CHAPTER I
NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY
OF ANCIENT BENGAL: ITS BEGINNING

The foundation of the Asiatic Society (1784) in Calcutta marked the beginning of antiquarian studies in India and this antiquarianism was meant for exploring India’s past that had so long remain in oblivion. Sir William Jones, founder of the Asiatic Society, was equipped with a scientific, critical methodology of inquiry. He was supposed to have discovered India not only for the Europeans but also for serving the interests of the Indians themselves. He did this work with the active collaboration of a group of scholars consisting of Charles Wilkins, H.T.Colebrooke, H.H. Wilson and James Prinsep. Learned communications on significant discoveries first appeared in the pages of the Asiatic Researches (1788) and continued to be published till 1839. The communications concerned mainly critical interpretation of the archaeological data and criticism of early Indian texts. Such communications had a bearing upon the history and culture of India in general and Bengal in particular. As it has been rightly observed by David Kopf:

They (that is, the Orientalists) both historicised the India’s past and stimulated a consciousness of history in Indian intellectuals.¹

CHARLES WILKINS: 1750 - 1835

Charles Wilkins was the pioneer in Indian epigraphy. He translated the Monghyr inscription in 1781, three years before the foundation of the Asiatic Society. However, it was presented to the Society in 1785.² The discovery of this inscription together with the Bādāl pillar inscription established the existence of the famous Pāla dynasty of Bengal. Whereas the Monghyr copper plate inscription was discovered by Colonel Watson, the Bādāl inscription was discovered, deciphered and translated by Wilkins.³ So far as the dating of the two epigraphs is concerned, both Wilkins and
Jones were wrong in their estimate. They believed that those two records were of the pre-Christian period. William Jones reconstructed the Pāla genealogy in his ‘Remarks’ on Wilkins’ communication, which was comparable to the one reconstructed by D.C. Sircar in 1975-1976. The Bādāl inscription furnishes the list of ministers of the early Pāla kings. Wilkins came across the word ‘Rāṣṭrakūṭa’ in the Monghyr inscription. The word was, however, wrongly rendered by both Wilkins and Jones. However, the discovery made by Wilkins marked the beginning of the historiography of ancient Bengal.

HENRY THOMAS COLEBROOKE: 1765-1837

Later on, H.T. Colebrooke further added to the researches in the history of early Bengal by discovering and editing the two records, namely, Maināmati grant of Raṇavaṇkamalladeva and Āṅgāchi grant of Vigrahapāla III, published in the Asiatic Researches, 1807. As Colebrooke was primarily a Sanskrit scholar, he had an easy access to early Indian texts. He consulted the Jātimāla, Rudrāyamāla Tantra and the Dharmapurāṇa in order to trace the origins of the caste systems in India. In a meeting of the Asiatic Society held on December 3, 1795 Colebrooke presented a paper on the ‘Enumeration of Indian Classes’. He observed:

...almost every occupation, though regularly it be the possession of a particular class, is open to most other classes. 5

He was not mistaken in stating the fact that only the Brāhmaṇas reserved their class-occupation for themselves. Although the paper of Colebrooke referred to above does not appear to have any bearing on the political history of Bengal, it explains, no doubt, everyday Indian social life that does not exclude Bengal. Colebrooke in his paper, ‘On Ancient Monuments’ studied nine inscriptions discovered in different places. Most important among these finds were the copper plate inscriptions relating to the Pāla kings discovered at Dinajpore. While Charles Wilkins and William Jones assumed that the Pāla kings, referred to in the Monghyr and Bādāl pillar inscriptions, ruled in the first century BC, Colebrooke surmised that those rulers reigned in the
eighth-ninth centuries of the Christian era. The said inscription found at Dinajpore revealed the names of Lokaśāla and Mahīśāla which were not found in the earlier two inscriptions.

HORACE HAYMAN WILSON : 1786 - 1860

Side by side with the discovery of Bengal’s political past, researches were undertaken by the scholars of the Asiatic Society to trace the history of the social and cultural life of India in general and of Bengal in particular. As the Asiatic Society was situated in Calcutta, the political and cultural centre of Bengal, the investigators of the Society could hardly ignore Bengal itself, although they justifiably took an all-India view of things. H.H.Wilson in his ‘The Religious Sects of the Hindus’ provided details about the history, rituals, religious beliefs and peculiarities, traditions and religious literature of twenty schools of the Vaiśṇavas, nine schools of the Śaivas, four of the Śāktas and ten other miscellaneous sects. Wilson based his study not only on the relevant texts in Sanskrit and Persian, but also relied on ‘oral report’. The work of Wilson might have provided a model for Akshaykumar Datta’s Bhāratvarṣāya Upāsak Sampradāya (1888) written in Bengali.

JAMES PRINSEP : 1799 - 1840
&SIR ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM : 1814 - 1893

In a Communication of James Prinsep entitled ‘Facsimiles of Ancient Inscriptions’. published in the January number of the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, mention was made of a copper plate grant exposing for the first time the existence of the Sena rulers of Bengal. The said grant was deciphered and translated by the joint efforts of three pandits, namely, Govindaram, Kamalakanta and Saradaprasad.

Alexander Cunningham was a friend and collaborator of James Prinsep. The collaboration aimed at archaeological discoveries leading to a true understanding of India’s past. Their efforts in this line, no doubt, advanced the progress in the study of the history ancient Bengal. Cunningham visited the archaeological sites in Bengal two
times, in 1871-72 and in 1879-80. During his first visit he explored the ruins of Sonargaon, the old capital of Eastern Bengal and the palace of Vallālasena known as Vallālabādi in Vikrampur near Dacca. The purpose of his second visit was to discover the exact location of Puṇḍravarvdhana, the ancient capital of Bengal. Previously in 1874, Puṇḍravarvdhana was located at Bardhankuti in Dinajpore. Cunningham found out the remains of the city in Mahāsthān. He also visited Pāhārpur, Devīkot, Dacca, Malda and Sonargaon. The historiography of ancient India in general and that of ancient Bengal in particular may be reasonably considered to rest on Cunningham’s identification of the ancient Indian sites and his elucidation of the geography of ancient India which had baffled all the ingenuity that Jones and Wilford could muster.

RAJENDRALAL MITRA : 1846 - 1891

Rajendralal’s interest in the history of the Pāla kings was developed, when he had translated a copper plate grant of Vināyakapāladeva (1848) containing a genealogical table. In 1850, he published in the Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal a translation of a copper plate grant found at Ujjain. Next, he discovered three ancient coins at Mahammadpur in Jessore (Bengaldesh), deciphered the legends on them and also determined their date. The first article of Rajendralal published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal was on the history of the Sena kings based on an inscription found at Rajsahi. A more detailed history of the Senas was published by him ten years later in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Rajendralal examined different copper plate grants, coins and inscriptions of the Pāla kings and wrote articles on them. The last article was published in the Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in July 1886.

In fact, in the history of Bengal, the Pāla and the Sena dynasties occupy the most important place. Because, the history of society and religion in pre-medieval Bengal was closely associated with the history of the Pāla and Sena dynasties. Rajendralal’s contributions towards the reconstruction of the history of Bengal were highly appreciated by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.
In the eighteenth century, Charles Wilkins translated the Monghyr copper plate inscription and referred to the Pāla rulers – Gopāla, Dharmapāla, Devapāla in his article published in the *Asiatic Researches*, as it has already been mentioned above. Again Charles Wilkins also translated in the pages of the *Asiatic Researches* the Bādāl pillar inscription discovered in Dinajpore. Later, Pratapchandra Ghosh published a revised reading and translation of the same inscription in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 17. The third stone inscription was found at Sāranātha near Benaras 18. It contains the names of Mahīpāla, Sthirapāla, Vasantapāla and Kumārapāla. But the distorted reading and translation of the record deprived it a position in the list of historical documents. Afterwards, a copper plate grant found at Āmgāchi in Dinajpore also suffered from the same fate as the former one. In 1864, a grant was discovered at Nālandā and scholars were hardly unanimous on exact reading of the record 19. However, in this background of uncertainty regarding exactness of reading and translation of the available records, Rajendralal Mitra had to establish the Pāla chronology in the face of stiff opposition from other scholars. According to his opinion, the first king Gopāla began to rule in AD 855 and the last and the eleventh ruler Vīgrahapāla ruled in AD 1080 20. The list of Pāla rulers as reconstructed by Rajendralal was more or less supported by later researches. In his list the name of the seventh Pāla king is conspicuous by its absence. There is a controversy regarding the name of the tenth king mentioned as Nayapāla (AD 1060). Some scholars have referred to him as Jayapāla 21. But R.C.Majumder has retained the name Nayapāla 22. Whatever that might be, Rajendralal has not referred to the Pāla kings who ruled after Vīgrahapāla.

Rajendralal had to determine the Pāla chronology merely on the basis of surmise due to lack of sufficient evidence at his disposal. The Sāranātha inscription found near Vārānasi (dated AD 1026) belonged to the reign of Mahīpāla. On the basis of this Rajendralal inferred that Mahīpāla ruled from AD 1015 to AD 1040. General Cunningham suggested that Gopāla’s reign began in the middle of the eighth century AD, whereas Rajendralal dated the reign of Gopāla in the middle of the ninth century AD 23. Needless to say, modern researches have shown that truth lies in the opinion of General Cunningham. So far as the dates of Mahīpāla and his successors are
concerned, Rajendralal's view is not fully accepted by the modern researchers. Although, the difference in respective reign period does seem to be very wide. However, some of the views of Rajendralal and the readings suggested in respect of some inscriptions, still hold the ground. For instance, the translation of the Bangarh copper plate grant of Dinajpore as given by Rajendralal in 1872 was accepted finally by the scholars at a later period, although he has to face controversy about it in his own time. The main controversy revolved round an expression ‘Kūñjaraghatīvarṣa'. Rajendralal explained it as 888 of the Saka era, that is, AD 966. Ramaprasad Chanda accepted Rajendralal’s view.

The history of the Senas did not provoke so much controversy among the scholars as that of the Pālas did. The Sena genealogy as determined by Rajendralal has been more or less accepted by modern historians. Rajendralal wrote articles on the Sena kings one of which was included in his Indo-Aryans, volume II and another entitled ‘The Genealogy of the Sena kings’ was published in the journal Rahasya Sandarva. Many legends and traditions connected with Vallālasena are in vogue. One of the traditions was found in the Kulajī texts. Rajendralal never depended upon those texts. He pointed out that the tradition of the advent of the Brāhmaṇas in Gauḍa in the year 1066 of the Saka era, as indicated in the Kulajī texts, was not at all supported by more reliable evidences gleaned from copper plate grants, stone inscriptions and ancient coins.

Among the stone inscriptions and copper plate grants of the Senas discovered in the nineteenth century, the most worth mentioning were Edilpur copper plate grant of Keśavasena and the Deopāra stone inscription of Vijayasena. Besides, some more copper plates and stone inscriptions were discovered in Dinajpore and Rajsahi. In the light of those records Rajendralal reconstructed the Sena genealogy. Although there still remains a difference of opinion regarding the genealogy of Lakṣmaṇasena’s successors, the genealogy of the Sena kings upto Lakṣmaṇasena as given by Rajendralal has been accepted by modern historians. Rajendralal surmised that Virasena, the first known ruler of the Sena dynasty was identical with Ādiśūra. But Ādiśūra was known from the tradition only and, therefore, was not included by
Rajendralal in the list of the Sena rulers. Lakṣmaṇasena had two successors – Mādhavasena and Keśavasena. Rajendralal added another name Aśokasena among the successors of Lakṣmaṇasena. Modern historians refer to Viśvarūpasena and Keśavasena as the two sons of Lakṣmaṇasena. The copper plate grant of Viśvarūpasena discovered at a later period was not known in the time of Rajendralal. The Barrackpore copper plate was also discovered at a later period.

The determination of the date of Lakṣmaṇasena could be done in the light of some available sources. According to the account of Minhaj-ud-din, Bakhtiyar Khilji conquered Bengal in AD 1203. The account also refers to eighty years’ reign of Lakṣmaṇasena and therefore, his reign period was from AD 1123 to AD 1203. Modern historians opine that Lakṣmaṇasena began to rule in AD 1189 and continued upto AD 1205. But it leaves the problem of determining the date of the Sarinva in the name of Lakṣmaṇasena unsettled. It goes to the credit of Rajendralal that even in 1878 he attempted to establish that Lakṣmaṇa Sarinva began in AD 1106. Of course, for this he acknowledged his indebtedness to Rajakrishna Mukhopadhyay. At a later period, the beginning of Lakṣmaṇa Sarinva was suggested to have begun sometime between from AD 1107 and AD 1119. For the determination of Lakṣmaṇasena’s reign period, modern historians rely more on the colophon in Saduktikarpūma of Śrīdharadāsa composed in AD 1205. It may be noted in this connection that Rajendralal for the first time discovered the manuscript of Saduktikarpūma in 1873 and included it in the list of Sanskrit manuscripts (Notices of Sanskrit Manuscripts, volume III). But Rajendralal could not exactly indicate the meaning of the expression. Rasaikaviniśa. Scholars at a later period took it to mean 27, whereas some scholars modified the expression as Rajaikaviniśa to mean 21. According to them, AD 1205 corresponds to the twenty-first regnal year of Lakṣmaṇasena.

Rajendralal admitted that he attempted to determine the Sena chronology on the basis of surmise. In his article ‘On the Pāla and Sena dynasties of Bengal’ published in The Indo-Aryans, volume 2, 1881, Rajendralal observed:
Of the predecessors of Ballāla we have lapidary proofs of four names. Vijaya Sena, Hemanta Sena, Sāmanta Sena, and Vīra Sena, but no authentic date about any of them. For the present their dates must be fixed by taking averages. At an average of 18 years their reigns would extend to 944 AD. or at 20 years, which I have reluctantly assigned to the Pālas, to 986 AD. ²⁸

In other words, he suggested AD 986 as the date of Vīrasena’s accession to the throne. But in his article published in Rahasya Sandarva Rajendralal referred to circa AD 994 as the date of Vīrasena. He himself, however, had great doubt about the surmise regarding the Sena chronology ²⁹.

For a long time there was a belief in Bengal that the Sena kings were Vaidya by caste. But Rajendralal clearly showed in the light of the Sena inscriptions that the Sena kings were Brahmakṣatriya. His contention was challenged by the Vaidyas of Bengal who considered themselves to be the descendants of the Sena dynasty. However, Rajendralal gave epigraphic proof beyond doubt to establish the caste of the Senas and established their Kshatriyaship.

Rajendralal’s views about history in general are not apparently referred to in his historical writings available so far. But a deeper study of all his historical writings taken together would indicate that he used to give more importance to the social history than the political history. He wrote several articles on food, drinks, dress and other customs in ancient India ³⁰. But those articles had only a bearing upon the social history of Bengal.

FORT WILLIAM COLLEGE: 1800

The Fort William College founded in 1800 with the purpose of imparting training to the Civil Servants deserves mention in the historiography of Bengal. Some of the Professors who served in the College devoted themselves to the task of writing history. For instance, Ramram Basu wrote Ṛṣipī Ṛataditya Charitra in 1801. Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyay wrote Ṛṣipī Kṛṣṇachandra Ṛāvasya Charitra in 1805 and
Mrityunjay Vidyalankar wrote Rājābalī in 1808. Those works represent a mixture of myth and history and incorporate antiquarian notions of chronology and geography.

The chronology is explained by Mrityunjay thus:

In course of the circular motion of the time, like the hands of a clock passing through the thirty *kalpa* such as Pitrkalpa etc., we are now situated in the Svetavarāha kalpa. Each kalpa consists of fourteen *manus*; accordingly, we are now in the seventh *manu* of Svetavarāha kalpa called Vaivasvata. Each *manu* consists of 284 *yuga*; we are now passing through the one hundred and twelfth *yuga* of Vaivasvata *manu* called Kaliyuga. This *yuga* consists of 432,000 years. Of these, up to the present year 1726 of the Saka era, 4905 years have passed; 427,095 years are left. *(Rājābalī, pp. 3-4.)*

For the first 3,044 years of Kaliyuga, it is said, the prevailing era (*Saka*) was that of King Yudhisthira. The next 135 years comprised the era of King Vikramāditya, that was succeeded by the era of Śālivāhana:

Now we are passing through the era of the King called Śālivāhana who lived on the southern bank of the river Narmadā. This Saka will last for 18,000 years after the end of the Vikramāditya era. After this there will be a king called Vijayābhīnandana who will rule in the region of the Čitrakūṭa Mountains. His Saka will last for 10,000 years after the end of the Śālivāhana era.

After this there will be a king called Parināgārjuna whose era will last until 821 years are left in the Kaliyuga, at which time will be born in the family of Gautabrāhmaṇa in the Sambhala country and *avatāra* of Kalkideva. Accordingly of the six eras named after six kings, two are past, one is present and three are in the future. *(Rājābalī, p.8.)*

The geographical background of Mrityunjay’s history is given thus:
Of the five elements – space (ākāśa), air, fire, water and earth – the earth occupies eight ānā (half) while the other four occupy two ānā (one-eighth) each. ... Half of the earth is taken up by the seas, north of which is Jambudvīpa. ... There are seven islands on earth of which ours is called Jambudvīpa. Jambudvīpa is divided into nine varṣa of which Bhāratavarṣa is one. Bhāratavarṣa in turn is divided into nine parts (khaṇḍa) which are called Aindra, Kaseru, Tāmrapaṇa, Gavastimata, Nāga, Saumya, Varuṇa, Gāndharva and Kumārikā. Of these, the part in which the varṇāśrama [caste] system exists is the Kumārikākhanda.

The other parts [of Bhāratavarṣa] are inhabited by the Antyajya people [those outside caste].

Thus Rājabali is basically the dynastic history of Sūrya and Chandravaniṣa:

In the Satyayuga, the Supreme Lord [parameśvara] had planted in the form of an Aśvathva tree a king called Ikṣvāku to rule over the earth. The two main branches of this tree became the Surya and the Chandra varṇa. The kings born in these two lineages have ruled the earth in the four yugas. Of these, some were able to acquire the greatest powers of dharma and thus ruled over entire earth consisting of the seven islands. Others had lesser powers and thus ruled over only Jambudvīpa or only Bhāratavarṣa or, in some cases, only in Kumārikākhanda. If a king from one lineage became the emperor [samrāta], then the king of the other lineage would become the lord of a maṇḍala. The accounts of these kings are recorded in the branches of knowledge [śāstra] called the Purāṇa and the Itihāsa.

In recent times, A.D.Pusalkar has traced the Traditional History from the Earliest Time to the Accession of Parikṣit following the chronological scheme of history according to the Purāṇas. Mrityunjay has enumerated the lists of kings and dynasties since the beginning of the Kaliyuga thus:
In the 4,267 years since the beginning of the Kaliyuga, there have been 119 Hindus of different jātis who have become samrāta on the throne of Delhi. (Rājābalī, p. 10.)

The count begins with the King Yudhiṣṭhira of the Mahābhārata, who heads a list of twenty-eight Kṣatriya kings who ruled for a total of 1,812 years. "After this the actual reign of Kṣatriya jāti ended." Then came fourteen kings of the Nanda dynasty, starting with "one called Mahānanda born of a Kṣatriya father and a Sudra mother," who ruled for a total of 500 years. "Rajput jāti started with this Nanda."

Then followed the Buddhist kings:

"Fifteen kings of the Nāstika faith, from Viravāhu to Āditya, all of the Gautama lineage, ruled for four hundred years. At this time the Nāstika views enjoyed such currency that the Vaidika religion was almost eradicated."

Next, we have a curious list of dynasties: nine rulers of the Maurya dynasty, sixteen of the Yogi dynasty, four of the Bairāgī dynasty, and so on. Of course, there are "Vikramādityas, father and son, who ruled for ninety-three years." Last but not the least, we are also told of "thirteen kings, from Dhīsena to Dāmodarasena, of the Vaidya jāti of Bengal who ruled 137 years and one month."

What is interesting about this chronology is the way in which its dynastic sequence passes ever so smoothly from the kings of the Mahābhārata to the kings of Magadha and ends with the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II, "of the lineage of Amir Timur", occupying the throne in Delhi at the time of Mrityunjay's writing. Myth, history, and the contemporary—all become part of the same chronological sequence; one is not distinguished from another; the passage from one to another, consequently, is entirely unproblematical. There is not even an inkling in Mrityunjay's prose of any of the knotty questions about the value of Puranic accounts in constructing a "proper" historical chronology of Indian dynasties, which would so exercise Indian historians a few decades later. Although Mrityunjay wrote at the behest of his colonial masters, his historiographic allegiances are entirely pre-colonial. 
Mrityunjay Vidyalankar’s Rājābali seems to be the Bengali version of Sanskrit Rājābali, which had got a far-fetched bearing on the early history of Bengal as it referred to some Sena rulers. Further, one may trace in it the history of Ādiśūra and his successors. Modern historians have reasonably questioned the historicity of Ādiśūra. Curiously enough, the successors of Ādiśūra are said to have been the ancestors of the Pāla and the Sena rulers. This is, to say the least, an apology for history. The induction of legends and tracing of the chronology from the Kaliyuga era are suggestive of the author’s ignorance of modern methodology of writing history in the light of reliable and dependable evidence deduced mainly from archaeology.

However, Charles Stewart (1764-1837) who also taught for sometime as Professor at the Fort William College wrote in 1813 The History of Bengal from the first Mohammedan invasion until the virtual conquest of that country by the English in AD 1757. Stewart meant by Bengal the Mughal administrative unit of Eastern Provinces, that is, the Subah of Bengal consisting of Bengal proper, Bihar, Orissa, parts of Assam and Arakan. Stewart’s History, accommodates translations made by himself from the works of the Persian historians like the Riyaj-us-Salatin, the translation of other persons on whom he could depend and also the accounts of European writers wherever necessary. Such a work belongs to the category of “scissors and paste history”, as it has been pointed out by R.G.Collingwood. Again, Stewart himself confesses at the very outset of his book:

In a work professing to be History of Bengal, it will probably be expected to find some account of the original inhabitants of the country; and a detail of their gradual rise, from a state of barbarism to that high degree of civilisation in which they were found when first visited by Europeans. In both these respects, I am sorry to say, the reader will be disappointed.
The materials that had been left out in this work were in Sanskrit that Stewart was not capable of reading. Regarding the period preceding the Turkish invasion of Bengal, Stewart has said:

Although the Hindus of Bengal have an equal claim to antiquity and early civilisation with the other nations of India, yet we have not any authentic information respecting them during the early ages of their progress: nor is there any other positive evidence of the ancient existence of Bengal as a separate kingdom, for any considerable period, than its distinct language and peculiar written character... As I am credibly informed that materials have been and are still collecting for furnishing an authentic account of the Hindu governments, I shall dwell no longer on the subject, in the hope that we shall one day be favoured with a history of Bengal from the pure mine of Sanskrit literature. 38

There is no denying the fact that efforts were made by some scholars of the Fort William College to give a shape to the history of Bengal that was in a fluid state at that time. But neither the Sanskrit pandits dependant on Puranic sources nor the English Orientalists relying on Persian sources could do justice to the work undertaken by them. But still, in the history of historical writings on Bengal in general, we can not afford to loose sight of any effort made by a scholar to reconstruct the history of Bengal.

SERAMPORE MISSION : 1800

The foundation of Serampore Mission synchronised with that of the Fort William College. John Clark Marshman (1794-1877) joined the Mission in 1799 at an early age. Marshman received his early education and training from William Carey, Ward and his own father whose knowledge of Indian languages had a tremendous effect on young Marshman. After retirement of Carey, Marshman was the virtual Director of Serampore’s affairs and edited a number of journals like the Samāchār Darpan, Digdurshan and The Friend of India. To him are attributed a number of historical
works of which *Outline History of Bengal compiled for the use of youths in India* (1839) requires special mention in this context. The work "presents a brief and simple outline from the Voidya dynasty to the close of Lord William Bentinck's administration." It consists of 255 pages and is divided into 19 sections. In the first section an account is given of the early history of Bengal in the shortest possible way. From the second to the twelfth section is related in quick succession the rise, fulfilment and the decline of the Muslim power in Bengal from the first conquest of Bakhtiyar Khilji (1203-4) to the defeat of Siraj-ud-daullah in the battle of Plassey (1757). The remainder of the sections is devoted to the description of the growth of the British power in the Indian sub-continent up to the year 1835. Marshman dismissed the early history of Bengal in five pages. It may be assumed that the non-availability of historical sources on the early period compelled him to discuss it in such a small space. His predecessor Charles Stewart had also by-passed the history of ancient Bengal on the ground of non-availability of authentic information in respect of the progress made by the people of Bengal in the early period. Of course, Stewart was 'credibly informed that materials' were being collected. It appears that the process of material-collection remained still incomplete when Marshman wrote his *History of Bengal*. Besides, it is not unlikely that his primary aim was to magnify the achievements of the British in India by depicting the proximate Muslim period in the darkest possible way. The observation of M Delwar Hussain made in this connection seems to be justified. Otherwise it would be difficult for us to explain why the civilisation, arts, crafts, languages and literature of early Bengal did not attract his investigation or could not rouse much of his curiosity.

While making an assessment of the contributions of a historian, it is our task to measure the impact of his writing on later historians or the historical process. For the Bengalis of the last quarter of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Stewart's *History* was the symbol of their regional identity and Hindu-Muslim unity and provoked the native historians of Bengal to write their national history in their own way. From this point of view, Stewart is considered the father of English historiography of Bengal. Again, John Clark Marshman's *Outline of the History of Bengal* gained much popularity, went into several editions and served as a model
before the native historians who had started taking their lessons in the art of writing history from its translation, partly or wholly, into their vernacular. Its first translation into Bengali by Govindachandra Sen entitled Bāṅgālīr Itihāsa was published in 1840. Isvarachandra Vidyasagar translated into Bengali a portion of Marshman's History, from the accession of Nawab Siraj-ud-daullah to the administration of Lord William Bentinck, in 1848. It was entitled Bāṅgālīr Itihāsa, Dvītiya Bhāg (Part II). Ramgati Nayaratna published his translation of the first part of Marshman’s History in 1859. It was entitled Bāṅgālīr Itihāsa, Pratham Bhāg. The queue of Bengali translations was followed up by Bhudev Mukhopadhyay who wrote Bāṅgālīr Itihāsa, Tīrthā Bhāg that consisted of the history of the period extending from the time of Bentinck to that of Bedon. It was, however, an independent work and published serially in the pages of Sikṣā Darpaṇ and Education Gazette.

**DEROZIANS’ SENSE OF HISTORY**

The Derozians, a band of young intellectuals imbued with European humanist-rationalist ideas, produced between 1838 and 1843, through their Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge (established in 1838) three volumes of papers on historical studies. Mention may be made of the papers (Discourses) of Reverend Krishna Mohan Banerjee (‘On the Nature and Importance of Historical Studies’). Babu Govindachandra Sen (‘Brief Outline of the History of Hindusthan, from the Reign of Rajah Vikramaditya to the Fall of Gourian Dynasty’) and of Babu Pearychand Mitra (‘State of Hindusthan under the Hindus’). The Derozians rightly perceived the importance of historical studies in the regeneration of a nation. To quote Reverend Krishṇa Mohan Banerjee:

I have entered into this lengthy explanation because the importance of my theme calls for clear views on the subject, and because an understanding of this principle is the more necessary to us whose early education had a tendency to confound in one mass history and mythology – facts and fables - truth and fiction – receiving them all indifferently as true or else rejecting them all as wholly false – sweeping the gold away with the dross. This mode
of dealing with the writings bequeathed us by historians is extremely unsound—and would be inexcusable did we not take into consideration the lamentable want of authentic records in our own literature and the absence of any document calculated to call forth and exercise our assent. The mythological legends with which our venerable language abounds demonstrate the high estimation in which poetry was held in our country in the days of her pristine grandeur—but they do not any way recommend themselves to our belief as historical compositions. For the natural principle of faith in the veracity of historians does not insist upon our assent to the fictions and romantic fancy of poets and novelists.\textsuperscript{44}

However, the Derozians created a new sense of history and historical consciousness among a wider section of Bengali intelligentsia which bore fruits in the later years of the century when Clio claimed a good number of Bengali scholars as her ardent devotees.

**BENGAL HISTORIOGRAPHY: CATERING THE NEEDS OF THE SCHOOL SYLLABUS**

It is of great significance that the history of Bengal was included in the syllabus of the schools of Bengal in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century. It may be reasonably held that Marshman began the process of writing the history of Bengal that was suitable for use by the younger boys and girls reading at schools. This model seems to have been followed later by the historians of Bengal who wrote both in Bengali and in English. For example, the School Book Society published Wenger's *Baṅgadeś Purāṇa* sometime afterGovindachandra Sen's *Baṅgālī Itihāsa*. History of Bengal published in 1844 was prescribed as textbook for two upper classes in Devendranath Tagore's *Tattvabodhini Pathsala* in 1844 syllabus.\textsuperscript{45} Earlier, Ramkamal Sen's *Baṅgadeśer Purāṇa* was published in 1834.\textsuperscript{46} It seems to have been an independent work done by him before Marshman. *Baṅgetihāsa* written by an anonymous writer and published in 1849 was prescribed for the *Hooghly Collegiate School* where Bankimchandra had his early education.\textsuperscript{47} Roper Lethbridge's *An Easy
Introduction to the History and Geography of Bengal, meant for junior classes in schools, was published in 1874. Sasichandra Datta's *Bengal* published in 1874 was an account of the country from the earliest times. It appears to be a full-fledged history of Bengal, as it comprises:

1. Physical Peculiarities
2. Products: Cultivated and Natural
3. Traditions of the Hindu Period
4. Reminiscences of the Mohammedan Era
5. Antiquarian Relics
6. Classification and Distribution of the People
7. Condition and Distinctive Traits of the People
8. Religious Beliefs and Festivals
9. British Rule: Its Effects and
10. Progress and Education.

The periodisation in this book does not seem to be accepted by modern historians. Because, he has referred to the Hindu period, the Mohammedan era and the British rule, whereas modern historians prefer to divide the history of Bengal into ancient, medieval and modern periods. Secondly, the work seems to emphasise upon the cultural condition in the country while giving a detailed account of the political background. However, there are some characteristics in this work, which might distinguish it from a mere account of the rulers of Bengal and mark it as an attempt to look into the history of the Bengali people. Rajakrishna Mukhopadhyay's *Prathama Sikṣā Bāṅgālār Ithāśa* was published in 1874 and was spoken highly of by Bankimchandra in the pages of *Bāṅgadarśan* (1281 BS, Magh). Pearychand Mitra's *The Hindu Bengal* published in 1880 was an article in *Calcutta Review* (April). It reflects how the author's historical imagination was attracted by the progress of culture in early Bengal. Rajakrishna Mukhopadhyay's book, although primarily prescribed as a school textbook, gained so much popularity that it went through many editions and its 34th edition was published in 1889. The book consisting of 89 pages...
was meant for the school students. In the introduction to the book it has been observed:

This little book has been written with a view to give the young pupils of our schools a general knowledge of the history of Bengal from the earliest times to this present day.

Romesh Chandra Dutt wrote *A Brief History of Ancient and Modern Bengal for the use of the schools* in 1892.

From the above we may derive some reasonable inferences. Firstly, the native historians mostly catered to the needs of the school students by writing the history of Bengal either in Bengali or in English. Secondly, the methodology of writing history was adapted from the models of Stewart and Marshman. Thirdly, although the books in small volumes were written primarily for school students, the historians concerned attempted to incorporate as far as possible the results of up-to-date researches in those books. Fourthly, an easy approach to the history of Bengal was adopted keeping in view the needs of the school students. Such an approach paved the way towards popularisation of the history of Bengal. The general readers found an access to the political and cultural conditions that prevailed in ancient, medieval and modern Bengal. Last, but not the least, the native historians did not always confine their study to the political history, but also tried to throw light on the social history of Bengal.

Incidentally we may refer to Lalmohan Vidyanidhi’s *Sambandha Nirnaya or A Social History of the Principal Hindu Castes in Bengal* published in 1875. It would be relevant to mention that Colebrooke’s learned paper (‘Enumeration of Indian Classes’) was published in book form in 1873. Therefore, even in writing social history, the native historians could fruitfully follow the western methodology as exemplified in Colebrooke’s work. The most successful of the nineteenth century Bengali historians was, according to Bankimchandra. Rajakrishna Mukhopadhyay, the author of *Prathamā Sīkṣā Bāṅgalār Iīṯāśā*. Although Rajakrishna wrote for school going children and did it within a short compass, he successfully pointed out
that in any history of Bengal an emphasis should be laid upon the social history of the
Bengali people. It was a golden work, according to Bankimchandra, ‘although it was a
fistful of gold.’\textsuperscript{49} In the textbook, R.C. Dutt showed some signs of new awareness
about the pattern of writing, clearly away from the British legacy of writing Indian
history. Dutt wrote in the ‘Preface’:

\begin{quote}
An account of kings and wars is useless and barren unless we have also an
account of the people and their condition and their progress.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

In point of time, this may be said to be the starting point of projecting history from the
people’s point of view.

\section*{NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY}

There is little doubt about the fact that the histories written by Charles Stewart
and Marshman in English not only introduced in Bengal a model of methodology but also
provoked the educated people of Bengal to think in terms of a history of Bengal to be
written by its own historians. It was felt by the intelligentsia of Bengal that unless the
native historians themselves undertook the work of reconstructing the history of
Bengal, little justice could be meted out to it. Justice, in this context, stands for the
standard of judgement by which the genuine history of Bengal could be brought out
before the eyes of the people. If the writing of the history of Bengal by its own
historians was desirable, the use of the Bengali language for the purpose was more so.
The development of Bengali prose was closely interlinked with the reconstruction of
the nationalist history of Bengal, the history that would stimulate national
consciousness among the people.\textsuperscript{51} But the status of the Bengali language at the end
of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century was not comparable to
that of Classical languages.\textsuperscript{52} Because, Bengali used to be used in domestic day-to-
day life, but was not considered as the language suitable for writing.\textsuperscript{53} Scholars
preferred Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic to Bengali for the purpose of expressing their
ideas on any subject of importance. William Carey, Professor of Bengali at the Fort
William College, for the first time evolved a prose-style in Bengali language by his
experimentation of various kinds, imitating grammatical features from languages other than Bengali. Although the experiment was begun by the scholars of classical languages, they stuck to the word-formation in the model of either Persian or Sanskrit. But Carey’s Bengali had an English flavour in respect of both its word-collocations and sentence-structures. Next, Rammohan Roy raised the status of Bengali prose by making it free from the dominance of either Sanskrit or Persian and also by employing Bengali for the exposition of serious subjects. The publication of *Samāchāra Darpana* (1818), a weekly journal of the Sareampore Missionaries, led to the growth of many Bengali periodicals in Calcutta and mofussil towns. The efforts of the scholars of the Fort William College, Rammohan Roy and the periodicals culminated in Isvarchandra Vidyasagar’s attempt to combine the use of *tatsama* words with the ease and fluency of colloquial speech. Thus, the mature development of Bengali prose served the purpose of the historians of Bengal who intended to write the history of the Bengalees for the Bengalees in their vernacular language.

**TATTVABODHINI PATRIKĀ : 1843**

Among the journals and periodicals of the nineteenth century which provided stimulus not only to the evolution of the Bengali prose-style but also towards the foundation of a concept of history, special mention has to be made of the *Tattvabodhini Patrikā* (1843), a monthly journal of the Brahmo Samaj founded by Devendranath Tagore in 1843. After the publication of the *Tattvabodhini Patrikā*, Ramgopal Ghosh brought to the notice of Ramtanu Lahiri the feasibility of writing on various serious subjects in Bengali language. Both Ramgopal Ghosh and Ramtanu Lahiri belonged to the Young Bengal group and took much pride in their English education. It was beyond their expectation that a periodical containing writings on serious subjects in Bengali prose could be brought out in reality at that time. However, the *Tattvabodhini Patrikā* began its glorious journey by publishing Madhusudan Datta’s poem ‘Ātmavilāp’ and later, the first specimen of Rabindranath Tagore’s writings. Besides, the prestige of the journal was heightened to a great extent by publication in it of the writings on science, philosophy, archaeology and history.
Devendranath Tagore, Akshyukumar Datta and Rajnarayan Bose were among the distinguished contributors of the periodical.

On behalf of the Tattvabodhini Patrika, an idea of history was professed. Although there was a general consciousness among those who were interested in history, the necessity of bringing in a change in the methodology of writing history was not yet realised. The Tattvabodhini Patrika said that it was due to the spread of English education that the educated people considered history as a chronological account of the ruling dynasties. As a result, an ignorance of the history of 'Our' country and people was fast spreading. It was further pointed that the educated people had acquired knowledge in the history and geography of England, France and America, but did not know anything about the districts of Birbhum and Bankura lying in their own land. Therefore, the question arose as to how the pursuit of genuine history of the motherland should be carried on. In a lengthy article entitled 'Itihāsāṅgraha' it was said that relevant information in respect of natural and geographical conditions of Bengal, the historical and archaeological evidences were to be carefully collected and studied. Not only that, an investigation had to be made in the natural conditions prevailing in different parts of Bengal, the nature of settlement of people in those parts and their movements from one place to the other. the extent of progress achieved by the society in those areas, the nature of expansion of education and knowledge, the conditions of trade and industry, their adversity and prosperity, the events of importance and noble achievements in order to form a genuine historical knowledge of Bengal.

Among the enquirers of the history belonging to the Tattvabodhini group special mention should be made of Akshay Kumar Datta whose researches led to the publication of Bharatvarṣya Upāsak Sampradāya in two volumes (1870-1883). Earlier, H.H.Wilson made a survey of 43 religious sects in his Religious Sects of the Hindus, while Akshay Kumar Datta made a study of 103 religious sects in his work. Besides, Akshay Kumar Datta wrote an article entitled 'Prāchīn Hinduīdiger Samudrajaṅrā O Vēpujavistār' published in 1308 BS (i.e. 1901 AD). The works of Akshay Kumar deserves acclamation, no doubt, but the scope of those works was not
limited within the geographical boundaries of Bengal and, therefore, did not truly implement the aims and objectives of the Tattvabodhini Patrika.

BAṅGADARŚAN : 1872

Before the appearance of Baṅgadarśan Rajendralal edited and published two journals, namely, Vividārtha Satiśagraha (1851) and Rahasya Sandarva (1863) presumably to promote historical research side by side with the development of other branches of learning and the advancement of Bengali prose writing. Of course, the most worth-mentioning article published in Rahasya Sandarva, series 3, volume 28 was that of Rajendralal Mitra himself. It was the history of the Sena dynasty of Bengal that has a bearing on the historiography of Bengal.

Baṅgadarśan was first published in 1872 under the editorship of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay with a professed objective of bringing to the notice of the English educated people the prospect of the Bengali language and literature. By that time, Bengali prose had gained enough maturity as a medium of expression for subjects like history, archaeology, anthropology, ethnology and linguistics. Among the regular contributors to the Baṅgadarśan mention may be made of Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay, Ramdas Sen, Lalmohan Bandopadhyay and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay himself. The writers in the Baṅgadarśan developed some characteristics in their line of thinking. Firstly, they thought that an intensive investigation was essential in historical research. The results of an investigation required to be recorded in detail. Secondly, they held the view that the facts of history, whatever might have been their sources, should be verified and tested in the light of the evidences which were beyond doubt. It was not possible to have an access to the accounts of the period concerned. Even if those were available, their veracity required to be checked and tested again and again. Thirdly, the writers in the Baṅgadarśan realised the importance of chronology in the process of reconstructing history. Fourthly, the historical researches were to be carried with the support of allied disciplines like anthropology and linguistics. Fifthly, the writers in the Baṅgadarśan believed in the comparative method. While studying Indian history.
they used to bring it in comparison with the Roman and the British histories. whenever it was deemed necessary. Sixthly, they were of opinion that literature was not to be distanced from history. In this connection, they used to cite the examples of Macaulay, Carlyle, Foude, La Martine and Thucydides. Seventhly, the historical researches, they thought, were to be objective and that the historians must remain faithful to the truth. The historian should not be guided by any compulsion, bias or self interest and should, in no way, suppress or distort any fact of history. It is alleged, of course, by some that Bankimchandra himself was prejudiced against the Muslim community and had the partiality for the Bengalis. Recent researches on Bankimchandra had shown the falsity of this assumption based upon a wrongful interpretation of the writing of Bankimchandra. This will be further discussed in proper place.

The number of articles written on history in Baṅgadarśan (numbering 40) may be divided into two categories, namely, history of Bengal and history of India. The area in which the history of Bengal was researched extended from the origin of the Bengali people to the eighteenth century history of Bengal. The discussions on Indian history are found to have been related to the social conditions in the Vedic and Epic ages, the origin and development of different religions, the past history of Maharastra, Rajputana, the Punjab and Orissa in addition to the biographies of the notable poets and political leaders. From this it would appear that Bankimchandra as an editor of Baṅgadarśan never confined his attention to the history of the Bengali people only.

Historians of Baṅgadarśan emphasised with justification on two aspects of research, namely, collection of basic facts and their interpretations. The basic facts might be collected from the researches already made by previous scholars. archaeology, anthropology, linguistics, palaeography, numismatics, etc. and other sources which the historians considered to be relevant to their study. It is true that historians of Baṅgadarśan collected materials from the Asiatic Researches and the researches already done by Rajendralal Mitra. But they had to face some difficulties in this connection. Firstly, the English historians, in spite of their predilection for orientalism, could not avoid a colonial orientation in their perspective of Indian
history. Secondly, Rajendralal Mitra, in spite of his great potentiality, could not bring his researches to completion and perfection. Again, in the nineteenth century, the progress of scientific research and that of subjects allied to history were not so remarkable as to be of substantial help to the historians of Baṅgadarśan. However, anthropology and comparative linguistics played their part in the historical researches done in Baṅgadarśan. The writers of Baṅgadarśan took into their consideration the Sanskrit sources, foreign accounts, ancient documents, monuments, coins and epigraphs. In short, they tried their best to collect the relevant facts of history. It remains true that all facts of history were not available to the historians. And again, whatever was collected from different sources was not always taken into account or given due importance by the historians who worked under the influence of their own experiences, ideas and tendencies and above all, the spirit of the age in which they lived.

If that be so, in spite of his objectivity the historian was subjective, to a great extent, in his value-judgement. In fact, the nationalist spirit of the educated Bengalis guided and influenced the historical writings of Baṅgadarśan to a great extent. But still, they tried hard to remain objective as far as possible. It is alleged by some that the Baṅgadarśan hardly showed impartiality and had a tendency towards giving support to the Hindu nation and devoted them towards the reconstruction of the Hindu age. However, it may be pointed out that the Muslim community had inherited a glorious past and that was recorded in history. On the other hand, the Hindu also had a glorious past but it remained unrecorded in history. It was, therefore, natural for the historians of Baṅgadarśan to focus more attention to a neglected area of study in history, especially when the on-going social process was paving the way between 1870 and 1872 towards a revival of Hinduism. It has been aptly remarked by E.H. Carr:

Historian is engaged on a continuous process of moulding his facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to his facts.
This was the characteristic view of Baṅgadarśan. It has been suggested by some that the historical view of Baṅgadarśan was founded upon both romanticism and positivism. The historians seem to have been romanticists like the Germans who made a search for their glorious past in ancient history, ballads and myths in the nineteenth century. But, in fact, they were more positivists in the sense that they believed only on the reliable evidences of history by rejecting the improbable, unbelievable and distorted things. W.H.Walsh has explained the theory of the nineteenth century positivists thus:

Historical thinking is in fact a form of scientific thinking. What the authors stressed was that there are laws of History just as there are laws of Nature.

The historians of Baṅgadarśan, in spite of their scientific attitude to history, never attempted to discover the laws of history comparable to the laws of Nature. Whatever criticism might have been levelled against the historians of Baṅgadarśan, there remains little doubt that they were truly successful in spreading the historical consciousness among the people of Bengal.

BANKIMCHANDRA CHATTOPADHYAY: 1813-1894

The nationalist historiography of Bengal drew its prime inspiration from Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay who is regarded as the philosopher and the preceptor of modern Indian nationalism. He felt aggrieved when he had found that our country’s history was not properly written and India of the Indians was almost absent from the accounts taught in the schools. Rajendralal Mitra’s researches had raised high hopes in his mind. But he was disappointed when he had found that Rajendralal ultimately could not produce a full-fledged history of Bengal. However, the silver lining was discovered by him behind the dark cloud when Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay’s Prathama Síkṣā Baṅgalār Itiḥāsa had been published. He found in it a true picture of Bengali society and culture for which it was referred to by him as ‘a fistful of gold’. He also appreciated the literary qualities of Isvarachandra Gupta. Because, in his literary works on the lives of Bengali rural poets, he had proved his native quality.
However, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay deeply felt the necessity of reconstructing the socio-economic-cultural history of Bengal. He gave a clarion call to the nation, Bengalees in particular and said:

A history (proper) of Bengal is needed; otherwise, Bengal has no hope. Who will write? You will write, I will write and all will write. Let us all search for a history (true) of Bengal together.  

The attitude of Bankim was well demonstrated in several essays published in the *Baigadarśan* from 1872 to 1882. In his essay *Bhāratkalanika* Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay raised the question why India had lost her independence. The Europeans criticised the weakness of the Hindus. But, at one time, the Hindus had conquered Kabul and the English had been defeated by the Marathas and the Sikhs. So far as the ancient Indians were concerned, it was difficult to know exactly about their military achievements due to the paucity of historical materials. The history of wars in India as found in the Greek and Muslim accounts is biased and exaggerated. In spite of that, the military skill of the Indians could be traced from their accounts. According to Bankimchandra, the stigma brought on the Hindu character could be explained by two facts. Firstly, they had no history. Secondly, as they did not make an aggression against their countries or kingdoms, their military skill was not recognised. Thirdly, their political subjugation was the main cause of the slur on the forehead of the nation. Bankim proved that the Indians could by dint of their military strength expand their political and commercial empire in Southeast Asia. Hindu kingdoms were established in Champā and Kāmboja, Java and Bali. In his essay *Bhāratvarṣer Swādhīnatā O Parādhīnatā* (Bhādra, 1280 BS) drew a comparison between ancient India and modern India to settle the question of independence and subjugation and determine the question whether India had her happiness in ancient or modern period. In modern India, “we are not being educated in the art of administration (rājaśāhīyarakṣā O rājyapālān) and therefore the nation is not flourishing. Therefore, it is to be admitted that political dependence arrests the progress.” On the other hand, under English rule European literature and science spread in India. From that point of view, foreign rule might prove to be beneficial. However, in ancient India daṇḍamāni or
political science had made remarkable progress. Bankim referred to the dialogue between Nārada and Yudhiṣṭhīra in the Sabhāparvan of the Mahābhārata in which the main principles of dāṇḍanīti were enunciated. Incidentally, Bankim made a significant observation in which he equated the status of Chandragupta Maurya as a conqueror and founder of empire with that of Charlemagne, Frederick II and Peter I.

Bankimchandra in his essay ‘Baṅge Brāhmaṇopādikā’ (Bhādra, 1280 BS: Aghrāṇ, 1282 BS) definitely made a sincere attempt to trace the social history of Bengal. He assumed that the Brāhmaṇas in Bengal represented the Aryans. According to him, before Aryanisation, Bengal was inhabited by the non-Aryan people like the Kols and Drāviḍas. The process of Aryanisation led to an admixture of Aryan and non-Aryan religion and culture. Thus, an explanation of the origin of the Bengali people was given by Bankim. In his view, the distinction between castes in Bengali society was due to the differences in occupations. Bankimchandra’s view regarding the position of the Brāhmaṇas vis-à-vis the Aryans has not been accepted by modern historians. Modern researches have dealt a rude shock to the belief that the “Brahmanas and other high castes of Bengal descended from the Aryan invaders who imposed their culture and political rule upon primitive barbarian tribes.” In his essay entitled ‘Baṅgālīr Bāhubal’ (Srāvana, 1281 BS) Bankimchandra tried his best to establish that the Bengalees had physical prowess in the past and it was to be revived with an intensity of desire and sincerity of purpose. Bankimchandra observed in this connection:

Now the Bengalees are charged with a very strong urge for upliftment and are ever busy for promotion. Many do not have any serious hope about the results, as the Bengalees do not have physical prowess. They firmly believe that there can be no betterment without physical strength.

The force of desire leads to initiative. When desire acquires that kind of intensity, shortcomings become painful and then that pain generates great drive to reach for the goal. …
When that desire will be awakened in the hearts of the Bengalees, when that desire will gather momentum in the heart of each and every Bengalee, unity will join the initiative.

If the intensity of the desire in the heart of each and every Bengalee reaches such a state that he will be ready to sacrifice life for the commitment, then the Bengalees will surely be strong in physical prowess.

It cannot be said that the Bengalees will never attain such a mental state. Anytime this may happen.

In a review of a tract on Bengal's history by Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay, 'Bāṅgālār Itiḥāsa' (Māgh, 1281 BS) Bankimchandra challenged the various versions of Bengal's history that characterised the Bengali people as cowards. He prided in the colonial achievements of the Bengalees in ancient period and also in the westward political expansion of some Bengal-rulers and raised doubt regarding the tale of the capture of Navadwip by seventeen Muslim cavalry soldiers. His doubts regarding the account of Minhaj-ud-din has been confirmed by modern historians. But his assertion in respect of Bengali colonial achievements can hardly be ascertained due to lack of sufficient evidence. In the same article he commented on the Indian character of the Sultanate in Bengal as contrasted with the foreign character of Mughal domination in Bengal. For, while during the Sultanate Bengali culture flourished, under the Mughal rule Bengali culture declined. This comparative study might not be acceptable to modern researchers. Because, behind the decline of Bengal during the Mughal rule there were socio-economic reasons which Bankim was not in a position to ascertain. Next, he wrote 'Bāṅgālār Itiḥāsa Sambandhe Kayekti Kathā' (Agrāra, 1287 BS). In this brilliant essay Bankim said that it was imperative to find out the social scenario during the Mughal rule. He realised that a predominantly Muslim local peasantry could not come from outside. He remarked that the native peasantry had sacrificed their earlier religion and had taken a newer one. Bankim searched for the reasons behind it. He also tried to find out the result of revenue settlement of Todarmal and the circumstances leading to the origin of the Zamindari system. Therefore, to
Bankim, the socio-economic enquiry might furnish the clue to Bengal’s past. In a nationalistic vein he said:

Bengal must have historical memory. Bengal must have its own history. otherwise the Bengalees could not be able to attain manhood. But this Bengal’s history could hardly be expected to be written by foreigners. It has to be written by the Bengalees themselves.

In his ‘Bāṅgālā Utpatti’ (Pauṣ, 1287 BS – Jayeṣṭha, 1288 BS) Bankim brought into analysis all the latest tools of historiography – anthropology, philology as well as sociology. He remarked that in Bengal the process of Aryanisation or Sanskritisation had not been an easy process. Because, low castes, the tribals with their own language and culture could not be so easily Aryanised. Thus, in an ethnological study it would be found that Bengal was a plural society comprising mostly the non-Aryans in the lower strata and mostly the Aryans in the upper strata. In his ‘Bāṅgālā Lītiśāver Bhagnāṁśa’ (Jayeṣṭha, 1289 BS) Bankim raised some questions to which satisfactorily replies were essential for the reconstruction of the genuine history of Bengal. The questions raised by him covered a very wide area comprising the administrative system, military department, revenue system, bureaucracy, judicial administration, economic condition of the common people, different religious sects, education system, philosophical systems, day-to-day life of the Bengalees, marriage system, fine arts, arts and crafts, maritime history, colonisation in Southeast Asia, nature of import and export in foreign trade of Bengal and the circumstances leading to the conversion of the indigenous people of Bengal to Islam. Most of the enquires of Bankimchandra are found to be related to ancient Bengal. Because, there was dearth of materials for ancient Bengal at that time, while medieval Bengal had been known through the writings of the Muslim historians written mainly in Persian. Bankim wrote an essay ‘Bāṅgālā Kalaṅka’ published in the journal Prachār (Srāvaṇ, 1291 BS). From this essay it is quite clear that the reasons for Bankimchandra’s in-depth study of the antiquities of Bengal primarily aimed to free the Bengalees from their traditional shame for lack of history and to inspire the future generations of Bengal to earn new glory. In this context Bankim wrote:
Bengal suffers from the same shame that India also does. In Bengal the darkness is darker. Sometimes one hears of the physical prowess of Indians other than the Bengalees. No one has ever praised the physical prowess of the Bengalees. Let the person who says that this is the typical character of the Bengalees, the Bengalees are always weak, cowardly and effeminate, be struck by lightning, for he lies. History does not corroborate the criticism. On the contrary we get ample proof of the fact that earlier Bengalees were physically strong, upright and triumphant.

Bankim’s message was, “there is need for Bengal’s history, otherwise there is no hope for Bengal.” From his introduction to Bibidha Prabandha, volume II (1892) it is learnt that Bankimchandra at one time planned to search for historical materials and to write a history of Bengal. But, for various reasons he abandoned this idea. The few articles he wrote in his monthly magazine Baïgadarsan were meant to inspire others. In Bankim’s own words:

To inspire others I wrote a few articles on the history of Bengal in Baïgadarsan. My work was actually the work of labourers who build roads through forests and mountains so that the generals of the army may lead his men to victory. The result of my humble road building labour are these articles on the history of Bengal. But where are those generals who are supposed to lead? I have not heard of them on this road till now.

Ramaprasad Chanda in his Presidential Address in the History section of Bankim Sēhitya Sammelan held at Kanthalpara on Āśādh 2, 1330 BS said with reference to the statement of Bankim quoted above, that for the last fifteen to twenty years much efforts were made for the collection of soldiers, materials and arms. In fact, Ramaprasad meant that many educated Bengalees devoted themselves to the task of collecting the facts of Bengal’s past history and also their correct interpretations. Ramaprasad felt that those two prerequisites – mainly collection and interpretation of facts for the reconstruction of history were satisfactorily fulfilled by the foundation of
Varendra Research Society with the financial assistance of Sri Saratkumar Roy. Ramaprasad himself referred to Bankim as his guru in the same address. Within a few months after the death of Bankimchandra, Akshaykumar Maitreya began to publish serially in Sadhana his work entitled Sirajuddaullah. It would not be unreasonable to assume that Akshaykumar undertook the work at the inspiration of Bankim himself. In this connection our attention is drawn to a reasonable observation made by Rakhaladas Bandopadhyay that Bankim’s sarcastic remark about the battle of Plassy that was in his view nothing but a farce might have stimulated Akshaykumar to take up a vow of obliterating stigma on the life and achievement of Siraj-ud-daullah imposed by the foreign historians. Prabodhchandra Sen is of opinion that Akshaykumar’s poem Vaigavijay was also inspired by Bankim’s view about the conquest of Nadia by seventeen cavalry soldiers. Rakhaladas Bandopadhyay himself had great doubt about the exaggerated account of Minhaj-ud-din regarding the conquest of Nadia by Bakhtiyar Khilji accompanied by seventeen cavalry soldiers. In his article published in Bangadarśan Rakhaladas explained how much labour he had put in to bring out the historical truth lying hidden in Minhaj-ud-din’s account. This he did no doubt in response to the urge previously shown by Bankimchandra. Besides, Rakhaladas made it clear in his article published in the Niśāïja that he wrote the second chapter of the first volume of Bangalar Itihasa by following the method already indicated previously by Bankimchandra himself. The second chapter of Bāṅgālār Itihiṣa is named ‘Baṅger Ādim Adhibāśī O Āryavijay’.

It may, therefore, reasonably be held that Bankimchandra’s mission did never fail. His mission was to introduce the writing of the history of Bengal by the Bengalees in Bengali language. It was fulfilled by the historians like Haraprasad Sastri, Akshaykumar Maitreya, Ramaprasad Chanda and Rakhaladas Bandopadhyay. Secondly, it was desired by Bankim that the writers of history should deeply probe into the original sources, verify their authenticity, analyse them properly and then derive the facts of history. This methodology was faithfully followed by the historians who followed him. Thirdly, Bankimchandra gave a caution to the future historians that the interpretation of the facts as given by foreign writers should be strictly scrutinised and tested so that an unjustified stigma of disgrace either of India or of
Bengal could be avoided. The task was successfully done by the nineteenth and twentieth century historians of Bengal.

The critics of Bankimchandra have charged him with Hindu chauvinism and Bengali bias. To Bankim, each and every Indian was a Hindu. Because, 'Hindu' is another name of India. If any scholar insists upon Bankimchandra’s bias for the Hindu sect, it would be reasonable to probe into Bankim’s essay ‘Bāṅgadeśeṛ Kṛṣṇa’ where no distinction has been made between Hasim Sheikh and Rāmā Kaivartta. So far as Bengali bias is concerned, Bankim’s intention was to show the proper path of reconstruction of the history of the whole of India. According to him, the history of India as a whole could not be written fruitfully, if the history of its parts was not written beforehand. As the history of Bengal was desired to be written by the Bengalees, so also the history of Maharashtra is required to be written by the Marathis themselves, the history of the Punjab by the Punjabis and so on. Bankim’s mission was to set an example before the future historians of India.

Bankimchandra may reasonably be considered as the propounder of a new agenda of the Nationalist Historiography, not only for Bengal but, in a sense, of the whole of India. While Mrityunjay Vidyalankar represented the pre-colonial nationalist historiography, Bankimchandra upheld the cause of nationalist historiography in the colonial period after having adapted European methodology of historical writing. The adaptation of Western methodology lay in the logic of history.
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