

Contributions of Akshay Kumar Dutta : The Legend of 19th Century Renaissance

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1. Introduction:

The least we owe to the leading protagonists of 19th century Renaissance led by men and women endowed with unfathomable talents, is to study the myriad aspects of their personalities and roles performed to generate social awareness and reform the society out of medieval thoughts and customs. The attributes that made them extraordinary and relevant even today is essentially confined to their indomitable efforts to filter the society of superstition and prejudice that obstructed social development and human productivity. Contrary to a popular notion that the movement was limited to Bengal, history of 19th century India reveals that the leading lights of Renaissance were scattered all over undivided India. For example, there were such legends of social reform like Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905), Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831), David Drummond (1785-1843), Dinabandhu Mitra (1830-1873), Radhanath Sikdar (1813-1870), Ramtanu Lahiri (1813-1898), Rev. Krishna Mohan Banerjee (1813 - 1885), Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73), Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-94), & Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). Among these great men, stand **Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar** (26 September 1820 – 29 July 1891) and **Akshay Kumar Dutta** (15 July 1820 – 18 May 1886) as the tallest contributors of renaissance in Bengal.

In contrast to a popular notion, the renaissance of 19th century was not a “Bengal Renaissance” but spread its wings all across the country. For example, in north India, it took root in the activities of Arya Samaj by Dayananda Saraswati (1824 – 1883) and in Maharashtra in the Brahmo Prarthana Samaj (1867) founded by M.G. Ranade and R.G.Bhandarkar. In Andhra Pradesh the movement was initiated by Viresalingam (1848 - 1919). A defining feature of all these movements was that they were all upper caste–class phenomena and catered to meet the social and spiritual demands of the newly emerging middle class. Paramhansa Sabha (1849) in Maharashtra also played a glorious role. Concurrently, we also find such luminaries like Dadabhai Narorji (1825-1917) and Behramji Malbari (1853-1912) in Maharashtra, Bholanath Sarabhai (1822-1866) in Gujarat, Fakirmohan Senapati (1843-1918), Madhusudan Rao (1853-1912) and Radhanath Roy (1848-1908) in Orissa, Anandaram Borooah (1850-1889) and Laksminath Bezbarua (1864 - 1938) in Assam to name just a few.

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These reformers were endowed with a combination of enviable qualities like human excellence, depth of learning, interactions with western civilization and gift of literature. Each of the pioneers of Renaissance was crafted with keen intellect, integrity, courage, conviction, generosity, sensitivity and compassion. The ferment of Renaissance was ingrained with a new outlook of a progressive human society which will assimilate the best of our past heritage with the concepts and ideas of reason, emancipation, human rights and dignity of labour, scientific attitude which formed the substance of European Renaissance.

2. Life of Akshay Kumar Dutta:

However, in this Paper, we will confine a discussion on the life and contributions of Akshay Kumar Dutta in the perspective of the achievements of Renaissance in Bengal. The narrative will inevitably refer to the great roles performed by Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891), the tallest legend of that era in as much as these two great men were very close friends and comrades. They actively collaborated to lead the movement of social reform on multiple fronts as we will see in the following discussion. Their contributions to social reform were complementary so much so that the example of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels come to our mind.

2.1 Early Life and Education:

Born at Chupigram near Nabadwip in an orthodox and not very educated Hindu family of moderate means, Akshay Kumar Dutta was exceptionally inquisitive from a very early age. His father was a sub-inspector at the customs collection point at Kudghat near Kolkata. Indifferent guardians marred his early education and precious early years were lost. While a student of class seven in the Oriental Seminary of Kolkata, his father died and his formal education came to an end. In the school he could attract the attention of his teacher Hardman Jeffrey, a great philologist with whom he took lessons in the Greek, Latin, German, French, and the Hebrew. Hardman Jeffrey also taught him physics, geography, geometry, algebra, trigonometry, general science, psychology etc. He learnt Persian and Arabic languages from Amiruddin Munshi. By the time he was nineteen, with extreme perseverance and focus, he had effectively mastered Euclid Mathematics and Differential Calculus with the help of Hardman Jeffrey, his Scottish tutor at the Oriental Seminary School, Kolkata and his scholar-mentors Ananda Krishna Basu and Srinath Ghosh at the fabulous library of Shovabazar Rajbari. He had also learnt English language & literature, some French, a little German, Latin and of course Sanskrit. Physics, Botany, Astronomy, Geography, Anthropology and Philosophy were his favourite subjects. Over the years, Dutta acquired rationality in thought processes and a vision of social existence that was based on scientific temperament and outlook. Gradually he mastered proficiency in oriental languages, Bengali literature, ancient Sanskrit Texts, Linguistics and Journalism and became actively involved in social movements of mid 19th century against illiteracy, obscurantism,

communalism, atrocities against women, child marriage and other forms of socio-cultural backwardness. By dint of his indomitable thirst of knowledge, Dutta studied the Western Philosophers like Bacon, Lock, Hume, Kant, Humoldt, Stewart, Mill, Huxley and others as well as Darwin. Concurrently, he carefully studied the history of evolution of the Indian Society over past 5000 years or so, unfolding of religiosity and its transformations and ancient texts like the Veda and Upanishada. Simultaneously, with extreme hardship but never to give up, Dutta learnt science over several years by practical experiments in laboratories of some of his friends and mastered the fundamentals of Physics, Chemistry, Zoology, Botany, Astronomy, Geology and Geography. This enabled him to inculcate a world view that was supported by science.

2.2 Facets of the Weird:

In some important ways, Dutta carried forward a line of argument first advanced in colonial Bengal by Rammohun Roy (1774–1833), advocating the progressive replacement of archaic and outmoded forms of indigenous knowledge by those which were socially and professionally [useful](#)¹. Like Roy again, Dutta was an admirer of the English philosopher Francis Bacon (1743–1803) and his inductive line of reasoning, which supported scientific observation and [experiments](#)². He also followed Roy's example of being an advocate of reforms for women. In the 1860s and 1870s, when conservatism had begun to take hold of the Hindu mind, Dutta was among the few to consistently support both widow remarriage and the legal abolition of multiple marriages among upper-caste Hindu males.

2.2.1. The Legacy :

There is complete unanimity that Raja Rammohan Roy was the pioneer of Indian Renaissance and he focused on two aspects, enlightenment through education and social reform to get rid of superstitious practices that were atrocious to the women in particular. But Ideas of [Raja-Rammohan](#)³ did suffer from an obvious self-contradiction. While he welcomed application of Baconian empiricism based on the principles of reason, logic and materialistic world view in contrast to metaphysical religiosity, he at the same time spoke in favour of Vedantism, albeit of a new kind. Paying utmost attention to sense data was the hallmark of Baconian empiricism, while the basic tenet of Vedantism, particularly Sankara's Mayavad, is that true reality is beyond the perception of the senses, including the mind. And yet, despite all this, he was bent upon establishing the monotheistic greatness of Indians as exemplified in Vedanta. But the question was not of one or many gods, it was whether you were able to see reality with an open eye or

¹ Ashish Lahiri (2007). *Akshay Kumar Datta: Aandhar Raatey Ekla Pathik*, Dey's Publishing, Kolkata.

² Anderson, Fulton H. (1962). *Francis Bacon : His career and his Thought*. University of Southern California Press.

³ *Biography of Raja Rammohan Roy*, RPH Editorial Board, Reader's Delight, New Delhi, 1972.

not. He almost said this, but not quite. This little hesitation has ever since marked nearly every 'progressive' intellectual endeavor of the Bengalis. In other words, the conflict between the compromising, hide-bound, so-called Hindu paradigm and the rationalistic, scientific and the rationalist and secular humanistic trend in Roy's thought found fruition in Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar⁴ and Akshay Kumar Dutta while his theistic ideas were inherited by Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905). According to Dutta, the clinching points of the education envisaged by Rammohan were the Baconian education and not Sanskrit scripture-based modern education for India. Dutta explains: 'Language is not knowledge. Language is only the gateway to the treasury of knowledge. One has to turn the key and open the door to that treasury.' So, 'only that language is adorable and worth learning by all means that is full of true gems of genuine knowledge.' In the very next sentence, he explains what he means by genuine knowledge. Only that knowledge is genuine 'which sharpens the intellect, cleanses the mind of errors and superstitions and allows one to learn the actual laws that govern the world.' As an end result, this true knowledge allows one to discern and determine one's duties. 'One must acquire only that kind of knowledge which would enable one to further the maximum good of one's own and of the society at large.' Having said so, he expresses the opinion that the Sanskrit-based traditional education was not a suitable coffer for the true knowledge of the time. 'Deep-seated errors, fancifulness and superstition are spread all over the Sanskrit scriptures.' Those 'who are well-versed in English, French or German find little of worth in Sanskrit so far as acquiring real knowledge is concerned.' Access to any of these three languages enables one to easily acquire 'real knowledge' the quantum of which is 'thousand times more' than that accessible through Sanskrit. Quite clearly, he hints at the empirical scientific knowledge as the only true, that is, positive, knowledge, à la Comte. Thus, stated simply, Dutta's point is that Sanskrit cannot be the instrument for acquiring modern scientific knowledge, which is the most important kind of knowledge in the present era. As he understood it, Rammohan was the first person in this country to realise and vociferate this. However, in order to forestall any mis-informed criticism, be it clearly mentioned here that Dutta had no doubts as to the *medium* of education: it must be the vernacular. He never wrote in English. All his textbooks and other works are in Bengali. Thus, his plea for introducing Baconian knowledge in English never for a moment stood against the assimilation and dissemination of that knowledge in one's vernacular. Dutta, who was well versed in both English and Sanskrit (and also had a sprinkling of French and German), was by no means against studying Sanskrit. All that he wanted was that Sanskrit should be studied as a special tool for historical studies, for linguistics, even for 'collecting excellent cures from Indian medicine', but not by any means for studying empirical science. Sanskrit studies should form a specialized domain and not a compulsory part of general culture. And this is where he waxes eloquent over Rammohan; 'One trembles in amazement to think of his love for science in that distant age. One simply marvels at the fact that at a time when India was virtually steeped in

⁴ Gopal Halder (1972). Vidyasagar, A Reassessment, Peoples Hub, New Delhi.

darkness, when Hindu society had perhaps not even heard of such a thing as European science, it was he who expressed such wonderful affinity and passion for science.' Roy, however, believed that India's political future would be bright in the hands of the British. And this is where Dutta, despite being such a great admirer of the former, strongly differed. Although he could not envisage any immediate alternative to British rule, he was keenly conscious of the all round ill effect of that rule on every aspect of the Indian society. As he wrote, "The British have occupied India by ignoble means and are ruling it by ignoble means".

2.2.2. An Eminent Educationist and Pedagogue :

During 1838 Akshay Kumar came in contact with Ananda Chandra Bose and Iswar Chandra Gupta. The latter inspired him to write articles for the weekly newspaper Sangbad Prabhakar. While writing for this paper, Akshay Kumar Dutta came in contact with Devendranath Tagore. When the Tattvabodhini Sabha was established on 6 October 1839, he became its member on 26 December. In January 1840, he was elected its Assistant Secretary. By the initiative of 'Tattvabodhini Sabha' the 'Tattvabodhini Pathshala' was established in Calcutta on 13 June 1840, and he was appointed as one of its teachers⁵. He used to teach Geography and Physics. As books on these two subjects in Bengali were not available at that time, he wrote two textbooks Bhugol (1841) and Padarthavidya (1857). His Bhugol is the first science-related book written in Bengali language and through this book Akshay Kumar introduced punctuation marks in the Bangla language. Though written later, Padarthavidya is the first book on pure science in Bengali. In collaboration with Prasanna Kumar Ghosh, Akshay Kumar Dutta launched the publication of a monthly journal named Bidyadarshan. The main objective of the journal was to inculcate in the minds of the people, the temperament and principles of science and get them science oriented. Later on, some other paper like Banga Darshan, Aryadarshan, Hindu Darshan took their name after the Bidyadarshan⁶. On 30 April 1843, the Tattvabodhini PATHASALA was shifted from Kolkata to the village Bansberia in Hugli district.

On 16 August 1843, 'Tattvabodhini Patrika' was launched under the patronization of Debendranath Tagore with Akshay Kumar Dutta as Editor⁷. This paper was the organ of the Brahma Samaj, and its objective was to discuss the Brahma religion and spiritual knowledge. However, with the initiative of Akshay Kumar Dutta the theme of literature, science, philosophy, sociology, archaeology, history, geography got priority. Although on 21 December 1843 Akshay Kumar Dutta along with his twenty friends embraced the Brahmafaith, he remained indifferent on religious matters. On 1 June 1845, his David Hare Memorial Address was delivered, which was published in the following year. In his speech on that day, he put a special emphasis on developing a national education policy and highlighted the need to introduce education in the

⁵ The Autobiography of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, Satyendranath Tagore, Alpha Edition, New Delhi, 2019.

⁶ Bangiya Sahitya Parisad et.al. (1941). Akshaykumar Datta, Brajendranath Bandhyopadhyay, Bangiya Sahitya Parisad, Kolkata.

⁷ Ibid; p-13 (Ref-5)

mother language. He wanted to change the old textbooks and introduce new syllabus. He proposed to the British government to raise funds from each village to set up Bangla schools and to introduce compulsory, free education. He also proposed to establish agriculture and technical schools in the villages. He put a special emphasis on setting up of a library in each village.

Akshay Kumar Dutta along with Rakhaldas Halder, Kanailal Pyne, Ananga Mohan Mitra established the '*Atmiya Sabha*' (Society of Friends) in the residence of Debendranath Tagore who became its president and Akshay Kumar Dutta its Secretary. The aim of this Atmiya Sabha (7) was to discuss the issues like social problems, science and knowledge of the East and West, and social reform. He believed that religious services should be in Bangla and not in Sanskrit.

On the problems of the peasantry, he wrote a regular, scathing column titled '*Palligramastha Prajadiger Durabostha*' (misery of the rural folk) in the *Tattvabodhini Patrika*⁸ to protest the oppression by the zamindars and indigo planters. He vehemently criticized The Permanent Settlement Act as it sapped the agricultural resources of the country. His Books *Baspio Ratharohidiger Prati Upadesh* and *Darmonnati Songsadhan Bishoyak Prostab* were published in March and April of 1855 respectively. The former was the first book on railway by a Bengali writer and the second book provides a brief history of the development of various religions.

Progressive thinker and writer Akshay Kumar Dutta remains an unsung hero from renascent Bengal (1817-1857) that had its fair share of celebrities and heroes. Dutta possessed not only a sharp intellect, but the courage and conviction to articulate certain views or proffer arguments that proved rather objectionable and distasteful to people of his class in contemporary Calcutta. For one, he was behind the reformist Brahmo Samaj, renouncing its faith in the Vedas as *pramana* (proof), or an authentic source for Hinduism; surely a revolutionary step for the time. Dutta found the Vedas to be internally inconsistent—as any work of human authorship was apt to be — and argued instead that 'nature' itself and not any humanly authored text would be better qualified to be called a 'scripture'.

The intellectual legacy of Dutta manifested itself broadly in two ways. First, he was pre-eminently an educationist and pedagogue who successfully ran schools and experimented with the teaching and dissemination of useful and practical knowledge, suitably adapted from the West. Arguably, he was also the first in his generation to invent a scientific vocabulary in the Bengali language for the teaching of elementary science. Like Vidyasagar, he was a successful author of school textbooks, as for instance, *Charupath (Elementary Lessons, 1853–54, Vol I, II, III)*, *Bhugol (Geography, 1851)* and *Padarthavidya (Physics, 1856)*. As a writer and editor, Dutta contributed substantially to the improvement of Bengali journalism and the evolution of modern

⁸ The Autobiography of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, Satyendranath Tagore, Alpha Edition, New Delhi, 2019.

Bengali prose. Dutta's argued that it was no less important to understand creation than the creator himself, reinforces the foundations of empirical science.

It is somewhat ironic that perhaps Dutta's best-known work is a two-volume narrative on Hindu religious communities in contemporary India- '*Bharatvarshiya Upasak Sampraday*', (Vol I and II). In the first volume, Dutta displays great erudition and the ability to muster ideas and methodologies across disciplines like history, philology and religious studies. This work, believed to be based on the Orientalist HH Wilson's classic account of the Hindu religious sects and communities (*A Sketch of the Religious Sects of the Hindus*, 1828), actually goes well beyond it. Dutta carried out extensive field-work, investigating extant Hindu religious communities and a third volume might well have emerged but for the untimely death of its [author](#)⁹.

3. Joint Struggle for Social Reform by Akshay Kumar Dutta and Vidyasagar:

His closest friend and comrade in carrying through struggles for social reform was the greatest reformer of 19th century, Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820–91), on request of Dutta, Vidyasagar associated himself with 'Tattobodhini Patrika' and became Chairman of the [Editorial-Board](#)¹⁰. Eventually, in 1855 when Dutta became ill and could not discharge the responsibilities due to ill health, Vidyasagar became the Chief Editor. This Journal was the most respected among the intelligentsia in Kolkata and Bengal in that period and it offered a great opportunity to Vidyasagar to articulate his views on dangers of religious orthodoxy, superstitious practices leading to human abuses, widow re-marriage, early marriage of girls, women literacy, mass education, education in subjects in the discipline of science, free schools in villages etc. On 17 July 1855, the 'Normal School' was established in Calcutta for Teachers' Training. On Iswar Chandra's request, Akshay Kumar Dutta became its [Head-Teacher](#)¹¹. Subsequent period saw Dutta explaining the rationals of Vidyasagar's works in the areas of widow re-marriage and prohibition of child marriage in terms of science, humanism and democratic rights of individuals while Vidyasagar was compelled to fight the hard core Brahmin pundits by referring to provisions in ancient texts that spoke loudly against such social evils. In this respect, the roles of these two icons were [complementary](#)^{12 & 13}.

4. The Protagonist Extraordinary :

Dutta represents an exceptional stream of thought and consciousness. Quite extraordinarily, at a time when religion had become the preferred mode of self-expression for Western-educated

⁹ Amiya P.sen (2019). The Extra-Ordinary Life and Works of Akshay kumar Dutta, www.sahapedia.org

¹⁰ The Autobiography of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, Satyendranath Tagore, Alpha Edition, New Delhi, 2019.

¹¹ Asiatic Society (2009). *Akshay kumar Datta O Unish Shataker Bangla, Bangladesh*. MS Islam. Asiatic Society, Dhaka.

¹² Sriyukta Babu Akshaykumar Datter Jiban-Brittanta , Mahendranath Ray. Kolkata,

¹³ Malay Sankar Bhattacharya, (2019). A Life Out Of A Joint. Amar Bharati, Kolkata.

Hindus, both Vidyasagar and Dutta extended their critique of contemporary Hindu faith and practice to the point of incredulous irreverence. While Vidyasagar argued that he had no need for a God who was powerless in preventing the merciless oppression of the weak and the innocent, Dutta insisted that honest human labour was likely to be as productive by itself as labour coupled with prayer. In true algebraic fashion, Dutta placed the value of faith and prayer as 'zero'. At least in the case of Dutta, his concerted tirade against religious practices may largely explain his gradual fading from public memory, even in his native Bengal¹⁴.

In some important ways, Dutta carried forward a line of argument first advanced in colonial Bengal by Rammohun Roy (1774–1833), advocating the progressive replacement of archaic and outmoded forms of indigenous knowledge by that which was socially and professionally useful. Like Roy again, Dutta was an admirer of the English philosopher Francis Bacon (1743–1803) and his inductive line of reasoning, which supported scientific observation and experiments¹⁵. And like Roy again, he was an advocate of woman-related reform. In the 1860s and 1870s, when conservatism had begun to take hold of the Hindu mind, Dutta was among the few to consistently support both widow remarriages and legal abolition of multiple marriages among upper-caste Hindu males.

Dutta's lasting contribution is his creative interpretation of the moral and scientific discourse of the contemporary West for the educated, middle-class Hindus of his time. Here, one can detect three major influences on his thought- all of which originated in contemporary or near contemporary Western thinkers. First, there was the English deist, William Paley (1743–1805), second, the Scottish phrenologist George Combe (1788–1858) and third, the French social theorist, Auguste Comte (1798–1857). From Paley, Dutta imbibed a deistic view of the world that spoke of a distant God uninterested in the day-to-day functioning of his creation. This argument he then joined to Combe's ideas (from *The Constitution of Man*, 1828 of a set of perfect natural laws, the observance of which assured human happiness. Such ideas Dutta found expression in his two well-known treatises- '*Bahya Bastur Sahit Manavprakritir Sambandha Vichar*' (*A Treatise on the Relationship between Human Nature and* In late life, the ideas of Comte led him to a spell of agnosticism. Here, it would be interesting *the External World*, 2 volumes, 1851 and 1853) and '*Dharmaneeeti*' (*Principles of Morality*, 1856) to note that unlike Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, also briefly influenced by the Positivism of Comte, Dutta did not take Comte to be an atheist (*niriswara*). If at all, he debated the nature of God, not his very existence.

5. Dutta Struggle against Poverty, Illness, Unhappiness :

¹⁴ Malay Sankar Bhattacharya, (2019). *A Life Out Of A Joint*. Amar Bharati, Kolkata.

¹⁵ Fulton H Anderson (1962). *Francis Bacon : His career and his Thought*. University of Southern California Press.

For a good part of his life, Dutta struggled against poverty, illness and an unhappy conjugal life. Estranged from his wife and family, he spent the last years of his life virtually as a recluse in the village of Bali, a few miles off Calcutta. His illness, primarily due to a nerve disease prevented him from all types of academic work. Through the last few years, he could not even write and used to dictate for composing his erudition as published later in Books. Yet, he pursued his consuming interest in science, studying and cataloguing extant fossil remains of plant and animal life. He constructed a Botanical Garden named Shobhonodyan which had 38 types of trees, 15 classes of Flowers, 16 groups of Spice trees among others with their names and description. Vidyasagar was so impressed after visiting this garden that he named it as Charupath, Vol.- IV. Charupath was the most popular Primer authored by Datta in Vols. I-III even before publication of Barna Parichay, Part I and II by Vidyasagar. Friends visiting him at Bali were struck by the huge portraits of Rammohun Roy, scientists Thomas Henry Huxley and Isaac Newton that adorned the walls of his drawing room. In hindsight, it might be reasonable to say that the choice of these portraits also testifies to the acumen and breadth of interest in a man whose work and memory has somehow not endured among his countrymen.

6. Three phases of Renaissance:

It has been discussed by [K.N.Pannikar](#)¹⁶ that the first phase of the renaissance in India was embodied in the socio-religious movements, which was mainly, though not exclusively, initiated by the burgeoning middle class, which was schooled in British liberalism. But the intellectuals who spearheaded the movement were not Anglophile Indians. A defining feature of the movement was an inquiry into the past and an assessment of the strength of tradition to overcome contemporary problems. Let us recall Ram Mohan Roy's use of Hindu scriptures in his debate with his opponents on Sati, or Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's widow remarriage campaign, Narayana Guru's advocacy of universalism or Datta's insistence on accepting a phenomenon on the basis of scientific evidence.. They were all groping for a way out in an era of darkness. That they struck at the obvious—social obscurantism, religious superstition and irrational rituals—was the natural outcome. Thus, the first phase of the Indian renaissance was predominantly engaged with social and cultural matters, a consequence of which was the relative neglect of the political. In fact, the political did not figure seriously in their thoughts save and except Akshay Kumar Dutta who brought the political questions to explain changes brought forward by British colonialism. He even tried to justify widow remarriage in terms of human rights of the women and prevent child marriage on the basis of physiology of the body. Dutta was in favour of marriage after the man and his partner met each other to find out the elements of commonality and arrive at understanding to tie the knot. This narrative was unique in those days.

¹⁶ Panikkar. K. N. (2017). Three Phases of Indian Renaissance. Frontline, March 3, 2017. <https://magazine-pdf.org/politics/9624-frontline-march-3-2017.html>

In contrast, the second stage was characterized by an attempt to bring together anti-colonial politics and the social quest for modernity. The anti-colonial movement did not follow the renaissance, as is generally assumed; the latter eluded into the former, in the sense that the national movement allowed the values of the first phase of the renaissance to form their ideological postures and enter areas where they were conspicuous by their absence. But the national movement took the precaution to keep the struggle on social issues outside its political agenda and to control it through measured interventions. Gandhiji's role in the Vaikom Satyagraha, for instance, was that of a mediator and not a participant, even if his sympathy was with the *satyagrahis*.

According to Professor Panikkar¹⁷, the third phase of the renaissance, which begins with the end of colonial rule, was a result of the confluence of Marxism and the renaissance values. In fact, the renaissance values are inherent in Marxism and were part of the agenda of the communist movement, which functioned with the notion of cultural and social equality, among caste and gender. This was not a break with the past. The ideas of equality, gender justice and secularism were integral to the first and second phases of the renaissance as well but with different humanist orientations. The aim of the Left was not so much to "reform", but to transform the existing cultural and social practices. In doing so, it sought to create a new meaning for the renaissance. Although several leaders of the Left movement realized the importance of culture in popular struggles, they did not succeed in creatively bringing them together. The third phase of the renaissance, as represented by radical cultural activism, therefore, did not really take off, despite a very encouraging beginning in the 1930s with the formation of Progressive Writers Artists Association and subsequently the IPTA. The deleterious effects of this failure have plagued the Left renaissance to the extent that cultural activism has almost become irrelevant in the cultural life of the nation. This is surprising as a substantial section of the creative intelligentsia is broadly left in their intellectual orientation. Many cultural activists and writers have started wondering whether a "Left Renaissance"¹⁸ is possible at all.

7. Conclusion:

In the historiography of modern India, the renaissance is generally marked as the pre-political phase of the anti-colonial struggle, a period when Indians were mainly engaged in social and cultural preparation for participation in the more "progressive" and "radical", political programme. The social and religious movements, popularly termed as the renaissance, which preceded the political struggles, are considered a necessary precursor to the coming of nationalism. Hence, nationalism is conceptualized as a natural outcome of the renaissance.

¹⁷ Ibid, p-17

¹⁸ Sarkar, S. C. (1970). Bengal Renaissance & other Essays, People's Publishing House, New Delhi.

The major achievements of the Renaissance were a secular struggle for rational free thinking, growth of modern Bengali literature, spread of western education and ideas, fervent and diverse intellectual inquiry, rise of nationalistic ideas, rise of nationalism and a rising awareness to challenge the foreign subjugation of India. We have seen that he became critically ill in 1855 at just 35 years of age due to a nerve disease that was incurable in that time. In his short creative lifetime, Akshay Kumar Dutta represented each of these attributes of Renaissance as a leading protagonist. He was uncompromising in his struggle against religious prejudices and fanaticism. He was unrelenting in matters of convictions based on a scientific world view. Dutta has left behind a rich legacy which can be appreciated from the Books that he authored. This Article is a humble effort to provide a slice of the life and contributions of this wonderful personality that excites anyone committed to progressive transformations of human society free from sectarianism, communalism and religious bigotry.

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