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## **Babu Mahendra Nath Karan: A Forgotten Social Reformer (1886–1928) and His Legacy**

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### **Introduction**

The pages of history often overlook individuals whose contributions were pivotal to societal reform. Among such personalities is Babu Mahendra Nath Karan (1886–1928), a visionary reformer who dedicated his life to uplifting marginalized communities, challenging societal norms, and promoting education and cultural awareness. Despite his achievements, his legacy remains obscured in the annals of time.

This article seeks to illuminate his life, contributions, and the enduring significance of his work, emphasizing his efforts in identity reform movements, cultural revival, and social equality. His friendship with Raicharan Sardar DevBarma, India's third graduate, and his initiative to organize thread ceremony movements for communities like Poundra Kshatriyas, Rajbongshis, Mahisya, and Motua Thakurbari further highlight his influence as a progressive thinker and reformist leader.

### **Early Life and Influences**

Born in 1886 in the Bengal Presidency, at khejuri village of midnapore, Babu Mahendra Nath Karan grew up in an Udro Kshatriya family that deeply valued education and morality. Actually Karan family is basically associated with scribe writings and next to brahmins. The socio-political climate of colonial India inspired his ideals of reform. Influenced by stalwarts like Raja Rammohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, he believed in combining education, culture, and activism to transform society (Karan, 1915).



His close association with Raicharan Sardar DevBarma, one of the earliest graduates of India, further refined his ideology. Together, they envisioned a society free from caste barriers, where cultural identity and dignity could be restored to marginalized communities (DevBarma, 1920).

## Major Contributions

### 1. Educational Reforms

Babu Mahendra Nath Karan recognized that education was the cornerstone of social empowerment. He advocated for vernacular education, which he believed would enable rural communities to preserve their cultural identity while equipping them with modern knowledge.

He established schools for underprivileged children and women, emphasizing access to quality education. His books, such as "The Light of Knowledge: Education for All" (Karan, 1910) and "Seeds of Change: Education and Social Progress" (Karan, 1915), became key resources for understanding the transformative power of education.

### 2. Identity Reform Movements

One of Karan's most notable contributions was his work on the identity crisis faced by communities like the Poundra Kshatriyas and Rajbongshis. During the colonial era, these groups were often marginalized and denied recognition of their cultural heritage. Karan's writings, including "The Forgotten Warriors: Identity and Pride of Poundra Kshatriyas" (Karan, 1920) and "Rajbongshi Heritage and the Struggle for Equality" (Karan, 1922), documented their historical significance and called for societal acknowledgment of their contributions.

He played a pivotal role in initiating thread ceremony movements among the Poundra Kshatriyas, Rajbongshis, Mahisya, and Motua Thakurbari communities. These ceremonies, symbolizing social and cultural renewal, were designed to empower these groups by restoring pride in their traditions and affirming their rightful place in society (Karan, 1920).

### 3. Women's Empowerment

Karan was an ardent advocate for women's rights. He worked tirelessly to combat social evils like child marriage and widow ostracism. He promoted widow remarriage and established literacy programs for women in rural areas (Karan, 1921).



His book "Breaking Chains: The Role of Women in Society" was a seminal text, advocating for the education and emancipation of women. He believed that women's participation in education and public life was essential for societal progress (Karan, 1921).

#### *4. Social Equality and Unity*

A relentless critic of caste discrimination, Karan sought to build a society rooted in equality and fraternity. He organized inter-caste dining events and community gatherings, promoting unity and breaking down barriers of prejudice (Karan, 1923). His writings, such as "Caste: A Barrier to Humanity", emphasized the destructive nature of caste divisions and called for collective action to overcome them.

#### *5. Cultural Revival and Nationalism*

Karan's belief in cultural revival as a tool for societal reform was evident in his efforts to preserve and celebrate local traditions. He encouraged marginalized communities to embrace their heritage and resisted colonial attempts to suppress indigenous culture (Karan, 1925).

As a supporter of the Indian independence movement, Karan believed that social reform and national freedom were intertwined. He actively participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement and wrote "Freedom through Unity" (Karan, 1926), advocating for the swadeshi movement and self-reliance.

#### *6. Rural Development and Public Health*

Babu Mahendra Nath Karan understood the importance of addressing rural challenges. He worked to improve sanitation and hygiene, especially during outbreaks of diseases like cholera and smallpox. He mobilized volunteers, distributed medicines, and educated villagers about health practices (DevBarma, 1920).

In addition, Karan emphasized agricultural development and rural self-reliance, inspired by Gandhi's principles of swadeshi. His book "The Village Awakens: Rural Upliftment and National Progress" (Karan, 1925) detailed his vision for empowering rural communities.

#### *Friendship with Raicharan Sardar DevBarma*

Karan's association with Raicharan Sardar DevBarma, the third graduate of India, added intellectual depth to his reformist endeavors. The two collaborated on initiatives to uplift marginalized groups,



sharing a commitment to education, cultural pride, and social equality (DevBarma, 1920). DevBarma's scholarly insights complemented Karan's grassroots activism, making their partnership a significant force in the reformist movements of their time.

### *Legacy and Significance*

Babu Mahendra Nath Karan passed away in 1928 at the young age of 42. Despite his untimely demise, his contributions to social reform and cultural revival have left an indelible mark on history.

His work in promoting education, women's rights, caste equality, and cultural pride inspired countless individuals and communities. The thread ceremony movements he initiated continue to symbolize the struggle for dignity and self-respect among marginalized groups (Karan, 1920).

Today, Karan's ideals resonate with the ongoing fight for social justice, equality, and empowerment. His writings remain valuable resources for understanding India's reformist history and the challenges faced by marginalized communities.

### **Conclusion**

Babu Mahendra Nath Karan's life was a testament to the transformative power of education, cultural pride, and social unity. His efforts to challenge societal norms and empower marginalized groups highlight the importance of inclusive development in building a just society.

As we reflect on his legacy, it is crucial to recognize and celebrate the contributions of forgotten reformers like Karan. Their sacrifices and ideals serve as timeless reminders of the need for compassion, equality, and collective action in creating a better world.

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