

# MODEL FOR ENCOUNTER AMONG PEOPLE OF GOODWILL

Proceedings and Presentations of the  
Symposium  
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Time: 9.00 a.m to 8.30 p.m.

It matters very little whether  
the follower of Christ  
wears a turban or a topi.  
The Catholic Church has  
never taught her converts  
to give up national customs and habits  
which are not expressive of superstition.  
-- Upadhyaya



Life: Feb 11, 1861

New Life: Feb 26, 1891

Life Eternal: Oct 27, 1907

**brahmanandhab  
upadhyaya**

## AN INSPIRATION FOR AN ACTIVE LAITY IN GOA

Dr. Rafael Fernandes

Even a very sketchy reading of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya's biography or his writings, makes one realize the complexity of his life. In the words of Lipner "Upadhyaya is one of the enigmas of modern India, and ... a potential embarrassment to those who invoke him."<sup>1</sup> Hence it is difficult to do justice to such a luminary by speaking about him in just a few words. There is no doubt that Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya merits being considered as an inspiration for all Indians, and Christians in particular. I shall briefly interpret or look at a few extracted aspects of Upadhyaya's life which are of significance to the laity in Goa. Very broadly these areas of vibrancy deal with our life at home or in the family, in the community and the society.

Bhabanicharan, as he was named, was the youngest of three surviving children, his older brothers being Haricharan and Parbaticharan.. His father Debicharan was a police inspector in the employ of the British and belonged to that category of educated Bengali called the 'bhadralok' (i.e. the 'cultured folk'). His mother, Radhakumari, died when he was about a year old and he was brought up by his paternal grandmother, Chandramoni, who, being a widow, lived in the same household. Bhabani was a conscientious learner and he absorbed a great deal about Bengali family and rural life from his grandmother. He made good use of this knowledge in the last few years of his life, especially in his Bengali publications. Though western influence was strong in the home (Haricharan and Parbaticharan went on to become a doctor and a pleader respectively), the grandmother's presence helped to foster the traditional side. In fact it is important to note that the early rooting in his ancestral culture had an enduring effect on Bhabani and his desire to indigenize the Christian faith which he was to adopt later. Much as we can engage in unending debates about the sustainability of traditional joint families, what the foregoing points out is the need to maintain strong familial ties, even though our families are increasingly becoming urbanized and consequently nuclear.

Another significant early influence in Bhabani's life was his paternal uncle Kalicharan who had become a Christian, yet continued to be an integral member of the family and visited home on weekends to teach the boys. This brings up the question of what should be our attitude towards those from

our family or neighbourhood who join other denominations, whom we tend to group or label as 'believers' Should we learn something from them or take such a self-righteous attitude so as to treat them as pariahs and ostracise them. This would make our own behaviour 'unchristian'.

"Bhabani was quite familiar with the thought of leading, contemporary exponents of Catholic doctrine writing in English. Before his Baptism Bhabani made good use of the adequately stocked local parish library." How many of our Parishes actually have a library? And if they do, do we encourage people to read formative books. Perhaps in today's context we should pay attention to having multi-media material that is made available to as many viewers. If our youngsters cannot find good material from the parish or neighbourhood then they will easily find alternative CDs from the video shops and their peers.

If Bhabani was an ardent learner during his youth, he was as passionate in his studies of Catholic doctrine in the years after his conversion. Bhabani militantly made use of the printed media to propagate his views and 'help the seekers after the Truth to arrive at the True Knowledge of the True Religion'. Just as the Letter to the Hebrews proclaimed Scripture to be sharper than a double-edged sword, Bhabani's writings in *The Sophia* gave ample evidence of his 'vigorous and knowledgeable understanding of Catholic teaching and his equally spirited opposition to rival views.'

Whereas Bhabani was convinced during his late teens that the sword was the appropriate instrument to get rid of the undesirable foreigners, in his thirties and forties he transformed the pen to be a mighty weapon in his spiritual endeavors and patriotic fervour. He made the best use of his talents combining teaching with journalism, to achieve his objectives. It must be emphasised that he lived his Christianity, being an example to his students and even attending to the plague-stricken in Karachi in 1896. (One cannot avoid a reference to the other great Indian soul who lived his Christianity amazingly: Sadhu Sundar Singh whose birthday will be remembered on 3<sup>rd</sup> September.)

At this juncture it is pertinent to point out two aspects of Upadhyaya's life that are very relevant to the Laity in Goa. The first concerns our personal and community life particularly with reference to our festivities where alcohol usually flows freely. Upadhyaya struggled to break the stereotyped impression about Christians. He wrote 'one who believes as a Christian need not be one who drinks liquor and eats beef, who hates the scriptures of India as lies and her inspired men as impostors.' Two decades

back the film '*Albert Pinto ko gussa kyon ata hai*' attempted to correct some of the stereotype images of Goan Christians. Much is talked about how Goan culture and Christianity is being misrepresented by the media, entertainment and tourism industry. We need to ask ourselves whether the facts are drastically different or whether we have continued to contribute to such impressions.

The other aspect of Upadhyay's life that calls for our attention is his commitment to India's Independence. He wanted complete freedom from the oppression of the colonizers and exploiters. Political freedom is only one of the facets of freedom. But many who fought for the political freedom of Goa, have over the past few years questioned the outcome of their efforts and sacrifices. Agitations in Goa over the past two decades have shown that social uprisings have to be directly proportionate with Socio-Political-Environmental degradations. At one time these issues were few and far between such as the pollution by Zuari Agro Chemicals, the fear over capitation colleges and DuPont's Nylon 6,6. The agitation for recognition of Konkani as Goa's official language in 1987 marked a watershed in people's movements. The number of issues against which people have to campaign is on the increase. Issues of Meta-Strips and Konkani Railway Re-alignment may have been relegated to the recent past but there are now more serious issues, which could undermine Goa's future considerably. Besides the tourism-related evils such as drugs and paedophilia we also have to reckon with casino boats and CRZ violations. Though the Goa Bachao Abhiyan, People's Movement for Civic Action and other NGOs managed to stall the insidious Regional Plan from immediate devastation, the struggle is far from over. Goan politics, with its money and muscle power, post-election horse-trading and intrigues, calls for a highly vigilant society. Like the leaven that affects the dough, the laity will have to play a very pro-active role. Should we just wait and watch, pretend we see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil, or should we call a spade a spade and say emphatically 'Woe to you hypocrites, Goan Catholic Faustuses and MLAs.?'

Conflict is of three main types: Humans against Natural forces or elements, Humans against other Humans and thirdly internal conflicts, or within Oneself. Battles with one's conscience may be mitigated by Casuistry, but conflicts with external forces and authorities are not always easily resolved. Some writers tend to look at Upadhyay as just a freedom fighter. [As in the case of Admiral Ronnie Pereira, one of India's best loved and admired Naval Chiefs, whose strong catholic faith determined his life; we must realize

that Upadhyaya's faith gave him the courage of conscience to take on the might of the authorities.] In Upadhyaya's life, besides his contemporaries and imperialists such external forces also included ecclesiastical authorities represented by Archbishop Ladislas Zaleski, Apostolic Delegate in India, who in accordance with the attitude of the times could not gauge his far-sightedness, hence his attempts towards fostering an Indian Christianity could not meet with much immediate success. Today's laity in Goa may not have to deal directly with ecclesiastical authorities since the hierarchy is fairly well established. But issues at the parochial level may remain unresolved, or worse still, result in fragmentation of parish and community life when pastoral priorities are sidelined and commercial interests gain the upper hand. If the objectives of the Goa Diocesan Synod are to be fulfilled, channels of communication and resolution within the church must be sincerely utilized.

Providentially, the proliferation of mass media is helping to highlight public issues that can be debated openly. Besides newspapers, TV channels are providing the much-needed platform to highlight the good, the bad and the ugly. It is, therefore, up to the laity to make the optimum use of such media and be active participants in the affairs of the church, our state and our country. With the impetus provided since Vatican II, the writings Pope John Paul II of beloved memory, and others, the Laity will have to be more pro-active to change the traditional misconception that the laity is only supposed to listen, pray, pay and go away. Thank you.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Julius J. Lipner. "Introduction", Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya. Bangalore: United Theological College, 2002, xv.

<sup>2</sup> Id. xv

<sup>3</sup> Id xxxiii

<sup>4</sup> Id xxxiv