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INVOCATION

The true hero is one who conquers his own anger and hatred.

- Dalai Lama

* * * * *

The man who sows wrong thoughts and deeds, and prays that God will bless him, is in the position of a farmer who, having sown tares, asks God to bring forth for him a harvest of wheat. That which ye sow, ye reap.

- James Allen

* * * * *

Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.

- Kahlil Gibran

Editorial

Everywhere in the world, any change from a stagnant social order, has been brought about by the youth. If we look at the awakening of Bengal in the nineteenth century, we will find that it had been steered by the young men and women who were inspired by a noble ideal for which they were ready to sacrifice all they had. This new dawn was ushered into other parts of this subcontinent by the youth who opened the windows of their minds to modern ideas. The power and dedication of the younger generation need not be underestimated.

Recently in our own country, a very detrimental remark made by one in the highest echelons of our judicial system has sparked a series of reactions from the younger citizens of India that turned into a major rallying point. But from the very beginning, the youth have displayed a unique way of protesting against this unwelcome insult, which seem to have touched to the very core of their hearts. In spite of the provocation, it is heart-warming to see how measured their response has been, strengthened by a peaceful resolve that has given them the moral courage and ethical legitimacy. This protest, unlike the violent protestations of their counterparts in our neighbouring countries of Bangladesh and Nepal in the recent past, has been completely nonviolent and disciplined.

Whenever the youth raise their voice against injustice and corruption that have crept into our moribund society, it urges their seniors to break their silence and lend their support by coming out of their deep-seated complacency. This peaceful protest against a very dishonest system that holds the future of our upcoming generation at ransom, has shown its great strength of resilience and patience. The youth have borne the blunt of the wrath of our police force, who have mercilessly brutalized them to crush the protestations. And yet, they have neither budged nor have they retaliated by resorting to violence. Their unwavering will has forced their oppressors to yield to their demands for accountability from the system. It is a matter of hope that the protest was joined by citizens of all rank and file, irrespective of cast, creed, gender and religion. It has manifested the joint will of the people to bring about a positive response from the ruling dispensation and that too through a peaceful unison of purpose.

Today the world is becoming too captivated by gross material pleasures and an engulfing greed to satisfy the vested interests. Amidst this all-encompassing atmosphere of insatiability, the selfless struggles of the youth for a more just society is indeed commendable. Let the moral and ethical valour of the human soul triumph against its more uncivilized and unethical intents. The human mind is capable of both noble deeds as well as ignoble ones. Let it be our constant endeavor to win over the dastardly tendencies and

make place for morality. In an atmosphere charged with fanatic adherence to religious beliefs and the deplorable tendencies of condemning the faith of others to uphold one's own, it really is worth wondering if belief in God can simply encourage morality? In his article 'Can there be Morality Without God?' the author Amitava Khastgir ponders over this critical question.

We have recently celebrated Jaishthotsava, that marks the founding of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj on 15th of May, 1878. Rishi Raj Narayan Bose, who was keen to unite the different factions of the Brahmo Samaj voiced his concern to the Editor of Brahmo Public Opinion. His letter and its reply are being reproduced in this issue.

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Can There Be Morality Without God? (Part-1)

Dr. Amitava Khastagir

To make sense of our lives, to find a humanly tolerable basis for morality, we must believe in God: such was the view of two eminent philosophers approaching the issue from different standpoints; William James (1842-1910) from that of Pragmatism, Soren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855) from that of Existentialism of which he was the forerunner. Other thinkers of lesser stature, have pointed out that if we discard the kind of insight that Theism can give us, we will have no Archimedean point in accordance with which we can decide how to live and die. A purely secular ethics, contend the theists, constitutes merely of social conventions and expediency without any binding force. We can continue to act in accordance with them or we can reject them and adopt a different set of conventions with no overreaching norms as exemplified by, for example, the Ten Commandments, emanating directly from a Personal God. The question before us is: ‘is it the case only if we believe that there is a Personal God endowed with moral attributes then morality can have an adequate foundation?’

Before proceeding further, let us note an interesting and profound significant fact:

there is an inherent contradiction between Ethics and Religion. It is essential to the religious perspective that its object should be accepted as the really existing embodiment of an ideal, irrespective of whether we call it God. This is the point in which the religious attitude differs most profoundly from that of Morality. In one of the greatest religious allegories of all time, ‘The Pilgrims Progress’ ‘Mr. Morality’ is actually portrayed as an adversary of ‘Christian’, the pilgrim. In the moral experience, the ideal is apprehended as something which does not yet exist, but has to be brought about by human endeavor. Hence for the purely ethical attitude the world has to be thought of as essentially imperfect, out of accord with what it ought to be in order to correspond to our demand on it. Thus, there is not for Morality as there must be for Religion, such as issue as the ‘Problem of Evil’. That the world as we experience it contains imperfection and evil which must be eliminated is a practical presupposition without which Morality itself would cease to exist. But in religion the case is just the reverse. It is only in so far as the object of our adoration, viz. God or whatever it may be, is taken to be

the really existing embodiment of our highest ideal, that it can generate that mixed emotion of exaltation and abasement which is characteristic of all spiritual communion. Hence Religion looks upon its ideal as already existing in individual form, i.e., God by whatever name we call it. This is why devotion to an abstract principle, be it nationalism, socialism, humanism, proves so much inferior as a permanent expression of religious life, to devotion to a Person, be it the Personal God of Theism or a human individual such as Ramakrishna. Hence, one of the towering figures of Western philosophy (curious how one always has to fall back on philosophy, rather than religion, for enlightenment) Hegel, insisted that the significance of Christianity lies neither in the career nor in the moral teachings of Jesus (much of which had already been anticipated in Judaism) but in the recognition of the union of God and man realized in individual form in the person of Christ.

What is the outcome of this digression vis-à-vis our central topic? Briefly, it is this: there can certainly be a secular Morality, Morality without God, but its foundation would be tentative. Besides, such a Morality might culminate in Materialism and extreme Hedonism which upholds the pleasure-principle as supreme. If there is no transcendental ideal to live for, then of course, bodily

pleasure becomes the supreme goal in life. The Charvaka system of philosophy accordingly combines extreme materialism with extreme hedonism.

যাবৎ জীবৎ সুখং জীবৎ

ঋণং কৃত্বা মৃতং পীবেৎ

(As Long as you live, live in pleasure even if you have to borrow from others).

The Charvaka, it will be recalled, not only repudiates God, but human soul (after life and heaven with it), spiritual values and even the existence of ether (byom). There is nothing substantial but the body with its sense-organs and the mundane environment consisting of material objects. Satisfaction of the body is all that matters (pun intended). As a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority of people all over the world have accepted this and live by this, however repugnant it may appear to us. And because Nature abhors a vacuum, several pseudo-religions, dangerous and pernicious creeds masquerading as lofty ideals, such as Communism, have been on the pedestal vacated by the theistic faith.

Let us shift our standpoint and look at the issue from an Agnostic/Atheist's perspective. At 80, Bertrand Russell observed, "As to morality, a great deal depends upon how one understands the

term. For my part, I think the important virtues are kindness and intelligence. Intelligence is impeded by any creed, no matter what, and kindness is inhibited by the belief in sin and punishment..... There are various practical ways in which traditional morality interferes with what is socially desirable. One of these is the prevention of venereal disease.... I do not believe that a decay of dogmatic belief can do anything but good.... What the world needs is not dogma, but an attitude of scientific inquiry, combined with a belief that the torture of millions is not desirable whether inflicted by Stalin or by Deity imagined in the likeness of the believer.” (Ref: Why I Am Not A Christian by Bertrand Russell).

Bertrand Russell, be it remembered, was not merely an eminent philosopher; he was, like Romain Rolland and Albert Schweitzer, a great humanitarian. What Russell says here is corroborated verbatim by W. H. Lacky in his great work on the rise of rationalism: - “Until the 17th century, every mental disposition which philosophy pronounces to be essential to a legitimate research was almost uniformly branded as sin, and a large proportion of the most deadly intellectual vices were deliberately inculcated as virtues.... There is scarcely a disposition that marks the love as essential for its attainment, that theologians did not for centuries

stigmatise as offensive to the Almighty” (Ref: The Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe by W.H. Lacky).

Let us now get down to biographical details: solid facts that are beyond dispute. How does morality of Sceptics, agnostics and downright atheists compare with men of God, men whose lives were regulated by prayers, like our own Mahatma Gandhi? The supreme criterion of morality should be the conquest of the ‘shada ripu’ (with its Christian counterpart of seven deadly vices) viz, - Kama, Krodh, Lobh, moha, mada, and matsharya. A person who has conquered or transcended all six should be regarded as morally perfect. There have been very few individuals in entire human history who deserve this crown. Buddha, Socrates, Spinoza, Joan of Arc, Mirabai – these names emerge as deserving the crown. One would be hard pressed to go beyond this brief list. One is tempted to insert the manes of Ramakrishna, Gandhi and Nivedita in this list, before remembering that none of them were quite perfect. One recalls, with a sense of embarrassment his (Gandhi’s) meanness and hypocrisy in his dealings with Subhash Chandra Bose when the latter became the president of the Congress party. One also recalls his turning out at midnight of his devoted wife, Kasturba, because she refused to clean latrines of ‘methars’ or sweepers.

Nivedita had a violent temper and like her mentor Vivekananda, was petulantly intolerant of anyone who disagreed with her. As for Ramakrishna “টাকা মাটি, মাটি টাকা বলে পুকুরে টাকা ছুঁড়ে ফেলে আবার কুড়িয়ে আনলাম, কী জানি, মা-লক্ষ্মী যদি রাগ করে খ্যাঁট বন্ধক’রে দ্যান!” (thinking that money has no value, I threw it away; but fearing that Goddess Lakshmi may get annoyed and stop my rations, I picked them up again). Also, on the way back from a ‘bhakta’ (follower) after practicing his pet doctrine of renunciation of everything mundane, his query “হ্যাঁরে হুদু, গাড়িভড়াটা দিয়েছে তো (has he paid my transport fare?). These words were hardly worthy of one who is worshipped by his devotees as ‘Avatar Varishtha’ and even as “Purna Brahman’.

Let us get back to our query vis-à-vis the central topic and the list of five. Of the five, Gautam Buddha was a towering Agnostic who neither denied nor affirmed the existence of God. For him, the sole transcendental Reality was Nirvana. The sole concern of Socrates was determining the norms of good life, the password to it prescribed by him being: Know Thyself. He skirted the issue of Divine existence. Spinoza ‘the God-intoxicated man’ was actually an Absolutist: Deus Sive Natura: God or Nature (the universe), that was his

watchword. His infinite substance did not have the remotest resemblance to the personal God of the Semite religions. It was Mirabai who was truly a God-intoxicated person, as also Joan of Arc (who claimed divine inspiration) perhaps the youngest person ever to be conferred a sainthood, if not God-intoxicated like Mirabai, was at any rate a devout Christian.

The upshot of this retrospect is this: There is no concomitance between morality and belief in a personal God. The five great souls mentioned had nothing in common. There were vast differences between them in almost every respect. Yet each attained moral perfection or a close approximation to it. (Note that the adjunct ‘Personal’ is employed throughout to God, because without it ‘God’ might connote any entity from Samkara’s ‘Nirguna Brahman’ to Comte’s collective image of Humanity, instead of the God of Theism.)

To revert to the query which constitutes the topic of the present essay ‘Is Godless Morality Feasible’? An answer to this question, either in the affirmative or in the negative, is of supreme importance for the determination of our attitude towards Reality in general and towards our own lives in particular. It will depend on an answer to this query whether we shall consider the universe as determined

by forces completely out of relation with the human Good or whether we may trust our dearest moral aspirations and ideals will eventually be realized in ultimate reality. While no answer, either way, can be said to clinch the issue, I propose to quote at length from a book (761 pages) which is entirely occupied with the issue, viz. – ‘The Theory of Good and Evil’ by Hastings Rashdall. Published in 1907 and now almost forgotten, the book has lost none of its relevance: ‘The belief in God ... essential to the logical justification of that idea of objective validity which is implicit in the moral

consciousness at least in the higher stages of its development. The idea of God may, no doubt, in particular persons of strong moral convictions, not only not be explicit, but may be formally denied. The tendency, however, of its denial is and must be in the long run to weaken or destroy belief in objective Morality of the world. The idea of a future life seems an equally essential implication of morality for those who find it impossible without it to reconcile the facts of life with such a conception of God and of the world as essential for the rational interpretation of the moral consciousness’.

Letter of Rishi Raj Narayan to the Editor of Brahmo Public Opinion***Unification of the Three Samajes***

[Published in Brahmo Public Opinion, March, 1879]

6 March 1879

To the Editor of Brahmo Public Opinion

Dear Sir,

Many sincere and well-meaning Brahmos, especially a good number of such residing in the mofussil, deplore the present split in the Brahmo Camp and its division into three parties. They deeply regret that a religion, which began with preaching the brotherhood of man, should lead to quarrels and dissensions and mutual bickering and jealousies among its followers. They are however aware that difference of opinion is inevitable among frail and imperfect men and that difference of opinion leads to the formation of parties. They do not so much lament difference of opinion as the non-existence of a common bond of union among all classes of Brahmos. Mr. Mahadeo Govinda Ranade, subordinate judge of Nasik, wrote, to me under date the 29th August last:- I take this opportunity of suggesting that the time has come when the subject of the separation or schism in the Brahmo faith should attract the serious attention of all your leading reformers.

Since the late unhappy disputes (he here alludes to the Kutch Behar marriage agitation) this necessity has increased a

hundred-fold. There is really nothing distractive between the foundations of the three separate organisations in your city. The dispute relates to men and their government and has no justification for its continuance any longer in the bosom of a community which should give an example to the world of its catholic toleration and expensiveness. If your local schisms were made up, the foreign churches in the N.W. Provinces, Onde, and the independent movement in our own part of the country will all consent to swell the union and we shall have realized the highest and noblest fruits of Rajah Ram Mohun Ray's labours in laying the foundations of a theistic movement broadcast all over the country. Owing to your schism, such a fusion becomes impossible. We cannot persuade ourselves that it is our duty to show a preference to any one of our parties and this cautious and questioning spirit increases the alienation and distrust of each other's love and constancy. The work is of course, a very arduous one. Let the three churches conduct their lordship separately and administer their funds and institutions separately, but let there be one confession of faith based on the foundations which Rajah Ram Mohun Roy celebrated and which your Patriarch and yourself and Babu Keshub Chander

sen and the missionaries and Babu Shiva Nath Sastri and Babu Nabin Chunder Roy have laboured so well to complete. You may count upon receiving to the fullest extent the sympathies of the friends on this side of India. This is a subject which weighs much upon my mind.

We are such a handful in the midst of opposing or indifferent multitude that it is sheer vanity to expect our labours will bear any fruit while this state of things is allowed to continue. In the Report of last Anniversary gathering of the Parthana Samaj at Ahmedabad, held on December last, kindly forwarded to me by Rai Bahadur Bholanath Sarabhai, President of that Samaj, it is said that “a body of followers begin, believing in the same principle of religion, having the same social status, keeping the same ends in view and acting in the same direction to accomplish those ends should for slight differences, either real or fanciful break up into violent parties arrayed against one another in the very place where it originated, is a circumstance full of melancholy foreboding and sufficient to bring upon its members the scorn and ridicule of the whole world,” Rao Sahib Mahiput Ram – Upram, Secretary of the said Samaj, in his letter dated the 7th January last, says:- “If the Calcutta Brahmos were united they could do much more than they can in their present lamentable condition, Their internal

quarrels, jealous and disruptions are very harmful. A united movement in all the provinces of India is highly desirable, may it is necessary for success, though perhaps under our present state it is not possible”, How could a common feeling of union so anxiously desired by well – meaning Brahmo of the same stamp as the content of the noted letters quoted above, be promoted among the members of our community? The three separate organizations, entertaining such different views and principles, cannot surely be placed under a common Board of Direction; I think the proposed union is feasible, if we make Raja Ram Mohun Roy, the founder of our common Church, the centre of such union. That a union founded on such a centric possible, has been amply exemplified by the meeting that lately took place in the house of our Proddhan Acharya, Babu Debendra Nath Tagore to honour his memory. Brahmos of the times of Rajah Ram Mohun Roy, Brahmos of Adi Brahmo Samaj, Brahmo Samaj of India and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj down to the new youthful members of our community who as belong to no party and are the really catholic Brahmos amongst us, were present at the meeting. It was indeed a pleasant sight to behold. That the said meeting will bear some fruit, was anticipated not only by the Brahmos of Calcutta but also by those of other places. Mr. Vaman Abaji I Moduk, Principal of

the Surat High school, a jealous Brahmoswrote to me under date the 15th January, "I look upon you as one of the few who thorough appreciate the noble life and labours of the illustrious founder of our church and hence I appeal to you in his name, whose memory you are all going to honour in a special way this year. I ask in the name of the great Rajah Ram Mohun Roy whether the present strife and division amongst you at Calcutta are agreeable to his spirit which must be watching over the church with a paternal solicitude. How can you, thus divided, pray to worship God as his children? Cannot you and Babu Keshub and some moderate leaders of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj movement heal up the differences and worship God and honour the memory of Ram Mohun Ray together? Dear brother, try and God will help you." Mr.Yashwant Purshottam Manerikar, Secretary of the Bombay Prarthana Samaj says in his letter of the 3rd January last:- "We are sorry. We cannot avail ourselves of this happy opportunity to go over to Calcutta and attend the meeting which comes off on the 19th instant in honour of the memory of Rajah Ram Mohun Ray but humbly hope that this solemn occasion will well serve to remind all the Brahmos connected with the three sections of the Brahmo Samaj of the common cause they have solemnly espoused and a falling of the unity will at last-germinate on the

solemn occasion which all differences removed and forgotten, will subsequently result in a Reunion of the three section," Brahmos of other places than Calcutta who anticipated such results from the meeting as are expressed in the above extracts be glad to see that their anticipations have been fulfilled.

It is to be highly desired that the meeting in honour of the memory of Rajah Ram Mohun Ray would settle down into an annual institution.

Yours Truly

Rajnarain Bose

Calcutta

Editor's statements on Raj Narain Bose's letter.

Babu Raj Narain Bose's letter, which our readers will find in the correspondence column, raises a very important question for the consideration of Brahmo Samajes in Calcutta is a "consummation to be devoutly wished for". No one for one moment will question. But how far this is possible in the present state of affairs is rather a difficult question. The letter set out in our respected correspondent's communication, deserve more than a passing notice, while admitting the disadvantages of a split so ably and luminously pointed out in their letters. We beg to offer a few remarks on the causes of separation noticed in them and

we think it is necessary to do so to see how far unification is possible. Mr. Mahadeo Govinda Ranade says "there is nothing really distinctive between the foundations of the three separate organisations in your city. It clears he disputes relates to men and their government and has no justification for its continuance any longer in the bosom of a community which should give an example to the world of its Catholic toleration and expansiveness." The italics are ours. We beg to join issue with this distinguished Brahmo on the sentiments contained in the first part of the sentence quoted. We think our friend will find, on a perusal of the history of the two schisms which have already vent the Brahmo Samaj, that there is something distinctive in each of the "three separate organisations" "We do feel it our bounden duty to protest strongly against the idea that the dispute relates to men and their government. No such thing. The dispute is, and has always, been, for principle.

When Babu Kesub Chander Sen separated from the Adi Samaj, was it on any personal ground? No, it was because the Adi Samaj would not countenance inter Marriage, allowed persons who wore the upavit (holy thread) to preach from the Veda, and was so very conservative as regards social progress, that it was found next to impossibility to continence together. Yet was it because the venerable Debendra Nath Tagore,

who was the government, wore any upavit himself or was backward in anything spiritual or moral? No. If that were the case, the matter would have personal, and then our friend could have said, "the dispute relates to men and their government," Even up to date there is a difference of opinion as to the principle upon which the religious, moral or social reformation of our country is to be carried on. Our respected correspondent, Babu Raj Narain Bose, only the other day, at the annual meeting convened for doing honour to the memory of Raja Ram Mohun Roy, said that he was strongly of opinion that we should improve the Hindoo society by remaining in its midst, and not by coming out of its pale, that we should only introduce so much of reform as the Hindoo society in its present state can bear without causing any disruption, and slowly and gradually raise and improve the tone and character of that society. We differ as to the principle itself. We consider the principle is erroneous. Had Rajah Ram Mohun Roy not cut himself off from orthodox Hindoo society, he could not succeed half as much as he actually did. Had he not defied the Hindu society by breaking through the caste system and gone to Europe to enrich his mind with the lore of western sages, could he have given a new impetus to the national feeling? We think not. He could never have succeeded to raise his countrymen to his own level

if he had not given a distinctive feature to his movement-- a feature not at all Hindu so far as his religious and social reformation was concerned. Why did not Pundit Ishur Chander Vidyasagar's widow marriage system work well? The learned Pundit devoted much of his time and labour and almost emptied his pocket towards its furtherance and even got the legislature to take under its wing. The issues of such a marriage yet he did not succeed and why? Because it was a mere patch work, an attempt to reconstruct the old Hindu system with new materials, true, but on its old foundation. We have got good reasons to differ from Babu Raj Narain as to the principle, yet do we for that less respect and honour him? No. The fight is of principle, not men. Again, on the occasion of the second schism, have the fight been about men and not about principle when the doctrine of inspiration was carried so far as to sanction an idolatrous marriage and since then that doctrine has been held to justify a man furthering upon the Lord his own sins and weaknesses, when we are told there are persons especially elected to preach the savings truths of religion and that those persons are irresponsible being so far as their mission is concerned, when we are told that a mediator is absolutely necessary between us and our God. A kind of Ghatak (match maker) for bringing alliance between us and our Lord, is it possible we ask Mr. Ranade, to

continue in the same church? Is it a dispute which relates to men and then government? We hope not. It concerns vital principles of our religion, and there is nothing left but to separate. But we do not say therefore unification is not possible. There is a Catholic platform on which we can meet, make the first principle of religion not this or that religion but of religion, we say, the basis of theism leave doctrines and creeds asides, and we can certainly shake hands with each other and unit to further the spread of true religion and morality in India. The existence of one true God, who governs the universe, sees the hearts of every human being, from whom nothing can be concealed, who is Unchangeable, Immutable, Good, Merciful who is incapable of doing or commanding us to do a wrong, is all that is necessary to unite us. He is the God of the Hindus, the Christians, the Mahomedans, the Jews and the Gentiles. He is the God of the Brahmos. The necessity of prayer, future world inspiration such as we believe in, is all converged by the attributes which we ascribe to God. This is the universal basis upon which we can build the huge fabric of national unity in all matters -- religions, social, moral and political. Raja Ram Mohun Roy laid the foundation of this fabric and we dare say, if we adhere to the first principles, laying aside differences in doctrines, in creeds

and forms of ritual, we may yet agree and unite. We thank the writers of the several letters mentioned in Mr. Bose's correspondence and we shall only be too glad to welcome any attempt to bring about a re-union of the three Samajes. There must be forgiveness and forgetfulness on all sides and all differences as to the details of an elaborate creed must be buried, make religion our creed, and we shall succeed. So long as we are weak, fallible beings, differences as to details of a creed shall exist and there is no golden way out of it. But that should not stand in our way of uniting to regenerate our country. Let the divided forces unite and it will be impossible for the country to withstand these united forces. We think the

unification possible on the only broad and catholic basis which we propose and move other. We think we have shown that there are differences of principles in the three Samajes. There must be a natural ground on which these differences can either be reconciled or put by for individual men – the units of an organisation, and other principles, about which there can be no difference of opinion, must be made the foundation of unity and strength.

[Brahmo Public Opinion March, 1879.
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[Courtesy Mr. Prodyut Bose]

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Donation

DN/GL No.	Donor's Name	Occasion	Purpose	Amount (₹)
GL - 1405	Arghya Roy	In memory of Late Bhabani Ray	General Fund	1,000
GL - 1413	Rita Bhimani		Mahila Bhavan Fund	670

Meditate on the Eternal One !
 Who equally pervades land, water and air,
 Who has created this Universe of which
 there is no beginning and no end;
 He knows all, but none know Him.
 Him, who is the supreme Lord of all Lords,
 the God of Gods, the Master of Masters,
 the Supreme Perfection of all Perfection;
 Him, who reveals himself and is the
 adorable Lord of all creation,
 Let us realize Him !

- Rammohun Roy