

# Brahmo Samaj and North-East India

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DIPANKAR BANERJEE

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# BRAHMO SAMAJ AND NORTH-EAST INDIA

DIPANKAR BANERJEE



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To  
my inspiration  
**Professor Sabyasachi Bhattacharya**  
for always being there  
and believing in me

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## FOREWORD

It is quite well-known that the Brahma Samaj had played an important part in the regeneration of modern India from its inception in 1828 to its development into an all India movement in 1866. The ideals of the Samaj carried to North-East India by a group of Assamese elites, who studied in Calcutta, created ripples in the socio-cultural life of this region. Many branches of the Samaj were set up in different parts of the Brahmaputra valley by the end of 1883. This movement also entered the Khasi Hills. The Brahma emissaries of Bengal had an important role in the socio-cultural regeneration of Assam. Depending on the unexplored primary and secondary sources the author of this work has developed the narrative thematically in three chapters and has thrown interesting light on 'this lesser explored field of research' with the idea of giving 'a more comprehensive picture of the Brahma Samaj activities and its impact in North-East India'. There is no doubt that in this work Dr. Dipankar Banerjee has made a very valuable contribution to our knowledge of the Brahma movement in this part of our country.

Rammohun Roy, founder of the Brahma Samaj, initiated the simple message of Divine Unity. Devendra Nath Tagore gave to the Samaj the 'Covenant for the future Communion'. Under Keshub Chunder Sen the Brahma Samaj became 'an all India movement and a power in the land'. But "with the gradual progress of the Samaj, differences in views and opinions have made their appearance". However, the Samaj could initiate a movement to fight the battle for freedom on

all fronts—social, moral, economic, educational, political and religious. The path for the founder-father of the Samaj was not at all a rosy one. In an address delivered at the 'Brahmobandhu Sabha' on 26 Baishakh 1271 B.S. Devendra Nath Tagore said that Rammohun Roy was vehemently opposed by the orthodox Hindus, Christians and Muslims when he tried to introduce a new meditation prescription for one God with the help of religious book of each community.

With the *bhakti* upheaval in the Brahma Samaj at Monghyr from 1867 by Keshub Chunder Sen two distinct trends of thought engulfed it. On the one hand there was "a great spirit of discontent with the old theology and an earnest struggle to realize a better order of things". On the other hand, "there was a distrust of things that favoured of the higher realms of the spirit,—a relentless rationalism which placed the worship of the intellect above everything else". It is to be noted that during this time great changes took place in the world. Religion and spirituality 'seemed to have fallen into disrepute'. The human mind was then 'plunged into the vortex of materialism'. The writings of Darwin, Spencer, Mill, Huxley and the like agitated very much the public mind. The atmosphere outside the Brahma Samaj in those days was 'surcharged with rationalism'. It also influenced the Brahma Samaj. Thus "side by side with the *Bhakti* movement there was a counter-movement of Rationalism which threatened to impede and dislocate the natural upholding of spirituality in the new community" of Keshub Chunder Sen.

Founding the Bharat Varshiya Brahma Mandir at Calcutta on 22 August 1869, for regular public worship harmoniously blending 'the Hindu, the Gothic, the Buddhist and Saracenic styles of architecture', which was 'a symbol of reverence of all faiths', Keshub Chunder Sen proclaimed: "All mankind will unite in a Universal Church; at the same time, it will be adapted to the peculiar circumstances of each nation and assume a national character". But his efforts to build up a new human society bringing closer of different religious groups were not successful. Referring to Keshub Chunder Sen's 'doctrine of one

Church for all mankind', Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan in a 'Foreword' to *Biography of a New Faith*, Volume Two by Prosanto Kumar Sen observed on 22 February 1954: "Today when humanity is broken up into different compartments each professing a different religious tradition, we cannot hope to develop psychological unity and spiritual coherence essential for a world community". Radhakrishnan also commented: "It is said that to be born in a church is good but one should not die in it. The dogmas and rites, the forms and prayers which are prescribed by a religious organisation are a means to an end but not the end it all. Life becomes easy if we follow established usage and conform to general practices but this ease is acquired at the expense of personal integrity and authenticity". Again, Radhakrishnan said: "If the Brahmo movement today does not seem to be flourishing, it is because its fundamental motives have been accepted by Hindu society".

Dr. Dipankar Banerjee rightly pointed out that the "Brahmo Samaj activists in their own way were able to create a positive socio-cultural impact" in North-East India. Without controverting it, one may ask, then, why the Brahmos in Assam were 'microscopic in terms of number' and remained confined to an upper stratum elite? Perhaps we would find the answer in the deep-rooted socio-cultural movement initiated by Sankaradeva and his disciples. In this situation it became difficult for the Brahmo Samaj to make an inroad into Assam. Sivanath Sastri in his addresses delivered by him as the President of Theistic Conferences at Calcutta in 1906, at Coconada in 1907 and at Allahabad in 1910 (published in the form of a monograph under the title *Theistic Church in India* in 1966 from the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj) admitted: "The last but the most important part of our work, as preachers of a new faith is to devise means for effective propagation. The efforts we have made in that direction up to this time are but few and feeble. The field lying before us is extensive. Not to speak of other lands, where the light of the new faith should be taken, for it is certainly a world-religion, vast masses in the country are lying near at hand who have not yet heard of the new

message. Our efforts have been up to this time, chiefly confined to a limited number of educated people in whom the faculty of reverence has been partly destroyed by a system of foreign education. We are crying at their door, but even they have not listened to us". In this circumstance the cry for 'one God, one Church, one Law and one Humanity' could not draw the attention of a large number of people.

There was no doubt that the Brahmo Samaj movement was 'pre-eminently a movement of social and religious reform'. But "it has nonetheless been really the first and the most powerful political force in modern India also". It was Rammohun Roy who "persuaded Lord William Bentinck to decide in favour of Western learning even against the recommendations of the Court of Directors". Indians trained 'in modern learning and criticism' played notable part in the struggle for freedom. Bipin Chandra Pal in his monograph entitled *The Brahmo Samaj and the Battle for Swaraj* (new edition, Calcutta, May 1945) wrote that the Brahmo Samaj "had stood up from the days of Raja Ram Mohun Roy for complete personal freedom". Bipin Chandra Pal also said that "What Martin Luther did in Christiandom, the Raja tried to do in modern India, or even more correctly speaking, in the modern world". He wrote that Sivanath Sastri as minister of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj introduced a special prayer during the congregational worship of the Samaj 'for the special uplift and emancipation of his own country and people'. Bipin Chandra Pal stated that "the Brahmo Samaj was among the very first to contribute to this inspiring hymnology of the present nationalism and freedom movement in India". Earlier patriotic hymns or national songs were composed by members of the Brahmo Samaj. Satyendra Nath Tagore, Jyotindra Nath Tagore and Govinda Chandra Roy 'were the authors of the most favourite of the first batch of these national songs'. Bipin Chandra Pal said that "Sivanath Sastri was the first to introduce patriotic songs into general hymn-book of the Samaj". Surendranath Banerjea preached 'a new gospel of political freedom' and formed 'political societies among the youthful intellectuals of Calcutta'.

Sivanath Sastri dreamt of “a commune of religio-political workers who would devote themselves absolutely to the service of their country aiming at the complete emancipation of the people from all forms of bondage, theological and sacerdotal, social and economic as well as political”. In this monograph Bipin Chandra Pal highlighted the direct and indirect contributions of the Samaj ‘to the political freedom or the Swaraj movement in India’.

Dr. Dipankar Banerjee has drawn our attention to the fact that the forward looking Assamese elite were influenced in various ways by the Brahmo Samaj movement. The scholars engaged in studying the socio-cultural history of North-East India would certainly welcome this work as an important addition to the history of this movement in this region.

18 April, 2006

AMALENDU DE  
Former President  
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## PREFACE

In August 2001 I was approached by Dr. Basana Ranjan Halder, President of the Board of Trustees of Gauhati Brahmo Samaj, to deliver the keynote address at the inaugural session of the 111th Session of the All India Brahmo Conference. As the Conference was to be held at Guwahati for the first time, the organizers expected me to speak on the subject: Brahmo Samaj and North-East India.

I honestly told Dr. Halder that I did not have any access to the subject. There were many learned scholars of the region who might have done better justice to the same. But Dr. Halder insisted that as there was practically no record available on the early Brahmo Movement in the North-Eastern region, petteist of the effort in this regard would be a welcome contribution. That is how this study was initiated.

As I was preparing for my address, I understood that not only the records related to the subject were difficult to trace in Assam, but many of the Brahmo Samaj properties including old Brahmo prayer halls in North-East India had also been lost to the posterity. I gradually realised that though the total number of people who followed the Brahmo faith was microscopic, the Samaj played quite an important role at a certain period of history of the region. However, its historic role has not as yet been properly assessed. After I delivered my address (it contained only nine pages) at the Conference, I was overwhelmed and touched when Lt. Gen. S.K. Sinha, PVSM, Hon'ble Governor of Assam (who is also a historian by his own right) referred to my address several times in his

inaugural address of the Conference. He suggested that the records related to the Brahma Samaj in the North-East ought to be documented. Many delegates from Calcutta and South India, including the representatives of the Unitarian church asked me to undertake further study on the Brahma Samaj in North-East India. That was a great inspiration for me.

Since then the officials of Gauhati Brahma Samaj kept reminding me that I should take up a more detailed study on the subject. Unfortunately, I could not honour their request immediately and I took a long time to start the study as I had some other pressing assignments including two visits abroad in between. I wish I would have got some more time for a more elaborate study—particularly on the role of Brahma Samaj in respect of labour problem of Assam. This, however, is not an excuse for my lapses and transgressions.

Various reform movements of the nineteenth century were the principal forces for social awakening in India. It is an accepted fact that the Brahma Samaj was to a great extent responsible for bringing that awakening and social change in the country. Though it started in Bengal, it gradually spread over to other parts of India. But how this Brahma Samaj movement spread to the remote corners of the country as well as the neighbouring provinces has remained relatively a barren field of research. This study attempts to throw some light on this important but unexplored field of research.

The Brahma Samaj movement in the North-East was basically confined to the Barak valley, the Brahmaputra valley and the Khasi Hills. Khasi Hills was a part of Assam till 1970 and in the fitness of things, an appropriate title of this book should have been Brahma Samaj and Assam. However, keeping in mind the consequent formation of the state of Meghalaya and in tune with the original subject of the key note address, the book has been titled *Brahma Samaj and the North-East India*. Data and materials for this work have been collected from different sources. Newspapers like *Brahmo Public Opinion*, *Sanjivani* and *The Indian Messenger*, which I have consulted at Brahma Samaj Library, Kolkata and in the newspaper section

of the National Library Kolkata need immediate preservation, and more importantly, should be immediately microfilmed. Though some old libraries at Shillong had lots of rare books on the subject, almost everything had been destroyed or lost permanently during the last few decades. However, I have tried to consult as much as possible, though I sincerely believe that there is scope for more serious research on the subject.

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I am grateful to Dr. B.R. Halder, President, Board of Trustees, Brahma Samaj, Guwahati who stimulated my interest in Brahma Samaj movement in North-East India. He constantly encouraged me to undertake this study which remained a barren field of research.

I must sincerely acknowledge with thanks the minor research project grant that has been provided to me by the Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi to undertake a part of this study.

I owe my deep gratitude to Prof. Amalendu De, former President of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata and a historian of repute for writing the foreword of the book which has immensely enhanced its value.

The management of Anamika Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd. also need to be thanked immensely for the interest they have shown in the publication of this book.

In fact, for this study, my debts are many: to Prof. Amalendu Guha and Prof. J. B. Bhattacharjee who have been kind enough to go through the manuscript and provided valuable inputs; to Krishnanjan Chanda of the South Point School, Guwahati, for his support; to Monideepa Chowdhury, and Devasree Datta of Silchar Women's College for sharing my load; to Anjali Lahiri for making available to me some rare books; to late Santi Ranjan Dasgupta of Dhubri, Indira Khuslani of Kolkata and Susama Roy of Shillong for their valuable interviews; to Nirupama Bargohain and Anima Guha for their suggestions; to the officials and staff of Brahma Samaj

libraries of Kolkata, National Library Kolkata, Dept. of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati and ICHR NE Regional Centre, Guwahati; Ramesh Prasad Agarwalla and Sankar Lall Agarwalla for their encouragement; to my wife Purabi and daughter Emon for arranging the materials; to Gautam Chowdhury for handling the computer work; to my son Tirthankar Banerjee for designing the cover. I take this opportunity to thank them all.

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## INTRODUCTION

The 19th century was characterized by a remarkable outburst of intellectual activity that set in motion radical transformation of India's socio-religious ideas. It was a period when the eight-century-long Islamic domination of Indian political life had come to a decisive end and British rule had planted firm roots. It was also a time when due to several historical factors social and religious thoughts were undergoing profound changes.

Overall, there was confusion and diverse opinions about what 'Hinduism' meant and how indigenous religions—both Vedic and non-Vedic—could be interpreted: at around the same time Western liberal ideas were inspiring new outlook and aspiration. The spirit of rational enquiry had begun to develop in the minds of a section of Indians who began questioning outdated rituals and practices then prevalent in society. The country was swept over by a wave of intellectual unrest and a significant group of educated youth began to feel the need for positive action-oriented social reform. The situation was ripe for the emergence of a religious reform movement resembling the millenarium, which had earlier taken place in other parts of the world.

The spirit of the age was most illustrated by the life and thoughts of Raja Rammohan Roy, considered the steward of this new awakening. In 1814 Rammohan founded the Atmiya Sabha through which he initiated a crusade against social ills. Atmiya Sabha attracted a substantial section of the Bengal aristocracy, including the Tagore family. Rammohan's objective was to awaken the people from their deep slumber and "dream

of error” by applying human reason and a rational approach.

During the same time William Adam, a Baptist missionary, converted to the Unitarian Concept of Rammohan Roy and joined hands with him in starting a small Unitarian congregation in Calcutta. In 1828 the works and activities of the Atmiya Sabha were made more broad-based and renamed as Brahmo Sabha. Two years later, it was renamed Brahmo Samaj. The rest, as they say, is history, with the Brahmo Samaj bringing about many far-reaching changes in the country’s socio-political ideas and thoughts.

The Brahmo Samaj was a congregation or an order, rather than a sect or community. It sought to strengthen Roy’s doctrine of universal brotherhood by making the ideals of love and service towards humanity an essential part of the Brahmo faith. The Samaj stood for the “adoration of the Eternal Unsearchable and Immutable Being who is the author or preserver of the universe”. It admitted no image or statue and stood for the promotion of benevolence, charity, morality and virtue. Rammohan conceived it mainly as a common platform for the different religious groups of India.

The Brahmo Samaj was to pass through various stages of evolution during the first four decades of its existence. Under Rammohan the Samaj was characterized by simplicity and catholicity of ideas and this gave Rammohan’s successor Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore the perfect foundation for carrying forward the spirit of the movement. Devendra Nath who joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1843 provided it with solid organizational machinery, his experience as founder of the Tattwabodhini Sabha (1839) (with the aim of disseminating information and correct knowledge of Brahma as defined in the Vedanta and which had been able to attract the cream of the then Bengali intelligentsia, including Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Rajnarayan Bose and Ramtanu Lahiri) helping him immensely.

In the year 1857 Keshab Chandra Sen, then a 20-year-old, joined the Samaj. While Debendranath was a conservative reformist and tried to keep the Samaj free from disruptive

foreign influences, Keshab Chandra was imbued with the romantic spirit of liberalism. His radical ideas that included inter-caste marriage, widow remarriage and change in the rites of worship were not encouraged by Devendra Nath and finally in 1866 a split occurred, dividing the Samaj into two factions.

While Devendra Nath remained deeply attached to the Adi Brahma Samaj, Keshab Chandra with his broad and universal approach started the Bharatbashiya Brahma Samaj. However, the latter was destined to split again and Keshab Chandra, the great apostle of religious unity, could not prevent it. A large section of his followers disagreed with him on some socio-religious issues and broke away in 1878 under the leadership of Sivanath Sastri. This brought into existence the more democratic Sadharan Brahma Samaj, which even got the blessings of Debendranath Tagore and Rajnarayan Bose.

It was in the 1860s that the ideas of Brahma Samaj began to penetrate the north-eastern part of India. Educated youths from Assam were starting to go to Calcutta for higher studies since Calcutta was then the dream destination for intellectual stimulation. During their stay there, these youths, many of whom were to bring far-reaching changes in the intellectual and social life of Assam, were inspired by Rammohan Roy's ideals and Brahma Samaj activities. Jagnaram Khargaria Phukan, Anadaram Dhekial Phukan, Gunabhiram Baruah, Padmanath Gohain Baruah, Manik Chandra Barua, Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Jagannath Baruah, Kalicharan Mech and others were highly impressed with the Brahma Samaj's initiative of social reform.

Inspired by the Bengal Renaissance they too began conceiving of a new Assam that could come through socio-cultural change and material progress. This group, the product of a new enlightened age, was the first to think of opening schools for the education of both boys and girls, supporting widow remarriage and opposing polygamy. They submitted memorandums to the government to lighten the tax burden, change the opium policy, increase the number of law courts and give due recognition to the Assamese language.

Besides this group, there were many others who did not go to Calcutta but were nonetheless influenced by Brahmo ideas. Padmahash Goswami, Kamala Kanta Bhattacharyya, Hem Chandra Barua, Braja Sundari Devi, Ananda Ram Goswami, Lakshmikanta Barkataki embraced the Brahmo faith and worked selflessly for a better society.

Complementary efforts were made by many Bengali Brahmo officers, who since 1860 had begun to settle in Assam on the employment of the British Indian government. In their own way this committed group of Brahmos contributed to the cause of education, health and other areas, thereby contributing to the spread of Brahmo ideologies. Social activists and Brahmo emissaries like Nilmani Chakravarty and Avinash Chandra Lahiri rendered yeomen service in the uplift of the tribals of the region.

According to Sivanath Sastri (*The History of Brahmo Samaj*) there were 360 Brahmos in Assam at the beginning of the 20th century (1901). 'But although microscopic in terms of number, the contribution they made in different fields cannot be underestimated. At a time when the spirit of the so-called Bengal Renaissance had touched Assam and Christian missionary efforts were on to bring about changes in the province, the Brahmo Samaj activists in their own way were able to create a positive socio-cultural impact. They took a lead in education and cultural regeneration in the growing administrative towns of the province—Dhubri, Goalpara, Nagaon, Tezpur, Guwahati and Shillong.

The Brahmo Samaj also played important role in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills during the last quarter of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century. Philanthropic efforts of Brahmo missionary Nilmani Chakravarty and other members of the Brahmo fraternity supplemented Christian missionary efforts to educate the people and bring other societal changes. On occasions they worked in association with the Unitarian church whose members had high regard for Brahmo Samaj. A few Khasi families also embraced Brahmoism and took initiative in establishing schools and rendering humanitarian

service. Individuals like Jeeban Roy who was closely associated with Brahma Samaj activities in Shillong were, in the true sense of the term, torchbearers of change in Khasi society.

Brahmo emissaries from Bengal like Aghorenath Gupta, Ramkumar Vidyaratna and Dwarakanath Ganguly rendered immense service towards the emancipation of the tea garden coolies of Assam, victims of the crudest form of capitalist exploitation under Planter Raj. But for their efforts, the sorry tale of the tea garden workers would have remained untold for a long time.

Sadly, the significant contribution of the Brahma Samajists has remained a totally neglected field of research in the region. Though much has been researched and written on the contribution made by American and Baptist missionaries in different fields in the region, little has been done to highlight the role of the Brahma Samaj. Of course Amalendu Guha in his *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947* did touch upon the subject, as did other pieces of writing like articles by B. Dutta Ray, Gautam Neogi and this author in different volumes of *Proceedings of the North-East India History Association*, K.K. Dasgupta's article on Brahma Samaj (in S.P. Sen edited *Social and Religious Reform Movements in India*), Rajen Saikia's recently published work *Social and Economic History of Assam 1853-1921* and Tillotama Misra's *Swarnalata*, a novel based on the life of an Assamese Brahma lady. However, a detailed analysis of the Brahma movement in the region has remained largely beyond the scope of their studies.

The first hand accounts of coolie exploitation in Assam written by some Brahma missionaries in the nineteenth century are also available for consultation now. For example, the new edition and reprint of Ramkumar Vidyaratna's *Coolie Kahini* (first published in 1888, Reprints 1982, 1985), *Udasin Satyasrabar Assam Bhraman* (undated, Reprint 1982) and thirteen articles written by Dwarakanath Ganguly, Asst. Secretary of the Indian Association (which has been compiled into a book by Kanailal Chattopadhyaya) give us vivid pictures

of the sufferings of the tea garden workers of Assam under the British planters.

Dwarkanath had come to Assam as the Indian Association representative and also as Brahma Samaj reporter for *Sanjibani* in 1886. His book *Slavery in British Dominion* is an invaluable document for the scholars who are engaged in research on labour history of the region during the colonial period. His reports on different subjects related to the region starting from education, health, labour problem, emigration acts and Brahma activities were regularly published in the *Brahmo Public Opinion*, *Tattakoumudi Patrika*, *The Indian Messenger*, *Sanjibani* and other Brahma newspapers and magazines.

Reprints of *Oronodoi* (Maheswar Neog ed.) and some other papers in which articles of contemporary Brahma Samajists, Brahma admirers and members of the emerging intelligentsia of Assam (Gunabhiram Barua, Kamalakanta Bhattacharyya, Braja Sundari Devi, Padmabati Devi Phukanani, Hem Chandra Barua, Padmahash Goswami, Ratnakanta Mahanta, Lakshminath Bezbaruah and others) were published also provide important source material for researchers. Articles that appeared in the *Dacca Prakash*, *Bengalee*, *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* also provide good source material for interested scholars in the related field.

Scholars now have access to the original editions of some significant works of the 19th century relating to Assam including *Udasin Satyasrabar Asam Bhraman* (by Ramkumar Bhattacharjee), *Asam Bhraman* (author unknown), *Sudharmar Upakhyan* by Padmabati Debi Phukanani. Two small booklets—*Brahmo Dharmano Kak Bole* (by Padmahash Goswami, 1874), *Brahmo Dharmar Lakhman* (by Padmahash Goswami, 1873) are also available for consultation at the Oriental and India Office collections, London. Different works of Sivanath Sastri, Hem Chandra Barua, Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Kamalakanta Bhattacharyya (Prafulla Dutta Goswami ed) Jnanabhiram Baruah (J.N. Bhuyan ed.) also throw light on different aspects of the Brahma movement and reflect its concern on issues like polygamy, widow remarriage, status of women, higher

education and protection of local and indigenous language. Works of Prasenjit Choudhury, Jogendra Narayan Bhuyan, Amar Dutta and some other contemporary writers help us get a better understanding on the subject.

Biographies and diaries of some eminent Brahmo Samaj members like that of Lakshminath Bezbarauh's *Mor Jiban Sowaran*, Sivanath Sastri's *Atmajibani*, Sarada Manjari Debi's *Mahajstrar Pathe*, Subarna Prabha Das's *Jharapata*, Jnanabhiram Barua's *Mor Katha*, etc., contain a lot of information as do small volumes and booklets like *Mahapran Atul Chandra Roy*, *Shadhanasramer Itibritta*, *Bhakta Sadhak Mathura Nath Nandi*, *Mahapran Ramesh Chandra Mukherjee*, *Subarna Prabha Das O Tatkalin Nari Samaj*, *Brahmo Samaj and the Depressed Classes*.

It needs to be mentioned here that not many primary records and papers relating to the history of the Brahmo Samajes of the region are available now. Land grant and trust deeds of different temples have been lost. Except for the Dhubri, Guwahati and Shillong temples, all others have been demolished and temple lands encroached upon. Not much of the above mentioned sources have been utilized or explored by the students of history. No full-length study on the impact of the Brahmo movement in the region has been undertaken so long.

This study, based on hitherto unexplored primary and secondary sources and personal interviews attempts at documentation of these sources. Further, the study based on historical methods of investigation aims to investigate the impact of the Brahmo Samaj movement as well as reassess the contribution of Brahmo emissaries and local Brahmo activists in north-east India. The author has tried to utilize all possible sources and build the narrative thematically in three chapters, thus throwing some light on this lesser explored field of research—with the aim of drawing a more comprehensive picture of the Brahmo Samaj activities and its impact in north-east India.

This study attempts to examine the activities of Brahma Samaj and its impact in North-East India, undivided Assam in particular, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was through the philanthropic works of the Brahma missionaries and social activists that the effect of the so-called Bengal Renaissance could be partially felt in parts of North-East India. By introducing some aesthetic values in the socio-cultural life, the Brahma Samaj exercised a wholesome effect on a section of the Assamese elites. Though microscopic in terms of number, the Brahmans in Assam made significant contribution towards literature, journalism and education in Assam.

The Brahma Samaj activists seriously took up the plight of the workers of tea gardens in Assam. The Brahma missionaries visited tea gardens in the disguise of coolies and collected first hand information about their exploitation by the British planters. They wrote books and series of articles in the Brahma newspapers on the "quasi slavery" prevalent in the tea gardens of Assam. It was due to their relentless efforts, the colonial government was compelled to pass the Tea Garden Emigration Act Awards at the end of the nineteenth century.

In the Khasi Hills also, Brahma Samaj made its impact. Here a number of schools, libraries and the first women's college of the region were established because of the initiative of the Brahmans. Because of tireless efforts of some Brahma missionaries, social activists and Khasi Brahma converts, Brahma Samaj activities took the shape of a rural reconstruction movement in the Khasi Hills.

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