of humanism, he learnt to oppose and stand firmly against naturalism and absolutism by accepting human experience as the primary concern for all. It made him a believer about what is real as well as attainable for man. At the same time, he developed the mechanism how to reject scepticism and agnosticism.

In this way, it is not unlikely that A.B.N. Seal developed a particular type of faith that man possesses genuine freedom of creative choice and action; and, therefore, man is the creator of his own fate. Throughout his life, he appealed to all men to believe in ethics

¹For details, see Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray (1958:132). Incidentally, as we know this portion was subsequently recast and expanded into a volume with the caption "Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus". See also *Atma Charita* by Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray (1998:126).

and morality that bound all human values in earthly experience and relationship. The theory of the position of man as a moral and spiritual subject, as a part of humanism, was propounded by A.B.N. Seal, whenever he got an opportunity to communicate anywhere during his lifetime.

Beginning of Originality in the Thoughts and Ideas. The above mentioned perception of men and the universe was forever reflected by A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal in most of his writings and deliveryings. Thus, one may recall his research on race origin and its presentation in the World Race Congress held in London in 1911. Here, A.B.N. Seal initially highlighted as follows:

If modern civilization is distinguished from all other civilizations by its scientific basis, the problems that this civilization presents must be solved by the methods of science. The evolution of Universal Humanity through the concourse and conflict of Nationalities and Empire is too vast and complex for the analytical methods of Aristotelian and Machiavellian Politics [...]. But in this process, science is no longer in the merely physico-chemical, or even, the merely biological clan, but is lifted to the sociological and historical platform (Seal, 1911:ii).

This point may enable us to judge the temperament of A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal regarding the role of science in our practical life. During this phase, there was yet another unique transformation of his temperament and some believe that he deviated himself at this moment from doctrine of *Brahmoism* and gradually came under the fold of spiritualism and turned eventually into a humanist. The most striking at that moment was his analysis on the comparative studies in *Vaishnavism* and Christianity (1912). In fact, this was a research work done by him in 1899 and was presented in the twelfth session of the Congress International Des Orientalist held in Rome in 1912. The fundamental points he highlighted, there were connected with “philosophy of history” and “historic comparative method”. He presented that:

In the first place, the comparative method of investigating the sciences relating to the History of Human mind requires elucidation and correction, what nothing has done greater

mischief in the department of research than the ill-conceived and blundering attempts of so many pylorus and prentice hands to build ambitious theories and comprehensive systems on the shifting quick-sands of loose analogy and vague generalization in the name of scientific method (Seal, 1899:i).

Incidentally, his analysis on this subject expressed the urge to break free from the hegemony of method as applicable in Euro-centric academic enquiry. In this lecture (the lecture was delivered in 1912), he also talked about the disciplines like Indology and anthropology, and refuted the orientalist hegemony in the academic world. For example, he tried to focus on historical comparison of human culture, and in his words:

Very few scholars in the West will be prepared to admit that any other religion can bear this relation in Christianity. One may trace here a cultural nationalist response in the imperialist discourse with a more profound love for nationalist spirit of enquiry in a colonial context. In this light, he may be considered as a rational humanist first and a cultural nationalist much later (Seal, 1911).

Life Philosophy or “Jivan Darshan”

Another stage that developed in A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal may be taken as philosophy of his life or *jiban darshan*. In this context, we may refer to one of his interviews taken sometime in 1933-1934 by Nanda Gopal Sengupta, a contemporary and one of the close associate of A.B.N. Seal, and the same has been published in a book by Nanda Gopal Sengupta titled *Smaraniyader Sannidhye*, where we come across various highlights about the philosophic mind of A.B.N. Seal. It is said that sitting beside A.B.N. Seal, Mr. Nanda Gopal Sengupta was able to efficiently provoke A.B.N. Seal to express something as his perception of life (*jiban bodh*). This may be quoted as below:

We have to create a profound universal harmony in the world of philosophy, science, literature, and cultural activities. If it is otherwise, men would be able to enjoy an unlimited command over the universe and in the long run would turn into a terrible demon devoid of love, conscience, and beauty. In fact, we have to build up a new life philosophy harmonizing all around us.²

²See, for example, Nanda Gopal Sengupta (1391 BS:19).

Thus, what A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal was inclined to clarify is perhaps clear to us as well. This shows that he was deeply attached to the ultimate effects of philosophy, science, literature, and creative culture; and, at the same time, to bring about an eternal harmony among these items of our creative forces. According to A.B.N. Seal, if it is otherwise i.e. to understand life negatively, there would be a demonic tendency in the instinct of human being and having been devoid of conscience man would turn into a devil (Seal, 1911).

In fact by temperament A.B.N. Seal aspired for Unity of Mankind (*Manav Sanghati*); and in that interview with Mr. Nanda Gopal Sengupta, he expressed the definition of his philosophy of life. In this respect, we may quote Mr. Nanda Gopal Sengupta again, when he writes as follows:

We need an all-round close union of universal mankind free of geographical boundary strong, but devoid of religious differences. And for this, there is a need of a World Parliament along with an universal mind and spirit of thinking extracted from all religions, civilizations, and culture (*ibidem* with footnote 2).³

Perception of "Manab Sanghati" or Unity of Mankind in the Eyes of A.B.N. Seal. This realization of A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal seems to have developed in course of time and his concern has been expressed in the speech he delivered on the occasion of inauguration of *Visva Bharati*, held on 23rd December 1923. Incidentally, poet Rabindranath Tagore invited him to deliver the inaugural lecture and, here, he indicated here the concept of Asian genius and its tendency towards Universal Humanism.

On some other occasion, we come to know that A.B.N. Seal delivered an inaugural speech

of the *Visva Bharati* at the request of poet Rabindranath Tagore on 23rd December 1921:

The genius of Asia is lying in the direction of Universal Humanism. So, there is a need of such university for India and Asia. In early age, the ideal of India was acclaimed by the *mathas* and *viharas* following that tradition of old sylvan-centric education, the *Visva Bharati* is being founded her.⁴

In addition to the above, A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal is said to have initiated a religious movement based on "New Humanism". Here, he highlighted the significance of "mass-life" and "mass-religion". Accordingly, he laid emphasis not on "individual emancipation" (*byaktir moksha*), but on the emancipation of the whole mankind (*sarbijanermukti*) and simultaneously appealed to pursue religion directed to uplift mass-life as a whole (cited in WBG, 1368 BS:807-810).

Truth and Humanity in the Analysis of A.B.N. Seal. This background of A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal may bring anybody else to search out the basic philosophy that appears to have reflected in his book of poems titled *The Quest Eternal (Shaswata Sandhan)* published in 1936. It is said that through this book of poems, A.B.N. Seal presented the evolution of "cultural history of our human society" and this can be inferred from the introduction of the book (Seal, 1936).

In the beginning of the book, he talks about hymns of ancient India, in which A.B.N. Seal portrays a particular type of ideas of philosophy in the form of Gnosticism and Neoplatonism grew up; and the hymn is said to have been uttered by a Greek priest returned from Bactria to his native land after several years of sojourn at Taxila and Mathura, where he had familiarized himself with Indian mythology and Indian art and speculation. Similarly, we come across how he presents

In Bengali version is as follows: "Darshan, bijnan, sahitya o kalakrishtir madhye gabhir ekti atmik aikya gore tulte hobe. Ta na hole prakritir upar asamanya prabhutva hate peye premhin, bibekhin, saudaryabodhhin manush to sesh parjanta bhayabaha danab haye darabe. Arthat sab kichhur samanvaye gare tulte habe natun ek jiban darshan".

³In the Bengali version is as follows: "Bhaugalik o dharmiya parthakya bimukta bolistha ekti sarbik manab sanghati chai, se janye chai ek visva rajdhani, ar chai sab dharma, samasta sabhyata o sanskritir niskarma manthita ek sarbijanin manan o chintaner prerana".

⁴As cited in Sunil Bandyopadhyay (1984:84). The Bengali version is: "Ashiyar genius universal humanism diki, ataeb Bharater ebong Ashiyar interest e erup ekti university prayojan achhe. Purbe je sangha o biharer dwara bharater sarthasarthakata sadhan hayechhila taderai e juger upajogi kare, sei puratan aranyake visva bharati rupe ekhane pattan kara hayechhe".

the medieval ideal of what he could trace the rationalistic movement of the *Mutazilas* of the 8th and 9th centuries, which in the long run A.B.N. Seal argued, developed the concept of *Ikhwanus-Safa* or "Sincere Brethren". In fact, A.B.N. Seal wants to emphasize how humanity can be sought in its simple universality. Therefore, the *Quest Eternal* cannot merely be a book of poems, but a reflection of an extraordinary quest of a scholar to reflect on his philosophical bent of mind (Seal, 1936).

This point may be comprehensible from a part of another conversation with Nanda Gopal Sengupta, when the latter asked him on the philosophical background, if any, of the *Quest Eternal*. On this point, A.B.N. Seal could only say that: "*Perhaps I have exposed myself substantially in those poems*" (cited in Sengupta, 1391 BS:21).⁵

In course of that conversation, Nanda Gopal Sengupta also drew the attention of A.B.N. Seal. Regarding the sole objective behind the composition of that book of poems and he asked him whether it was for Pure Knowledge of Search for God or Eternity or Salvation. Nanda Gopal Sengupta ultimately turned him to confess that all these aspects were beyond his cognizance (Sengupta, 1391 BS:21).⁶ Naturally, he did not give any clear or straight answer to such enquiry and surprisingly instead A.B.N. Seal instantly reacted to this question and said, as follows:

The perceptions are so delicate and undefinable that these can also be realized through mind, cannot be expressed in words (cited in Sengupta, 1391 BS:21).⁷

Intuitive Power and His Realization of Philosophy of Life. In fact, the *Quest Eternal* or *Shasvata Sandhan* is intended to stick to a particular view as to the existence of God and

⁵In Bengali version is: "*Amar ami ke or madhye bodhay anektai bhyakta korechhe*".

⁶In its original Bengali version, it has been written as: "*Ami prashna korlam, manabatmar anusandhan ki lakshe pauchhanor janye, ta ki suddha jnan, na Ishvar na amritattva, na nirban, thik budhini baiti pare*". The English translation is: "I asked him what is the purpose of the quest about human soul, is it a pure knowledge or search for God or the mystery of the celestial world or salvation. In fact, I could not understand the essence of the book".

⁷The Bengali version is: "*Anubhutiguli etoi suksha, etoy anirbachaniya je ta buk diyaei upalabdi kara jay, mukh diye bola jay na*".

it is likely true that A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal had deep faith in all the mysteries of this universe; and this can be realized through certain intuitive power and that also cannot be expressed or explained in words. Thus, if it is really understood one can realize the depth of his philosophy of life and why he got divulged in various subjects on many occasions.

Practically speaking, his splendid refinement of thinking, decent taste, and profound power of reasoning with scientific insight made him really the unique thinker, who could identify truth and humanity through prudent analysis of human spirit. By the way, the *Quest Eternal* is nothing, but his philosophic realization about human life and the mysteries of this universe at the same time. In a recent study, one Maheswar Bhattacharya, in his *Ashviner Jhar* (2015), noted the essence of this book of poem in the following words:

Quest Eternal, a book of poems, written at the fag end of the life of Brajendranath, contains the philosophical realization of his life. Like Rabindranath, he also believed that whatever is unlimited, infinite, and unknown Supreme Being may be called *Bhuma*, and from there the whole universe has been created, life organism comes from that Great Soul, life cell comes from that Great Soul. There is a limitation of this universe, but not of the *Bhuma*. The bubbles that blossom into the Eternal Sea take its form in the *Bhuma* and are exposed in different forms in this world. The same bubbles in the long run merge with that unlimited Eternal Sea (Bhattacharya, 2015:51).

In a way, A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal seems to have sought a cosmopolitan man in search of an ever illusive unity in the pluralistic universe; and how he saw the matter can be understood in the light of the following lines:

By slow unconscious steps / I move / to the central cosmic light / In which I would see / transfigured, in the heart / of things, my story / the individual passion / of my life / as world passion of / creative deity (Seal, 1936).

It is perhaps an example how a philosopher turns into a poet; and, in that sense, he is not at all a poet of less calibre rather an excellent one.

Ideas of Spiritualism and Sense of Humanity. A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath)

Seal had no doubt developed his ideas of humanism and the channels he developed to touch the tune of spiritualism. On this question, we may refer to the example he set to judge Rammohan and why Rammohan be treated as a universal man. Secondly, we may refer to his mode of analysis as to the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna Parahamgsa.

On the question of Rammohan, one may recall his address at the death anniversary (27th September 1924) of Rammohan, where he portrayed the “man Rammohan” who has been presented as “*a harmonious blending of many excellences which have found contradictory or conflicting in previous history*” (Seal, 1933:1). It is a fact that Raja Rammohan Roy was born at a time of regression in many ways; and according to A.B.N. Seal, it was:

[...] an old society and polity had crumbled down, and a new one had not yet been built in its place [...]. And all round reconstitution and renovation were necessary for the continued existence of social life and order. But, what was to be the principle of organization! For there were three bodies of culture, three civilizations which were in conflict: the Hindu, the Moslem, and the Christian or Occidental; and the question was: how to find a point of rapport, of concord, of unity, among this heterogeneous, hostile and warring forces (Seal, 1933:2).

So, for A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal, Rammohan was “a Prophet of coming humanity”. Because in his analysis, Raja Rammohan Roy seems to have for the first time explored the mechanism of “concord” and convergence; and in this light, he might claim to be the “father” and patriarch of modern India. In this respect, A.B.N. Seal is perfectly right to assess Rammohan, when he wrote as follows:

India with a composite nationality and a synthetic civilization, and by the lines of convergence he laid down [...] he pointed the way to the solution of the larger form of problem of international culture and civilization in human history (Seal, 1933:3).

A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal, in this lecture, had undoubtedly tried to present the characteristic marks of Raja Rammohan and his lively assessment and formative influence

that led to the emergence of modern India (Seal, 1933). In the same way, we may refer a unique analysis of the philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna. Incidentally, A.B.N. Seal delivered his Presidential Address on the occasion of the birth centenary of Sri Ramakrishna, held in Calcutta in March, 1937. This lecture may be taken as one of the brilliant analysis and exposition of Sri Ramakrishna’s thought; and through this, A.B.N. Seal expressed his ideology that he forever professed and followed throughout his life.

This is simply because the significance A.B.N. Seal could be seen in the philosophy of Ramakrishna and that it was nothing, but a realization of Universal Humanism, which bears its relevance in times to come. His studies in searching out the ideas and personality of Ramakrishna prompted him to analyse how Ramakrishna developed the mechanism to contemplate truth from the Absolute (*Nirupadhi*) and negative all conditions and modes (*Upadhi*), but from the relative or *Sopadhi* point of view, he worshipped the Mother Goddess *Kali* as well as other images of the deity (cited in RMIC, 1938:109).

It is interesting that A.B.N. Seal was well convinced about Ramakrishna’s universal attitude towards human beings; and on that occasion, he placed Ramakrishna who said:

[...] worshipped the one in all, and the all one in; and he saw no contradiction, but only a fuller reality in this. So also, he reconciled *Sakara* and *Nirakara Upasana* (Iconic and Aniconic Worship). For there was nothing in the form of the Deity, but God manifesting himself. The antagonism between matter and spirit no longer existed for him (Seal, 1933).

A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal had perhaps thus represented Ramakrishna as a cosmic humanist in religion, and the unique understanding about Ramakrishna was that he could touch the pulse of Ramakrishna who prescribed practices and rituals of each religion according to the efficacy and truth of each religion, which A.B.N. Seal categorically described in his speech as “*Parahamsa’s syncreticism*” (cited in RMIC, 1938:113). If one is to understand the significance of the

syncretic idea of Sri Ramakrishna, one may try to realize the logic behind it and this is not strange, but definitely echoes the message of Sri Ramakrishna-*Jatamat Tatta* Path (as there are faiths, so there are paths).

A.B.N. Seal's idea of Parliament of Religion portrays that he was well aware about the religious antagonism in India. He stressed on a Parliament of Religions in the religious gathering of 1937. Through his address, he clearly pointed out the essential need of a Parliament for all men or a federation of world cultures (cited in RMIC, 1938:114). He explained the background in such a way that:

[...] creeds and dogmas divide man from man. But, we seek in religion a meeting ground of humanity. What we want is not merely universal religion in its quintessence [...] but experience as a whole [...] by syncretic practice of Religion by being Hindu with a Hindu, a Moslem with the Moslem, a Christian with the Christian, and a Universalist with a Universalist; and this as a stepping stone in the ultimate realization of god-in-man and man-in-god (Seal, 1933).

A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal had thereby not only followed a personal religion, but also cosmic humanism which freed humanism from its limitation of outlook, which displayed man in the universe as a whole and the whole universe in man. He indicated rather a new approach towards our life, where we must make room for larger personalities and to regulate humanity consciously. In fact, through the concept of Parliament of Religion *vis a vis* Federation of World Culture, A.B.N. Seal visualized a progressive evolution of humanity.

In this way, A.B.N. Seal was definitely fully aware of the importance of multiplicity, which in his view and realization cannot be rejected as unreal. Because it is multiplicity through, which unity of mankind manifests itself. While the idea of unity appears to him as an eternal truth of things, diversity would be a play of the unity. Again, A.B.N. Seal might have been aware of the verse of the *Ishopanisad* (Verse No.9), which runs as "Diversity is not false by nature; it becomes false when divorced from the unity, which is the eternal truth".⁸

⁸In Bengali version is: "Andham Tamah Pravisanti Yea avidyam Upasate; Tato Bhuya Iva Te tamo ya yu Vyayam ratah".

Search for "Life Universal" in Personal Life: Views of A.B.N. Seal. A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal was much concerned about the regulation of personal life and how to universalize the attitude towards man and society. In order to pursue such a life, he prescribed four cherished goals and these are: (1) *Dana* or charity; (2) *Priyabachana* or pleasant words; (3) *Lokahita* or public welfare; and (4) *Samanartharta* or co-operation towards a common end. In this way, he laid emphasis on co-operation and sympathy of men towards any common end; and in this respect, his realization was such that:

[...] there is no justification merely in friendship, mercy, pleasure or apathy, because these have never relinquished the absolute power of dictation, nor have even been in touch with the Life Universal of the Eternal Soul. So, we need co-operation, let everybody be trained in the same meaning of life, being seated in the platform, and seek and pray unitedly as well as with full concentration the emancipation of all mankind.⁹

Search for Infinite Knowledge vis a vis Fundamental Truth. In retrospection, A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal tried to explore a *tattva* – a theory called "fundamental truth" for the solution of multifarious problems encircling the life of a human being. Here, he developed the idea of "infinite knowledge" (*Param tattva*), which is much significant to understand the philosophical background of A.B.N. Seal. In this way, it is said that he tried to find out the subject matter of this world and which has no end and that our sense organs namely eyes, ears, nose do not work in one point (Seal, 2013:94).

In his observation, we are given to believe that these items bring to our knowledge all the mundane objects in different forms according to its attributes. All these objects, A.B.N. Seal believed, come to us in parts. But, in actual sense, these are all inseparable. In course of writing a short essay in Bengali titled *Brahmatattva* and *Purnatattva*, he referred to the *Brihadaranyaka Sruti* and wrote, as follows:

⁹See A.B.N. Seal (2013:52). In the Bengali version is: "Kebal maitri, karuna, mudita ba upekshay chalibena, tahao swatantra kartritva bodh chhadaiya uthenai, visvatvar vishvajivaner (Life Universal) sahit ekibhuta haite pare nai. Tai samanarthata chai; sakale ekartha haiya ekasane basiya ek joge ek dhyane visva manaber mukti sadhan korai ek matra sadhan".

Whatever we apparently realize in different forms in reality, this is not its real manifestation. Whatever is seen in parts, in reality, these are unbroken. Whatever is perceived to be incomplete is, in fact, the full form of the same. That *Brahma* is the One and the Same, He is undisputed, He is the full form of all Reality or the real Truth. Our eyes, listening organs, our all power of perception are all the manifestation of that Absolute. This mysterious form is being merely exposed and justified in various ways. For this reason, all these are the symbols of the Great *Brahma*. All these forms, reveal and justify the existence of the Great *Brahma* or the Absolute, do never, manifest the half or part of the whole (Seal, 2013).¹⁰

So far, as the above statement, is concerned A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal had perhaps developed a typical power of realization and, in that light, he wanted to identify a "truth" that bears the cardinal substance behind each existence and what is called *Brahma* and that the *Brahma* or the Soul, which exists in every human being and in all creations. On another occasion, he pointed out the defective side of "emotion" and in order to become more realistic on a strong critical faculty, which virtually creates an urge to realize the motion of the age, truth of the universe, and a self-introspection to find out the means of solution to problems of men (Seal, 2013:100).

A.B.N. Seal: A Child of Bengal Renaissance. There may be a controversy whether A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal can be taken as a "product" or a "child of Bengal Renaissance" (Bandyopadhyay, 1984:76). There may not be any clear cut conclusion on this point, but let us see the time and the teachings of the then Bengal, which witnessed a new wave of awakening. It is a fact that being fully aware of the situation of Bengal as well as the socio-cultural crises of contemporary India, A.B.N. Seal was perhaps the first Indian to apply the principles of comparative philosophy, religion, and also literature; and having been well-versed in almost ten Eastern and Western

languages he proved himself as one of the greatest scholars of his time.

Under the circumstances, he was very much acquainted with the intellectual quest of the age. According to Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, a particular scientific temper developed at that point of time and in fact the characteristic feature of modernism within the fold of humanism, secularism, and democracy as a historical process had started in Europe with the Renaissance movement, which culminated into various protest movements throughout the world. Against this backdrop, the idea of Renaissance had influenced the mind of the people of 19th century Bengal. A.B.N. Seal, with his uncommon ability, could judge his time, place, and people in real perspectives.

In the given circumstances, he started popularizing a "value based social order" not like any other "technical philosopher", but as a social reformer with scientific instincts to judge man and society in a new perspective. He was not a social reformer or a propagandist, but it is likely that he was more influenced by the scientific knowledge of his time and naturally emphasized reason and objectivity. As a rationalist, he was acquainted with the philosophy of life of a reformer, like Raja Rammohan Roy who is supposed to have presented the scientific temper in the great intellectual climate in Calcutta.

At the same time, he got the opportunity to come close to Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen, and so on, who equally advocated the ideas of "world humanism". He, thus, talked about human solidarity and also explored the issues that might threaten this solidarity. His efforts were to bring forward the deep spiritual foundation of Indian culture as well as the glory of Indian civilization. Such religio-spirituality, A.B.N. Seal strongly believed had given Indian culture a solid foundation exceeding all material and earthly life-values. This may be the reason why A.B.N. Seal could write in his unpublished Autobiography, as follows:

I have taken all knowledge for my purpose [...]. I am a man (hence, nothing human is alien to me). I lived in the spirit of these sayings (cited in Bandyopadhyay, 1984:77).

¹⁰In Bengali version is: "Apatata jaha bahurupe pratita haitechhe, mule taha bahu nahe. Jaha khanda khanda baliya dekha jaitechhe, mule taha akhanda. Jaha apurna bodh hoitechhe, taha purna. Brahmai sei ek, sei akhanda, sei purna bastu ba purna tattva. Chakshu karnani gnanendriya sakal sei purnabasturai bibidha o bahumukhi prakash matra. Ai janya ihara brahmarai nidarshan. Sei Bramhake, sei purna tattvakei ihara prakash o pratisthita kare, kebal matra angshik ba khandake prakash karena".

Why he could utter such rare words about himself and his mind, may be realized from the fact that A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal was a scholar par excellence. About him, a modern scholar has paid his respect in the following style:

In the realization of Brajendranath Seal, there was a peculiar experience of the Indian history and culture. Those who deal with philosophy only may find difficulty to understand the catalogue of learning of Brajendranath Seal, not only that it is absurd. Philosophy was one of the main worlds of his thought and culture. He understood philosophy as sum total of many strings of ideas and knowledge. He sought the meaning of life as well as the stand of real life in philosophy. In his ideas and realization, philosophy stands to mean along with other branches of knowledge, such as anthropology, economics, politics, fine arts, history, and so on. In fact, during the revolutionary era (1905-1914), we never called him a philosopher rather a prodigy of learning – a stupendous scholar, a versatile genius, and also a living encyclopaedia.¹¹

This great son of India breathed his last on 3rd December 1938. On this occasion, various personalities paid their due homage and some of them have been mentioned above. Let us see how Rabindranath Tagore himself had reflected his mind on this incident, may be presented here at the end:

I have lost an old friend for whom I always had a sincere affection and regard. He was one of the few in India, who had made for himself a distinct place in the intellectual hierarchy of the large world, but unfortunately the last years of his life were clouded by disease that [...] prevented him from the proper exercise of his great scholarship. But, we cannot forget that generation of young men have received inspiration from his intellectual insight and encyclopaedic knowledge. We offer our homage of respect to his memory.¹²

¹¹See, for example, Haripada Mandal (2009:53f). In Bengali version is: "Brajen Sealer kalpanay chhila prakarantare ghotā Bharatiya sanskritir itihās. Ek matra darshane jara matha khelay, tader pakshē Brajen Sealer suchir bhetar thāi paoya kathin, eman ki asambhav. Darshan chhila tar chintar sanskritir anyatam anga. Darshan balle tini ek sange dekhten anek jinis. Darshan shabde tini gota jibanke jiban bujhten tar chintay darshan anyanya anek kichhu sange jatha-nirtattva, dhanabijnan, rashtraniti, sukumar shilpa, itihās ityadi sujārita chhila. Bastutah e janyei bangali biplaber juge (1905-1914), Brajen Seal ke amra darshanik baltamna, baltam lokta bidyar jahaj, paraknda bidya-diggag, sarbabidyabisharad pandit – jyanta vishvakos".

¹²As cited in *Anand Bazar Patrika* [newspaper], on Sunday, 18th Agrayayan 1345 BS or 4th December 1938, pp.5 and 11.

CONCLUSION

Thus was the end of the towering career of A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal and his shining phases of intellectual career shocked his contemporaries as well as those who still feel for this scholar philosopher. His dynamic personality, creative soul left a widening influence to those who had the mind to appreciate his scholarship and creative insight to develop a world of universal knowledge. It is a fact that he had the ability to create the total perspective of an intellectual atmosphere, which in its ultimate goal leads anybody to search out the viewpoint of universal humanism. He himself had remarked about the sincerity to be utilized to fulfill the purpose of life, which through philosophical research might touch the world stock of knowledge.

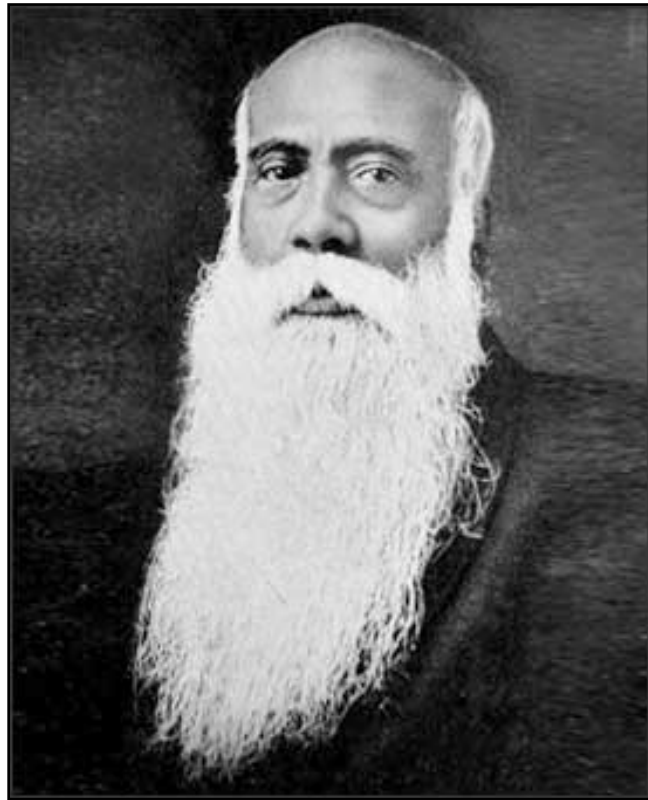
As a Principal of more than one colleges, a teacher of philosophy in the Calcutta University, and Vice-Chancellor of the Mysore University, he proved his worth and had showed the examples for the coming generations. One may recall that once the Government of India appointed a Commission (i.e. Sadler Commission under Dr. Michael Sadler of the Oxford University) for a review of the mode of function of the Calcutta University and introduce reforms to boost up the academic standard of the university.

A.B.N. Seal is said to have carefully prepared papers and submitted his valuable opinions for the reconstruction of the entire function of the university, when the report was submitted (Sadler Commission, 1917-1919), and this report still carries its intrinsic value for our higher education. So, it was no less a wonder to speak about this personality named Acharya Brajendra Nath Seal, who for his intellectual attainments has been called an encyclopaedic in character and standard. He was great as a philosopher, as an educationist and perhaps the most impressive point was his simplicity in the style of his life and largeness of heart.¹³

¹³**Statement:** I, hereby, declare that this paper is my own scholarly work, it is not product of plagiarism, not to be submitted, reviewed as well as published by other scholarly journals; and finally having received, the paper will also not to be withdrawn from this journal.

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Acharya Brajendra Nath Seal

(Source: <http://sciencegarage.in>, 9/10/2016)

We know that A.B.N. (Acharya Brajendra Nath) Seal was born on 3rd September 1864 at Rammohan Shah Lane, Kolkata, India; and left this world on 3rd December 1938. Obviously, the year 2014 happened to be the 150th birth anniversary of this great personality and from different corners of India many academicians and institutions paid their tributes in a notable manner. I do believe that A.B.N. Seal College, Cooch Behar once known as Victoria College, where he served as a Principal from 1896 to 1913, had remembered the man as per expectation.