CHAPTER II
NATIONALIST AWAKENING AND ANCIENT BENGAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

The era of nationalist school of historiography that seems to have had its beginning in the Baigadarśan edited by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay witnessed a remarkable progress in the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century. The nationalist historiography was guided by two main principles. Firstly, the history of Bengal was to be written by the Bengalees in Bengali language that came to be considered as jātīya bhasa or national language since the time of Isvaragupta. The publication of Bankimchandra’s works, both novels and essays, strengthened the Bengali prose style and the writers of history in Bengali language gained much confidence. Secondly, the objective of the nationalist school was jātipratisphā or making of the nation by an assertion of the characteristics of the polity, society, economy and culture of their country. In order to achieve their objective they had to be equipped with evidences deduced from available sources, mainly archaeological, so that they might combat the views of the colonial historians who had purposely distorted the history of India in general and of Bengal in particular. In fact, the writing of history made its progress with the progress of archaeological discoveries.

The principles of the nationalist school were upheld in two ways. Firstly, they used to collect material by exploration or excavation of the antiquities, on the one hand and also by the discovery of the manuscripts of some indigenous texts and continued to write articles in contemporary journals. Secondly, the historians also attempted sometimes to get together, thus organise a society of their own and make use of it as a forum for expressing their views and opinions on different historical problems.
LITERARY JOURNALS

Among the journals to which the historians liked to contribute, first mention may be made of Bhāratī that might be considered as a successor of Baṅgadarśan. The monthly Bhāratī, started in 1877, was a literary magazine of high standard. For the first seven years it was edited by Dwijendranath Tagore. Dwijendranath wrote in his introduction to the very first volume of Bhāratī about the objectives for which it was published. It was said that his main purpose was to promote expansion of knowledge acquired from both swades (own country) and vides (foreign country) without any bias. But preference would be given to swadesīya bhāb, that is, ideas and ideals of the motherland. From the contents it appears that Bhāratī accommodated articles on literature, science, fine arts, education, philosophy, history, politics – Indian and foreign – and even dramaturgy. After Dwijendranath Tagore Bhāratī was edited by Swarnakumari Devi, Sarala Devi, Rabindranath Tagore, Manilal Gangopadhyay and Saurindranath Mukhopadhyay. For about half a century Bhāratī made great contributions to Bengali literature. Among the contemporary historians who made their contributions to this journal special mention may be made of Ramdas Sen, Akshaykumar Maitreya, Ramaprasad Chanda, Rakhaladas Bandopadhyay, Jadunath Sarkar and Nalinikanta Bhattashali.

The monthly Prachār, started in 1884 was run by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and it continued for four years. The monthly magazine Sādhanā was started in 1891. Its founder editor was Sudhindranath Tagore. From the fourth year it was edited by Rabindranath. Some remarkable historical essays were published in those two journals. The monthly magazine Sāhitya was first published in 1890. It was edited by Sureshchandra Samajpati. The objectives of the journal were:

1. Development of national literature;
2. Priority to be given to truth and beauty in literature, secularism and the principle of art for art’s sake;
3. Synthesis between the old and the new;
4. To consider English education as beneficial to the development of Indian intellect:
5. To follow the past tradition.

Among the historians who contributed to this journal special mention should be made of Akshaykumar Maitreya, Ramaprasad Chanda, Kailashchandra Singha, Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay, Radhagovinda Basak. On the suggestion of Rabindranath Tagore, Akshaykumar Maitreya started the quarterly magazine *Aitihiṣik Chitra* from Rajsahi in 1899. Later it was published in 1904 and 1907 under the editorship of Nikhilnath Roy. This journal contained at the initial stage exclusively the historical contributions of Akshaykumar Maitreya himself. The *Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrika* was started in 1894 as an organ of *Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat* itself founded in the same year. The first editor of *Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrika* was Rajanikanta Gupta. Among the contributors who enriched this journal special mention may be made of Nagendranath Vasu, Haraprasad Sastri, Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Nikhilnath Roy, Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay etc.

The main objective of the above mentioned journals was mainly the development of Bengali language and literature. Bengali literature, however, accommodated the writings on different branches of knowledge – social sciences, natural sciences, literature and art. Among the social sciences, history was brought under a separate category. It appears, therefore, that the editors of those journals distinguished history from literature, science, art, education, philosophy, religion and politics. This categorisation of the subjects included in the journals seems to indicate that the concept of history was limited within the boundaries of the chronological account of the past events. But in fact, genuine history should include accounts of different phases of human life. From that point of view, it may be said that the above mentioned journals upheld the cause of reconstructing history in both its wider sense and limited sense. At a later period, the findings of scholars in the fields of literature, linguistics, various branches of science, philosophy, sociology, religion, fine arts, politics etc. helped, to a great extent, in giving a final shape to the total history of India in general and of Bengal in particular. It is also interesting to note that in contemporary times many other journals, periodicals and newspapers were published and some of them had an objective of development of Bengali language and literature.
But the reason behind selecting above journals is that the Bengali literature they promoted included the historical literature in a big way and thus advanced the progress of historiography of ancient Bengal.

NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY & AWAKENING IN BENGAL

As it has been observed by Rameshchandra Majumdar:

Broadly speaking, nationalist history of India was originally a reaction against the British histories of India, and later gathered its strength and inspiration from the awakening of national consciousness among the Indians. Still later, it received further impetus from the countrywide agitation for securing political rights which slowly merged itself into the movement to free India from the yoke of the British.¹⁰

The historical works of most of the British writers showed certain clear tendencies which hurt particularly the people of Bengal who had been sufficiently enlightened not to overlook them. Those tendencies were the following:¹⁰

A. There was a conscious and deliberate effort to minimise the importance of the past greatness of the Indians;
B. To deny the antiquity of Indian culture;
C. To belittle the culture of the Indians;
D. To highlight and magnify only the evils and weak points of the Indian society and to hammer upon the excellence of European culture and values.

The reactions to those tendencies were inevitable.

It should be pointed out that the reactions shown by the historians of Bengal especially in their historical writings seem to have had a necessary relation with the growing political consciousness in Bengal. On the one hand, the beginnings of researches into ancient Indian history, culture and civilisation and the revealing works
on Indology of Jones, Colebrooke, Wilson, Prinsep, Cunningham, Rajendralal Mitra, Akshaykumar Maitreya, Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay and others threw new light on the great heritage and glorious past of the Bengalees and thus instilled into them a buoyant sense of pride and self-confidence. The growing sense of pride and self-confidence caused a great awakening in Bengal and sowed the seeds of national consciousness. On the other hand, the post-1857 period witnessed a remarkable and rapid growth of political consciousness, the assertion of national sentiments and the beginning of sustained political agitation in Bengal. The symptoms of political consciousness were manifest in the organisations like the Patriots’ Association (1865), Hindu Mela (1867), National Society (1870), Indian Association (1876), All India National Conference (1883) etc. According to some, the All India National Conference was the precursor of Indian National Congress (1885). The growing political consciousness, which is evident from the Associations mentioned above, reflected no doubt dissatisfaction with the colonial rule of the British. In this background, the historians of Bengal were publishing articles on different historical problems or reporting in edited forms discoveries of some epigraphs, coins, monuments and manuscripts in the contemporary journals. It was but natural for them to feel the impact of national awakening in Bengal. Jāipratisṭha or the making of the nation was the ulterior goal of Bengal intelligentsia who were in search of self-respect and self-confidence that might be based upon the heritage of the past. As Dr. Percival Spear writes:

All this attention was to the new class as water in a thirsty land. avid as it was for respect.

From this point of view, it may be reasonably held that the nineteenth century agenda of Bengal was the nationalist historiography of Bengal that was to be fulfilled by the historians of Bengal, as it was dreamt of by Bankimchandra.
Rabindranath Tagore’s response to the nationalist historiography in Bengal was of much significance. He promoted researches in history of swades in the capacity of an editor of the journals like Sādhana, Bhāratī and Baṅgadarśan. He also reviewed some historical works of his time like that of Akshaykumar Maitreyya and Saratkumar Roy. He himself wrote two essays, namely, Bhāratavarṣer Itihāsa and Bhāratavarṣer Itihāser Dharā. Tagore turned his attention to the history of his motherland at a time when nationalist aspirations were gaining strength more and more and paving the way towards the Swadeshi Movement. He was not free from the influence of the spirit of the age that was awakened by gaining self-respect and self-confidence through the discovery of the glorious past of India in general and of Bengal in particular. He was never in agreement with the European Orientalists’ perspective of Indian history. He found that the Westerners’ view of history was predominantly political in nature. But he was of opinion that Indian history was basically social and cultural in character.

In a letter to Ajitkumar Chakravorty (Āśvin 23, 1316 BS) he wrote:

I am not prepared to take lessons from the political history of other countries... Our history has been different.

In 1916, he said:

In fact, our history has not been of the rise and fall of kingdoms, of fights for political supremacy. In our country records of these days have been despised and forgotten, for they in no way represent the true history of our people. Our history is that of our social life and attainment of our spiritual ideals.

Tagore accepted a social interpretation of history. According to him, man is a social, sensitive and imaginative being and not a mechanical entity or political animal. That India’s history was a manifestation of the continuing process of racial and social synthesis has been explained by Rabindranath thus:
... though the *Mahābhārata* may not be history in the modern western definition of the term, it is, nevertheless, receptacle of the historical records which had left their impress upon the living memory of the people for ages. Had any competent person attempted to sift and sort and analyze this material into an ordered array of facts, we should have lost the changing picture of Aryan society which they present, a picture in which the lines are vivid or dim, connected or confusedly conflicting, according to the lapses of memory, changes of ideal, and variations of light and shade incident to time's perspective. Self-recording annals of history, as they are imprinted on the living tablet of ages, are bared before our sight in this great work.¹⁸

*It has been again said by Tagore in his inimitable language:*

> Throughout her history one notices the attempt, above all else, to establish unity in diversity, to approach truth by different paths and to realise in complete faith the One in the many as the inmost Reality – not destroying superficial differences but discovering their underlying correspondence.¹⁹

The inspiration, which Bankimchandra gave at one stage for recording genuine history of our country, received further impetus from Tagore in its next phase. Tagore also gave a call to that historian who would be able to project the true image of *Bhāratavarṣa* ²⁰ (*jini samasta Bhāratavṛṣke sammukhe mūrtimān kariyā tuliben, sei aitihāsikke āmra āhwān karitechi*). He thought that the responsibility of imparting education to our country's children should be taken away from the foreigners into the hands of the native people so that the children might imbibe the idea of *swades̄* in a *swades̄i* method ²¹. According to Tagore, the *swades̄i* method is entirely dependent upon “*swades̄er ekkhāni sampūrpa itihāsa*”, that is, a comprehensive and genuine history of our country ²².

Rabindranath most probably discovered in Akshaykumar Maitreya the historian who might be able to project the true image of *Bhāratavarṣa*. The periodical *Sādhana* edited by Rabindranath started publishing ancient copper plates, on the one hand, and
articles on the comparatively modern historical topics, on the other. The Sādhanā published in a series Akshaykumar’s work entitled ‘Siraj-ud-daullah’ since September 1895. When the publication of the Sādhanā discontinued, ‘Siraj-ud-daullah’ began to be published in the Bhāratī, jointly edited by Hiranmoyee Devi and Sarala Devi. When Siraj-ud-daullah was published in the book form in 1898, Rabindranath himself reviewed the book in the Bhāratī thus:

Bengali literature will remain ever grateful to him (i.e., Akshaykumar) for the freedom he has brought in the historiography of Bengal.

Akshaykumar deserves the credit of being a pioneer among the early historians. An intimate friendship between Rabindranath and Akshaykumar developed in the closing years of the nineteenth century. During this phase, Akshaykumar was a regular contributor to the Bhāratī edited by Rabindranath himself. Sometimes they wrote the editorials jointly. When Rabindranath started editing the Bangadarśan, Akshaykumar was a regular contributor to it. However, there is least doubt about the fact that Rabindranath provided both inspiration and encouragement to Akshaykumar’s historical writings. The poet encouraged the historian to edit a historical journal, Aitiḥāsik Chitra, from Rajsahi in 1899. The journal did not continue for long. But it reflected the nationalist approach to the history of Bengal. At the request of Akshaykumar, Tagore wrote a lengthy introduction to the first issue of the journal. He wrote:

On this day we are rejoicing on the beginning of the publication of the Aitiḥāsik Chitra. Literary progress is not the only cause of rejoicing: there are other reasons also to rejoice...

Scholarship is not the only result of the efforts for collecting materials and constructing history of one’s own country. These efforts induce a current in the stagnant mind. These efforts contain our health and our life.

When the Bangadarśan first appeared, it also created an unheard-of joy and hope in Bengal, a far-reaching star in the heart of the Bengali readers. That joy came from the efforts to do something independently...
The *Barigadarsan* opened the main gate of the palace of our literature. Now the time has come to open the door of one particular portion of that palace. The *Aitihāsik Chitra* is standing on the threshold of a closed, large building on which ‘Indian History’ is inscribed...

We hope that this magazine will usher in a new era of free historical researches... If the magazine dies after giving birth to this era, even then the *Aitihāsik Chitra* will be nationally alive forever.  

The poet found in the *Aitihāsik Chitra* an emancipation of Indian history from alien hands and ushering in of the age of freedom in the writing of history of our country. He further declared that the *Aitihāsik Chitra* had waged a crusade for unshackling India’s history.

Rabindranath Tagore was aware of the shortcomings of the British historiography on India. In his ‘Foreword’ to *Śīvāji O Mārāthā Jāī* by Saratkumar Roy, Rabindranath wrote:

> The history of India we read in schools is the life story of the kings and not the story of the country. By reading this, our curiosity may be satisfied but we do not get any historical lesson.

Again, Tagore’s reply to the criticism of an Anglo-Indian newspaper against Akshaykumar’s *Siraj-ud-daullah* was actually a defence of the nationalist historiography. He remarked that the reaction of the said newspaper was quite natural. He asked:

> But which was more serious, the slur and sneer heaped upon the eastern people by English writers which resulted from what the *Spectator* called ‘the dislike for Aryans’ or the history of Bengal (written by the nationalists) which even the majority of the educated Bengalees will not read?
Here we are reminded of Bankimchandra’s essays entitled ‘Bhārat Kālaïka’ and ‘Bāṅgālār Kālaïka’. In his article ‘Aītīhāṣık Jātiknēchit’ (‘Historical Titbits’) he questioned:

Why should we always bear the torture of studying history written in accordance with the alien tradition of foreign writers?\(^\text{30}\)

But Tagore did not spare Akshaykumar when he crossed the limits of objectivity. He criticised him for taking side with Siraj-ud-daullah. In stead of narrating history on the impatient in establishing basis of solid evidences Akshaykumar became emotional in presenting the story and became impatient in establishing his own opinion.

Although Rabindranath upheld the cause of nationalist historiography, he did not hesitate in underlining the essentiality of neutrality in writing history. He has said:

Thus the task of determining the truth becomes easier, if history is two-sided and not one-sided. The foreign historian will arrange his evidences in his own way and the nationalist historian in another way. This will facilitate the work of a third neutral side.\(^\text{31}\)

It would, therefore, be reasonable to hold that Tagore viewed nationalist historiography as a means to an end and not an end in itself\(^\text{32}\).

**VAṆĠĪYA SĀHITYA PARIṢAT**

The **Bengal Academy of Literature** was established on July 23.1893. The main aim of the Academy was “the study of Bengali literature and the publication of the results of that study, with a view to popularise the literature of Bengal.”\(^\text{33}\) It has been surmised by Rameshchandra Majumdar that Bankimchandra himself was one of the patrons of the Academy\(^\text{34}\). The first President of the Academy was Kumar Bijoykrishna Dev. Among the distinguished members of the Academy were George Birdwood (India Office, London), Professor Maxmiller, Sir Monier Williams, Dr.
Litener, Sir Edwin Arnold and Sir William Wilson Hunter in addition to Rajanikanta Gupta, Saratchandra Dás, Romeshchandra Dutt, Basantaranjan Roy, Chandicharan Bandopadhyay and others. The objectives of the Academy were the publication of the comprehensive Bengali dictionary, the Bengali grammar written on scientific lines, the history of the origin of the Bengali language, the study of names of persons, places and rivers, the collection of inscriptions and other records found in different parts of Bengal and the collection of other evidences of Bengal’s history and culture in order to discover the past of *swades*, that is our country. The advices given by Professor Maxmuller and others for the purpose were put into practice in course of time by the contemporary intellectuals like Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Haraprasad Sastri, Rabindranath Tagore, Yogeshchandra Roy Vidyanidhi, Nagendranath Vasu, Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay, Nalinikanta Bhattashali, Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, Rameshchandra Majumdar, Sushilkumar De, Ramaprasad Chanda, Saratkumar Roy, Dineshchandra Sen, Sukumar Sen, Chintaharan Chakravorty, Dineshchandra Sircar, Dineshchandra Bhattacharya, Brojendranath Bandopadhyay, Jogeshchandra Bagal and others. The monthly periodical of the Bengal Academy of Literature was the mouthpiece of the organisation. Besides, a plan of work was drawn up by which each member or any two members would jointly undertake to make himself or themselves master of a division of literature and write a paper thereon. Among the ten divisions, the fifth one is mentioned as “Hindu literature as portraying society and ethics among the Bengalees, past and present.”

By the advice of Rajnarain Basu, the Academy was renamed as Vañgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat on February 18, 1894. In course of a decade, the branches of the Vañgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat were established all-over Bengal. Till the foundation of the Bengal Academy of Literature (Vañgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat), there was an inclination among the distinguished scholars to write papers concerning any aspect of the history and culture of Bengal in Bengali language. The Vañgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat abolished the restriction as regards the use of a language, which was allowed to be either Bengali or English. The first editor of the *Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā* was Rajanikanta Gupta. The first President of the Pariṣat was Romeshchandra Dutt and first joint Secretaries were L. Liotard and Devendranath Mukhopadhyay. The efforts of the Vañgiya Sāhitya
Pariṣat towards the reconstruction of the ancient history of Bengal were quite evident from the papers published in the Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā, monographs published by the Pariṣat and the Archaeological Museum of the Pariṣat.

ROMESHCHANDRA DUTT: 1848 - 1909

Romeshchandra Dutt was elected the first President of the Vaṅgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat with justification. Because, he was in full agreement with the aims and objectives of the organisation emphasising upon the swadesī ideal. Earlier, he had come in contact with Bankimchandra and developed his liking for ancient civilisation. Besides, his mentality was deeply touched upon by the historical essays of Bankimchandra published in the Baṅgadarśan. Earlier, he had written The Peasantry of Bengal (1874), An Easy Introduction to the History and Geography of Bengal for junior classes (1874) and A Brief History of Ancient and Modern Bengal for the use of the schools (1892). It appears that Romeshchandra Dutt’s devotion towards the reconstruction of the history of Bengal was inspired by Bankimchandra. However, in 1895 a revised and enlarged edition of his The Literature of Bengal was published. Earlier, the same book was published in 1877 under the author’s pseudonym. However, in this latest work, Romeshchandra, being inspired by the spirit of nationalism, attempted to portray not only the history of Bengali literature but also Bengal’s national life. In a revealing passage he noted the importance of literary evidence as a source material of Bengal’s social history:

The literature of every country, slowly expanding through successive ages, reflects accurately the manners and customs, the doings and the thoughts of the people. And thus, although no work of a purely historical character has been left behind by the people of ancient India, it is possible to gain from their works on literature and religion a fairly accurate idea of their civilisation and the progress of their intellect and social institutions.

Romeshchandra sought “to trace as far as possible the history of the people, as reflected in the literature of Bengal.” The inner life, the thoughts, the feelings and the
real life of Bengal had been brought in *The Literature of Bengal*. Prabodhchandra Sen is of opinion that Romeshchandra’s pamphlet entitled *Bāngālār Itiḥāsa* (1892) together with *The Literature of Bengal* helps us to form a clear conception of a comprehensive history of Bengal. It is interesting to note that Romeshchandra’s *The Literature of Bengal* was further edited and published with the title *Cultural Heritage of Bengal* (1962). What Romeshchandra Dutt did as a researcher was in keeping with the programme of the *Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat* as well as maintained the continuity of the nationalist historiography of ancient Bengal. It has recently been pointed out by a scholar that although Romeshchandra was influenced by Bankimchandra’s Hindu nationalism and romantic spirit towards the glorious past, he did never part with the liberal, rationalist philosophical approach of the West.

**HARAPRASAD SASTRI : 1853-1931**

Haraprasad Sastri, an eminent Sanskrit scholar of his time, began his career of academic researches and investigation as an editor of the *Bibliotheca Indica* at the *Asiatic Society* under the guidance of his illustrious teacher Rajendralal Mitra. At a later period, he was closely associated with the *Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat* as one of its Vice-Presidents for a number of years and also with the *Greater India Society*. Although his ulterior goal was to discover the true spirit of Indian culture, his researches brought welcome light on the still unknown corner of Bengali literature. He felt like Bankimchandra whom he considered as his ‘friend, philosopher and guide’ that ‘Bāṅgāli ekī ātmabīṃśṛta jāti’, that is, the Bengalees represented a nation who had been oblivious of their own identity. Although the proverbial saying was uttered by him much later in his life he had been always conscious of this fact while prosecuting his studies in different fields of Indology.

Haraprasad stated in one of his essays entitled ‘Āmāder Itiḥāsa’ (Our History):

> We had no history; it is true that the Europeans have taught us history. We have been still following the way shown by them. But mere listening to them will no longer suffice. They do not have all information about our country. do
not read all books, do not mix with our people. They have consulted some of the books. On that basis they have created a structure of history.\textsuperscript{43}

Therefore, like other historians of the nineteenth century Bengal, Haraprasad also believed in nationalist historiography of ancient Bengal.

One of the discoveries of Haraprasad was the exact date of the origin of the Bengali script. In 1867, Rajendralal Mitra traced, for the first time, ancient Bengali script in an eleventh century manuscript of the text \textit{Setubandha}. In 1883, Bendell discovered the text of \textit{Hevajratantra} written in Bengali script bearing the date AD 1198. But those discoveries failed to determine the date of the Bengali script before the Muslim rule in Bengal. Haraprasad discovered eleven manuscripts\textsuperscript{44} copied before the beginning of the Muslim rule. With the help of those manuscripts it was possible for him to suggest tenth century AD as the date of the beginning of the Bengali script. Of course, according to Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay:

\begin{quote}
We find the complete proto-Bengali alphabet in the eleventh century AD. In the twelfth century, we find further changes, which make the formation of the modern Bengali alphabet almost complete.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

Haraprasad showed the full formation of the Bengali alphabet through an evolution in the Muslim period. He came to this conclusion on the basis of an investigation of the scripts in which were written the texts like \textit{Subhāṣītasānīgraḥa} (Twelfth century AD), \textit{Pañcharakṣī} (Thirteenth century), \textit{Dharmaratana} of Jīmūtavāhana (Fourteenth century), \textit{Śrīkrṣapakṛttana} of Baśu Chaṇḍidāsa (Fourteenth century), \textit{Kusumāṇjali Prakāś}, Part I (Fifteenth century), \textit{Mahābhārata}, Ṣūlapara of Kāśīrām Dās (Sixteenth century), \textit{Aṅgadarśavara} (Seventeenth century) and \textit{Jaiminibhārata} (Eighteenth century). However, his article entitled '\textit{Bāṅgāḷī Purāṇo Aksar}' (Old Bengali Script)\textsuperscript{46} deserves mention in this connection.

Haraprasad collected from Nepal three Buddhist texts in their manuscript form along with the Sanskrit commentaries on them. Those texts were \textit{Chāryāchārya...
*Viniśchaya* (a collection of the Buddhist songs), Saroruñavaja’s *Dohākośa* and Krṣṇāchārya’s *Dohākośa*. Those three texts along with *Dākārṇava*, discovered earlier, were edited by Haraprasad under the title of *Hāzār Bacharer Pūrāṇa Bāṅgālī Bhāsā: Baudhā Gaṇ O Dohā* and published in 1916. The *Charyāpadas* written by the Buddhist Siddhāchāryyas not only determined the date of the Bengali language, but also brought to our notice the pen picture of the daily life of the Bengali people. Haraprasad, for the first time, traced Bengali language in the manuscript of *Subhāṣītaśāsana-graha* collected from Nepal in 1897-98. However, in the light of his nine years’ laborious research on the *Charyāpadas*, Haraprasad concluded that Luipāda, the first composer of the *Charyās* (Buddhist songs), was the first Bengali poet. Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay later confirmed the findings of Haraprasad in the following statement:

The language of the *Charyās* is the genuine vernacular of Bengal at its basis.

The date of Luipāda was AD 950 according to Haraprasad. This view was more or less confirmed by the later writers like Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, Sukumar Sen, Prabodhchandra Bagchi and Muhammad Sahidullah.

Among the manuscripts collected by Haraprasad special mention may be made of the *Rāmcharita* of Sandhyākara Nandi. The text is treated as the only historical document of Eastern India and the historians have made use of it in connection with the reconstruction of the history of ancient Bengal and eastern India. The *Rāmcharita* was written in such a style that it presented the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the story of Rāmapāla at the same time. In an introduction to his edition of the *Rāmcharita* (1910) Haraprasad has discussed in a short span the origin of the Pāla dynasty, rise of the Pālas to power; their matrimonial alliances with the Kṣatriya dynasties; reign period of Dharmapāla; expansion of Dharmapāla’s kingdom; reformation of Mahāyāna Buddhism; reformer Haribhadra; Khālimpur copper plate grant; Dharmapāla’s father Gopāla; Dharmapāla’s brother Vākpāla. Devapāla: Buddhism in the reign of Devapāla; *Dharmamāṅgal; Läusen*, wars and battles in the reign of Vigrahapāla; generations of Brāhmaṇa ministers; coins of the Pāla kings:
Nārāyaṇapāla; Rājayapāla; Gopāla II; Mahīpāla and Sāranāth inscription; popularity of Mahīpāla; invasion of Rajendrachola; Chedi empire; Karna of the Chedi dynasty; Atiśa Dipaṅkara; Prajñakaramati; Bengali literature; Nātha religion: Nayapāla; Vigrahapāla II; Mahīpāla II; Sūrapāla; Rāmapāla and his battles: the bridge made of a fleet of ships; foundation of the Rāmāvatī city; council of Rāmapāla; death of Rāmapāla; Kumārapāla’s general Vaidyadeva; Gopāla III; Madanapāla; Mahendrapāla; Govindapāla and history of Mithila. In fact, the Rāmācharita deals with the most remarkable achievement of Rāmapāla, that is, how he subdued the Kaivartta rebellion headed by Divyoka and recovered Varendri. In this connection, Haraprasad has chosen to recount the history and culture of Bengal during the entire Pāla period. Haraprasad also discussed about the Brahmanical Sanskrit literature, the Buddhist Sanskrit literature and the Bengali literature during the Pāla period in his article ‘Literary History of the Pāla Period’. Haraprasad’s edition of the Rāmācharita is not without flaws. For that reason, Rameshchandra Majumdar, Nanigopal Bandopadhyay and Radhagovinda Basak later published a revised edition of the Rāmācharita from the Varendra Research Society in 1939. So far as the history of ancient Bengal is concerned, Haraprasad made further contributions by editing some of the epigraphic records like the Edilpur and Madanpara copper plate grants of the time of Lakṣmaṇasena’s successors. Dineshchandra Sircar in recent times has traced some defects in Sastri’s epigraphic studies.

Haraprasad Sastri appears to have been specially interested in the history of Buddhism in Bengal. Attempts were made by him to trace the circumstances leading to the decline of Buddhism in Bengal. In his articles entitled ‘Varīge Bauddhadharma’ (Buddhism in Bengal), ‘Sahajayāna’ , ‘Bauddhadhāmer Adhālap’ (Decline of Buddhism), ‘Bauddhadhāmera Kothīy Galo’ (Where the Buddhism has gone), ‘Bāṅgālīr Bauddhasamīr’ (The Society of the Buddhists of Bengal) etc. he attempted to trace the circumstances leading to the decline of Buddhism in Bengal. He has shown how the decline of Buddhism was caused by an induction of the Tantric elements in it. In Bengal, Buddhist Tantras were, in course of time, absorbed into the Hindu Tantras. It was suggested by a scholar later on that the Buddhists were the first to introduce the Tantras into the religion of Bengal, and the Hindus borrowed
them at a later stage. However, in spite of the decline of Buddhism, it maintained its precarious existence, according to Sastri at the level of folk religion represented by the worship of Dharmathākūr. This viewpoint has been explained by him in his article ‘Discovery of the Remnants of Buddhism in Bengal’ (1894) and in his monograph entitled _Discovery of Living Buddhism in Bengal_ (1897). Haraprasad’s monograph was presented at the Paris Congress of the Orientalists by M. Foucher and Sylvain Levi recognised it as a real discovery.

**NAGENDRANATH VASU: 1866-1938**

Nagendranath Vasu, _Pracyavidyāmānāraṇava_, was associated with the _Vangīya Sāhitya Pariṣat_ from the very beginning as one of those who gave a definite direction to the programme of the _Pariṣat_. In 1896, he undertook the responsibility of editing the _Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā_. The drafts of essays published in the _Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā_ were later on included into the _Viśvakosa_ (Encyclopædia) edited by Nagendranath himself. He was a pioneer in the collection of Bengali manuscripts. Those manuscripts edited by Nagendranath were published by the _Vangīya Sāhitya Pariṣat_. By his tireless efforts from BS 1294-5 to 1318, twenty volumes of the _Viśvakosa_ consisting of 17,000 pages were completed. The Encyclopædia was the most notable achievement of Nagendranath’s academic career. Another work of Nagendranath that deserves mention in the history of historical writings on ancient Bengal is _Vaṅger Jāṅya Itihāsa_ (The Castes and Sects of Bengal). The first part of it was published in BS 1305. It contains the social history of Bengal reconstructed in the light of the _Kulajī_ texts, stone inscriptions and copper plate grants. Nagendranath has given an account of the Brāhmaṇas, Kāyasthas and Vaiśyas in his social history. The _Brāhmaṇa-Kāṇḍa_ is divided into four volumes and six parts. The most authoritative _Kulajī_ text entitled _Mahāvaṁśa_ useful for the history of the Rūḍhiṇa _Brāhmaṇa_ community forms a separate part of _Vaṅger Jāṅya Itihāsa_. The account of the Kāyasthas is given in five volumes and six parts. The first part of the first volume only is entitled _Vaiśya Kāṇḍa_. Nagendranath mostly concentrated on the history of the Kāyasthas. In the work entitled _Kāyasther Varṣa Nīraṇaya_ (1901) the author has traced the history of the Kāyasthas living in different parts of India from ancient to
modern times. It is included in Vañger Jāñya Itihāsa. Besides, A Short History of Indian Kāyasthas was written by Nagendranath for the All India Kāyastha Conference held at Lahore in 1915. While writing Vañger Jāñya Itihāsa, Nagendranath derived much help and advice from Haraprasad Sastri all through.

We obtained the historical perspective, the motivation behind his historical studies from his Introduction to the RājanyaKapda in Vañger Jāñya Itihāsa. It is learnt from the above Introduction that the symptom of progress achieved by a nation is indicated how the history of families (vaṁśa) and clans (kula) is maintained properly. In Indian tradition it is customary to recount the glorious past of a family or families on the occasion of social ceremonies, especially marriage. However, in recent times, anthropologists are divided in their opinion with regard to the origin of the Bengali people. It is held by some that the Bengali people represent a branch of Dravidian stock. Others hold that they represent a mixture of the Dravidian and the Mongoloids. Most of the anthropologists underline the fact that there is a minimum Aryan element in the population of Bengal. But in the Brāhmaṇa Kapda of Vañger Jāñya Itihāsa, Nagendranath has shown that all categories of Brāhmaṇas, Varendra, Rādhīya, Vedic and Sākadvīpi, were not original inhabitant of Gauḍa but came from the North Western Province. So also was the case of the Kāyasthas who came along with the Brāhmaṇas. This fact deduced from the Kulajī texts, According to Nagendranath, leaves no scope of doubt that the Brāhmaṇas and the Kāyasthas had in their veins pure Aryan blood. Therefore, no doubt should be entertained with regard to the existence of Aryan element in the Bengali population.

Secondly, those who argue that Indians did not recognise the necessity of history are mistaken. Because, the Kulajī texts in Bengal itself have preserved the history of the society in Bengal. The rise and formation of the society, expansion of the society, family relationship in the society, social exchanges, customs and traditions of the society and even the course of history of each and every family living in the society are found recorded in the Kulajī texts. Western educated Bengalees are enchanted by the European history. But they totally lose sight of the fact that they also have their own history, which is in no way inferior to that of Europe. It is for this reason that
Nagendranath took great pains in collecting as much *Kulaṭि* texts from different parts of Bengal as possible.

Thirdly, the Kāyasthas in Bengal played the most crucial role in the social, political, religious and cultural history of Bengal. It is true that the Kāyasthas were the professional clerks cum accountants and that sometimes they served in different capacities in the bureaucracy of the ruler. But, that is not all about the Kāyasthas. In fact, the real history of Gauḍa-Vaṅga is mainly the history of the Kāyasthas who excelled other in physical, mental and intellectual faculties. Nagendranath has referred to the statement of Abul Fazl that the most of the zamindars of *subah* Bāṅglā were Kāyasthas. In view of the historical importance attached of the Kāyastha community, Nagendranath has given in the first part of the *Kāyastha Kānḍa* an account of the Kāyastha rulers, the part being named as *Rādhīya Kānḍa*. In the second part of the *Kāyastha Kānḍa* he has dealt with the entire history of the Kāyastha society.

Nagendranath’s reliance on the *Kulaṭि* texts was not the first of its kind in the historiography of ancient Bengal. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay believed in the authenticity of the *Kulaṭि* texts. Lalmohan Vidyanidhi wrote his *Sambandha Nirguṇa* , the first social history of Bengal on the basis of the *Kulaṭि* texts. Haraprasad Sastri, who wrote some pioneering historical works, maintained his belief in the *Kulaṭि* texts as a source of genuine history. He provided Nagendranath with much help, advice and guidance at the time of writing *Vaṅger Jāṭya Itihāsa*. But later on, the reliability and authenticity of the *Kulaṭि* texts was put to question by Ramaprasad Chanda, Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay and Rameshchandra Majumdar.

The historicity of the *Kulaśāstras* or the *Kulaṭि* texts has been criticised on the following grounds:

A. That the Brāhmanas were brought in Bengal from the west is the main theme of the *Kulaśāstras*. First, Sudraka brought the Sārasvata Brāhmanas, later known as Saptasatī Brāhmanas. Second, Ādiśūra brought five Brāhmanas (each Brāhmaṇa being accompanied by a Kāyastha) whose descendants were known as Rādhiya
and Varendra Brāhmaṇas. Third, King Śaśāṅka brought Sākadvīpi Brāhmaṇas, later known as Grahaṇipras. Fourth, King Harivarmā or Sāmalavarmā brought the Vedic Brāhmaṇas. Among the kings who invited the Brāhmaṇas in Bengal Ṛdiśūra has been given the highest importance in the Kulajī texts. While other kings are known in history, Ṛdiśūra is the least known figure of history. There is no evidence supporting the existence of a king named Ṛdiśūra in Bengal. However, from different sources we come to know about three Sūra kings ruling in Bengal in the eleventh century AD, such as Raṇāśūra of Dakshiṇa Rādhā mentioned in the epigraphs of Rājendra Chola, Lakṣmīśūra of Apara Mandār mentioned as one of the sūmantas of Rāmapāla in Sandhyākara Nandi’s Rāmacarita and the Sūra dynasty from which was born Vilāsadevi, queen of King Vijayasena.

The Kulajī texts suggest two dates of Ṛdiśūra. According to some, he ruled in the eighth century AD on the eve of the foundation of the Pāla kingdom. The second opinion of the Kulajī texts is that Ṛdiśūra ruled in the eleventh century AD at the time of the decline of the Pāla dynasty. The second opinion appears to be more probable than the first one on the grounds referred to above.

B. Even if it is admitted that Ṛdiśūra ruled in the eighth century AD and brought five Brāhmaṇas from Kānyaκubja on account of death of Veda-knowing Brāhmaṇas in Bengal, it is difficult to accept this suggestion. Because, from a large number of Gupta land grants found in Bengal we come to know that the Brāhmaṇas belonging to various gotras, pravaras and various branches of Vedic schools and performing Śrāuta rites began to settle in Bengal since the fifth century AD. Fresh immigration of Brāhmaṇas and their settlement in Bengal are known to us from the Pāla -Sena records (eighth to twelfth century AD). Therefore, it would be quite unreasonable to assume that the Brāhmaṇas who settled in Bengal before the time of Ṛdiśūra were only seven hundred in number and almost entirely vanished from Bengal, whereas the descendants of five Brāhmaṇas from Kānyaκubja multiplied to millions in course of a thousand on twelve hundred years. Besides, the complete absence of any reference to the story of five Kanauj Brāhmaṇas in
contemporary epigraphic records can hardly be explained reasonably. From the Bhuvaneswar Prāṣasti 78 we come to know about Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva, a minister of King Harivarmā who was a Brāhmaṇa of the Sāvarpa gotra and his previous seven generations had been settled at the village Śiddhala in Rādhā. Again, from the Badal pillar inscription 79 we may trace the existence of a Brāhmaṇa family of Sāṅcīiya gotra, the family which gave generations of ministers to the Pāla kings. As pointed out by Ramaprasad Chanda, those evidences can hardly be reconciled with the account of Ādiśūra as found in the Kulajī texts 80.

Again, there is hardly any consistency in the account of the Kulajī texts regarding the reason and date of bringing the Brāhmaṇas, the names and genealogies of five Brāhmaṇas, the reason behind their settlement in Bengal, the names of villages given by them (gaṁīs) and their matrimonial relations with the Bengal Brāhmaṇas. Rameshchandra Majumdar is of opinion that such discrepancies in the Kulajī texts deprive them of their historical importance 81.

C. Nārāyaṇa, a Brāhmaṇa of Vāsya gotra who is an author of Chāndoga Pariṣṭa Prakāśas has given such an account of his ancestors that contradicts the account of gaṁīs as given by Bāchaspati Miśra and other Kulāchāryas of Rādhā. This was admitted by Nagendranath Vasu himself 82. Again, it was also admitted by Vasu that Nārāyaṇa’s Chāndoga Pariṣṭa Prakāśa and Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva’s Prāṣasti leave no scope of doubt that except the five Brāhmaṇas mentioned in the Kulaśāstras many others belonged to five gotras settled in Rādhā 83. This admission on the part of Nagendranath Vasu has devastated, according to Majumdar, the historical foundation of the Kulajī texts of Bengal 84.

It is true that the gaṁīs mentioned in a large number of Kulajīs also occurred in the copper plate grant of Arirāja Danujamādhava Daśarathadeva 85. But there is hardly any unanimity among the Kulāchāryas in respect of the date and time of the assumption of a particular gaṁīs titles by the Brāhmaṇas.
D. The Kulajī texts often refer to the introduction of the Kulinism by Vallālasena. But, the genealogy of the Kulin Brāhmaṇas as given in the Dhruvānanda's Mahavariśa after Vallālasena does deserve little reliance. Again, the copper plate grants of the time of Vallālasena and his successors refer to many Brāhmaṇas who received donation of land. But we do not find any attribution of Kulinism to those Brāhmaṇas in any form. Further, it needs to be pointed out that the prestige attached with Kulinism was very much in vogue long before Vallālasena. Chakrapāṇi Datta, author of Chikitsāsanagraha, has claimed that he was a Kulīn of the Lodhrāvalī family. Chakrapāṇi Datta's father Nārāyaṇa was in charge of the Royal Kitchen in the time of the Gauḍa king who was none but Nayapāla according to Sibdas Sen's commentary on the Chikitsāsanagraha.

From the above it appears that there are reasonable grounds for criticising the historicity of the Kulajī texts. Those grounds were shown by some historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who had more reliance on the contemporary epigraphic records. They verified and tested the veracity of the statements made in the Kulajī texts in the light of the epigraphic records. Besides, they also scrutinised the accounts given by the Kulāchāryas in different Kulajī texts and found out their discrepancies. It was pointed out by them that the genuineness of the Kulajī texts could very well be questioned, as the instances of forgeries were not few and far between. However, Nagendranath Vasu's Vaṅger Jāṭhya Itihāsa, written mainly on the basis upon the accounts left by the Kulāchāryas in the Kulajī texts appears to be an experiment for writing social history of ancient Bengal in the light of the traditions of the medieval period recorded most probably between the fifteenth and the sixteenth century AD.

HERBERT H. RISLEY

While Nagendranath Vasu remained engaged in his work on 'castes and sects of Bengal' popularly known as Vaṅger Jāṭhya Itihāsa, attempts were also made by some other scholars to focus attention on the ethnological background of the social history of Bengal. Nagendranath Vasu attempted to determine the position of the Brāhmaṇas.
the Vaiṣyas and the Kāyasthas of Bengal primarily on the strength of the data deduced from the Kulajī texts, although he took into consideration the evidence of the available epigraphic records only for confirmation of what he had obtained from the Kulajī texts. It was during his lifetime that H.H. Risley was appointed by the Bengal Government to conduct an enquiry into castes and occupations throughout the administrative territory of Bengal, which then included the whole of modern Bihar as well. Eventually, the survey which came to be conducted in the field in 1886-88 covered Bengal, the north-western Provinces (roughly modern United Provinces) and the Punjab. Resultant anthropometric data and ethnographic glossary were published in four volumes under the title *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* in 1891. The first volume contains data from Bengal, Chittagong Hills, Darjeeling Hills and Chhotonagpur. The entry under Bengal shows the following categories of people who were anthropologically measured:

Bāgdi, Bāuri, Brāhmaṇa, Chaṇḍal, Goālā, Kāyastha, Kaiwartta, the Muslims of East Bengal, Māl, Māli, Mālpāhāri, Muchi, Pod, Rājbariśi and Sadgope.

On the basis of his anthropometric data Risley concluded that the caste system came in operation as the principle of taboo when the invading Aryans came in contact with the Dravidians. The principle emerged from a sense of racial difference initially indicated by the difference in culture. However, he did not believe in the fixity of caste-types; rather, he believed that there was a constant process of "gradual Brahmanising of the aboriginal non-Aryan or caste-less tribes." Risley’s enumeration of the anthropometric and ethnographic data on the tribes and castes was made in racial, social, and partly, linguistic framework.

**JOGENDRANATH BHATTACHARYA**

Jogendranath Bhattacharya published in 1896 *Hindu Castes and Sects: An exposition of the origin of the Hindu caste system and the being of the sects towards each other and towards other religious system*. As it has been observed by Nirmalkumar Bose in his Foreword to the second edition of the book (Calcutta: 1968):
Books written on the same subject by earlier historians or anthropologists generally partook of the character of encyclopaedic notes, alphabetically arranged, of the origin, division and distribution of various castes in different provinces of India.

The author, being a trained Jurist and the President of the Brāhmaṇa Sabhā of Bengal, was conversant with the Sastric aspects of the caste system with which many social scientists are not so familiar. With this knowledge the author assigned authoritatively the rank of different castes and different occupations of Bengal during his time. Besides, he gave the equivalence of the castes in other parts of India and also indicated the differences in culture or the ritual practice, which marked off one from the other.

The author collected relevant information for his work by interviews with a very large number of Hindu gentlemen hailing from different parts of India. He has also acknowledged his obligations to the work of Risley, Wilson and Sherring, and to Mr. Narsimayanger's Report from the 'Last Census' of Mysore. He has recognised that "Mr. Risley's Tribes and Castes of Bengal is an exhaustive treatise, and is, generally speaking, reliable also." (Preface, page vi.). But, he was unhappy over the fact that there were no similar works for the other provinces. If such works had been there, "the task of taking a bird's eye view from the whole would not have been so arduous to me as it has actually been." While making his survey of the Hindu sects, the author attempted to set forth "the true character of the cults that the majority of those who profess to be Hīndus believe and practice."

Jogendranath Bhattacharya made a survey of different branches of the Brahmanas living in different provinces of Northern and Southern India in parts II, III, and IV. In part V and VI he has given an account of the semi Brahmanical castes and the degraded Brāhmaṇas. Part VII incorporates the military castes like the Rājputs, the Kṣetris, and the Aguris of Bengal. In part VIII he has dealt with the scientific castes such as the medical castes (Vaidya) and the astrologer caste etc. In part IX he has
discussed the position of the writer caste (Kāyastha) of Bengal. Upper India, Southern India, Bombay Presidency and Assam. Part X is devoted to the mercantile caste (the Banians) of Bengal, Northern India, Gujrat, Southern India, Telegu country and Orissa. Part XI is meant for the artisan castes, generally recognised as clean Sūdras. such as the weavers, sweet-meat makers, potters, ironsmiths, goldsmiths, carpenters, saṅkhavaṇiks, grain parchers and tailors. In part XII the author has considered the position of the clean agricultural castes of Northern India, Bengal in particular. Central Provinces, the Punjab, Telegu countries, Mysore and the Dravīḍa country. Part XIV is meant for the cowherds and the shepherds. Part XV includes an account of the clean and the unclean castes employed in personal and domestic service. Part XVI is meant for miscellaneous castes like the fishermen, boatmen and the criminal tribes.

The author in his Introduction to the section of the work entitled Hindu Sects has examined the general character and classification of the Hindu sects. In part II he has discussed the position of Shivite and the semi-Shivite sects. Part III is devoted to the Sāktas, part IV to the Visnuve sects and part V to the semi-Visnuve or Guru-worshpping sects. Part VI incorporates a discussion on modern religions intended to bring about the union between the Hindus and the Mohammedans, such as the Kabirpanthis and the Sikhs. In part VII and VIII Buddhists and the Jainas respectively have been dealt with.

The caste system is the foundation of the social structure in India. There are some scholars who have emphasised upon the ritual status of the caste following the principles of the Dharmaśāstras like that of Manu. Again, there are others who have considered the caste system from an economic point of view and have classified them on the basis of their occupation. This methodology was introduced by Nesfield. Jogendranath Bhattacharya has combined creditably both the systems in the present work. He has considered the Hindu sects separately. But, if we look into the Bhaddhārma and Brahmavaivarta Purāṇas we find that the caste system of Bengal not only comprises the occupational groups but also some religious sects. In fact, the Hindu sects could not maintain their existence in society without having a caste-
status. To whatever sect they might belong, they were Brāhmaṇas, Vaidyas, Kāyasthas etc. Besides, some castes continued to bear their sectarian names such as Yugis (derived from the Nātha sect) and the Sarāks or Śrāvakas (derived from the Jains). However, Jogendranath Bhattacharya’s comparative study of the position of the castes and sects in different Provinces of India provides us with a deeper insight into the characteristic social structure of Bengal itself.

DINESCHANDRA SEN: 1866-1939

In the historiography of ancient Bengal the history of literature of Bengal gradually acquired for itself a position of significance. Because, those who engaged themselves in reconstructing the history of literature attempted to trace as far as possible the history of the people reflected in the literature of Bengal. In fact, behind the vicissitudes of political fortune he wanted to probe into “the inner life, the thoughts, the feelings, the real life of Bengal.” An investigation on this line was undertaken by Dineshchandra Sen, when he had decided to publish Bauṅgaḇhasā O Sāhitya on the basis of a large number of manuscripts collected by him from different parts of Bengal. He took great pains for six years to complete the work and published it in 1896.

wrote in *The Calcutta Review* an article entitled ‘Bengali Literature’.

Ramgati Nayaratna wrote in 1872 for the first time a systematic history of Bengali language and literature. He divided the entire history of literature into three periods, namely:

A. Ancient Period or Pre-Chaitanya Period; B. Medieval Period, that is, pre-Bhāratchandra period beginning from the time of Chaitanya; C. Modern Period extending from Bhāratchandra to Bankimchandra. Rajnarain Vasu wrote in 1878 the history of Bengali language and literature depending on Ramgati Nyayaratna’s work and Long’s *Descriptive Catalogue*. In 1877 was published Rameshchandra Dutt’s famous work *The Literature of Bengal*. In this work we may trace a keen sense of history combined with a sharp insight into the mentality of the Bengali people.

Therefore, it may be reasonably held that while Ramgati Nayaratna introduced a periodisation in the history of the Bengali literature, Rameshchandra Dutt initiated the process of utilising Bengali literature for exploring the history of culture of the Bengali people. Those two trends seem to have been combined by Dineshchandra Sen in his *Baṅgabhaṣā O Sāhitya* (1896).

Rabindranath Tagore wrote in 1901 a critical appreciation of the second edition of Dineshchandra’s work and stated thus:

> We have found in Dineshbaboos’s book the shadow of a gigantic tree of history (*itiḥāśa vanaspati*) of Bengal with its different branches and sub-branches.

In fact, it was Dineshchandra who synthesised the results obtained previously by fragmentary attempts to reconstruct a comprehensive history of Bengali literature. Dineshchandra Sen’s work is characterised by collection of a lot of information and facts, systematic presentation on the basis of periodisation and deep insight into the mind of the Bengali people. In this work he has sought assistance from the *Asiatic Society of Bengal* and Haraprasad Sastri. Most of the contemporary scholars witnessed with great interest the process of making history of Bengali literature mainly through field-survey and collection of manuscripts in the districts like Tippera and Chattagram.
The periodisation in the history of Bengali literature as followed by Dineshchandra Sen indicated, firstly, the Hindu-Buddhist age, secondly, the age of Chaitanya, thirdly, the age of Reforms, fourthly, the age of Krishnachandra and lastly, the age of the British. Rameschandra Dutt's periodisation was thus: the age of Lyric and Poems, the age of Sanskrit influence and the age of Western influence. In comparison with the previous scholars' periodisation Dineshchandra Sen's planning of the period appears to be more meaningful and comprehensive, although the shortcomings in it was pointed out by later historians like Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay and Sukumar Sen.

Prabodhchandra Bagchi in an appendix to the eighth edition to the *Baṅgabhasā O Sāhitya* pointed out the following:

A. Whatever has been said about the interrelation between the Prākṛti language and Bengali requires revision. Because, Bengali language originated from the Prācyu or the eastern Apabhraṃśa which was again derived from Prācyu or Māgadhī Prākṛti.

B. No mention has been made of the Buddhist Charyāpadas representing the earliest form of the Bengali language. When the first edition of *Baṅgabhasā O Sāhitya* was published, the Charyāpadas were not yet discovered. But in later editions, a discussion on the Charyāpadas might have been incorporated.

C. Whatever has been said about Sūnyapurāṇa appears to be based on facts furnished by Nagendranath Vasu and Haraprasad Sastri. After the discovery of many manuscripts it has been found out that there was actually no work entitled Sūnyapurāṇa. The work was actually Dharmapūjāpaddhāti written in the fifteenth-sixteenth century by the priests of Dharmathākur and not by the person named Rāmāipandit.
D. In order to determine the exact date of the Nath literature, the discovery of more manuscripts is required. It is difficult to determine whether Goraksavijaya or Mainamati Garan formed a part and parcel of the Nath literature.

As we are concerned mainly with the early history of Bengal we may concentrate on the Hindu-Buddhist period of Dineshchandra extended from AD 800 to AD 1200. Dineshchandra has opined that to this period should be assigned the Suryapurana, the Nathagriká including Goraksavijaya and Mainamati Garan, Katha Sahitya, that is. Vratakatha and Rupakathä (folk-tales) and the sayings of Dak and Khanä. Dineshchandra has made a brilliant sociological study of the texts referred to above with the purpose of reconstructing the social history of ancient Bengal. But for obvious reasons, it would be unreasonable to assign the said literature in the period between AD 800- AD 1200. As pointed out by Niharranjan Roy that the above-mentioned texts were put into writing when the oral traditions transmitted from generation to generation in Prakrit language was rendered into the literary language ॐ.

In fact, most of the texts referred to by Dineshchandra Sen were compiled in the medieval period and it would be, therefore, reasonable to assume that some social ingredients entered into those texts at the time of compilation. It does not necessarily mean that those texts are not useful for reconstructing the social history of ancient Bengal. But the historian has to be very cautious in making use of the data furnished by those texts. To quote Niharranjan Roy:

There is some historical basis in the adages of Dak and Khanä; scattered here and there in these sayings there is enough to give a fragmented impression of society, undoubtedly that of the tenth or eleventh century. However, the form and language in which they have come into our hands are not as old, and the same kind of room for doubt is applicable to the Suryapurana, Gopi Chander Gita, Sekhshobdaya, Adyer Gambhir, Murshidyagän and the ancient folk-tales. The real story of the life and language of the common people, their daily joys and woes, their problems great and small, did not begin in written form but rather was contained in songs, stories, proverbs, ballads and folk-tales and circulated amongst the people in oral tradition; only a long time later, perhaps.
it achieved a literary form, and thus the language of the common people was elevated to the status of a written language. 98

VARENDRA RESEARCH SOCIETY : 1910

Before the introduction of the Muslim rule in Bengal, *Varendrabhūmi*, lying between the eastern bank of the river Mahānandā and the western bank of the river Karatoya, was the pivot of the historical process. In different parts of this *janapada* were discovered the remains of many royal palaces, royal forts and temples. Buchanan Hamilton, Alexander Cunningham, Westmacot, Ravenshaw, William Wilson Hunter, Henry Blochmann and others initiated the archaeological exploration in Varendra. They may be considered as the pioneers of Varendra research. In order to prosecute the research initiated by the British civilians, the formation of a research society was felt necessary. Because, the efforts made previously was sporadic in nature due to several constraints and a fuller effort to construct the history of *Varendrabhūmi* was called for 99. Thus was born in 1910 the Varendra Research Society and its Museum.

The objectives of Varendra Research Society were almost similar to those of the *Vaṅgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat* (1894). The branches of the *Vaṅgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat* gradually opened in places like Rajsahi, Rangpur, Dacca, Coomilla and Gwahati etc. Sasadhar Roy was elected the Secretary of the Rajsahi branch of the Sahitya Pariṣat. Under the auspices of this branch Bengal Literary Conference (*Vaṅga Sāhitya Sammilan*) was held in 1909. In this Conference, the programme of determining the ethnology of the Bengali people was adopted and Ramaprasad Chanda was entrusted with this task 100. Next year, Bengal Literary Conference was held at Bhagalpur. The Conference was attended by Akshaykumar Maitreya, Saratkumar Roy and Ramaprasad Chanda from Rajsahi and Rakhaladas Bandopadhyay from the Archaeological Survey of India 101. After the Conference was over, some archaeological sites near Bhagalpur, such as Nathnagar (ancient Karnagad) was visited by all representatives. At the initiative of Akshaykumar Maitreya, Saratkumar Roy, the zaminder of Dighapatiya, some representatives came to visit Gauḍa, ancient capital of Bengal, Pandua and other places 102. By the advice of Akshaykumar
Maitreya, Ramaprasad Chanda published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, an account of Vijayasena’s Deopara Praśasti found near Rajsahī. Saratkumar Roy was encouraged when he found the publication and decided to extend his patronage towards exploration in and around Rajsahī. Many sculptures were discovered in the village of Mandail near Godagari. Akshaykumar Maitreya and others decided to set up a Museum at Rajsahī. Therefore, they could not oblige either the Indian Museum or the Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat by making gifts of thirty-two sculptures they had discovered. The decision of Akshaykumar and Ramaprasad to retain the antiquities in Rajsahī was supported by others including Sasadhar Roy, Secretary of the Rajsahī branch of Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat.

Earlier, at the *North Bengal Literary Conference* held at Rangpur (1908), Akshaykumar Maitreya in his Presidential Address emphasised upon the collection of materials for the history of Bengal and the history of Bengali literature in order to discover the past glory of Varendra which at one time represented the life-spirit of Bengal. In this Conference was presented Rajendralal Acharya’s essay on the archaeology of Bogra illustrated with photographs of some stone sculptures and other antiquities. Next year, in 1909, *North Bengal Literary Conference* was held at Bogra itself. In this Conference some resolutions were adopted, of which the eighth resolution recommended the foundation of Uttar Vaṅgīya Sāraswata Bhavan with the purpose of preserving manuscripts and other historical materials. Thus, the seed of Varendra Anusandhān Samity or Varendra Research Society was sown. Saratkumar Roy in his Presidential Address at the Annual Conference of Varendra Research Society held in 1930 stated thus:

In June following (i.e. 1910), I undertook the second trip to Khanjanpur in the Bogra district, accompanied by Messers. Moitra, Chanda and Babu (now Rai Saheb) Rajendralal Acharyya, then in charge of the Khanjanpur Khash Mahal. was our host and guide, ... It was at Khanjanpur that the idea of organising ourselves into a Society occurred to us and I was called President. Mr. A.K. Moitra Director and Mr. R. Chanda Honourary Secretary. In this tour we began to collect specimens in the name of the Rajsahī museum.
Niradbandhu Sanyal, Curator of the Varendra Research Society Museum has also described how at the initiative of Akshaykumar Maitreya and under the patronage of Saratkumar Roy a large number of antiquities including sculptures were discovered on the borders of the district of Rajsahi and Bogra leading to the foundation of the Varendra Research Society. It was in 1919 that the Museum of the Society was established accommodating all the archaeological materials discovered so far. Thus, Rajsahi became a place of pilgrimage for the archaeologists and the antiquarians. F.J. Monahan published an account on the aims, objectives and achievements of Varendra Research Society in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1914). Although the Varendra Research Society was founded in 1910, the foundation stone of the Museum attached with it was laid by the Governor of Bengal in 1916 and the door of the house of Varendra Research Society was formally opened by Governor Lord Ronaldsray in 1919.

Akshaykumar Maitreya, who was the Director of the Varendra Research Society throughout his life, was joined in his academic efforts by Ramaprasad Chanda, a teacher of Rajsahi Collegiate School, Radhagovinda Basak and Dineshchandra Bhattacharya, Professors of Sanskrit at Rajsahi College and Ghulam Yazdani, Professor of Arabic and Persian at Rajsahi College. The above account has been furnished by Sarasikumar Saraswati who was a disciple of Akshaykumar. The heritage of Akshaykumar Maitreya's historical scholarship was preserved by his friends and disciples and also by the Museum and Art Gallery of Varendra Research Society established by him.

The objective of Varendra Research Society was to discover the places of historical importance and to collect specimens of art and archaeology. Those specimens were of three kinds, namely, architecture, sculpture and specimens of religion, philosophy and culture. On the basis of the discoveries and collections a plan was outlined for publishing a comprehensive political and cultural history of Bengal in eight volumes in Bengali language under the title of Gauḍa Vivaraṇa. The Gauḍa Vivaraṇa was to be divided into eight parts or volumes, viz.:
1. Rājamāla (Dynastic History)
2. Silpakalā (Art History)
3. Vivaramālamāla (Antiquarian Topography)
4. Lekhamāla (Inscriptions)
5. Granthamāla (History of Literature)
6. Jāttattva (Descriptive Ethnology)
7. Śrīmurtitattva (Iconography)
8. Upāsakasampradāya (Religious Sects)

Although the entire series was proposed to be written in Bengali except one on dynastic history and another on art history, a few that were actually published were in English.

AKSHAYKUMAR MAITREYA: 1861-1930

It has been observed by Prabodhchandra Sen that almost immediately after Bankimchandra’s death, footsteps of the generals of the contingent of historians, anticipated by him, were heard 115. Akshaykumar Maitreya deserves the credit of being the pioneer among the early historians of Bengal. The magazine, Sādhana, edited by Rabindranath Tagore started publishing Akshaykumar’s ‘Siraj-ud-daullah’ serially 116. That Akshaykumar’s source of inspiration was Bankimchandra is attested by the reminiscences of Rajendralal Acharya. He has recalled how in a condolence meeting convened after Bankimchandra’s passing away Akshaykumar paid his respects with a genuine feeling 117. Akshaykumar had not only a blessing of Bankimchandra with him but also was fortunate enough to derive inspiration from Rabindranath Tagore. This was quite evident when Akshaykumar Maitreya began to publish the historical journal named Aitihāsik Chitra (1899). We have already discussed above the closeness of relationship between Akshaykumar Maitreya and Rabindranath Tagore in the field of historical research 118. In the early part of his life Akshaykumar Maitreya became famous for his historical works in respect of the eighteenth century Bengal. Akshaykumar argued against the stigma on the character
of Siraj-ud-daullah leveled by Holwell holding the Nawab responsible for the Black Hole tragedy. Recently, Dineshchandra Sircar has pointed out that the historicity of the Black Hole Tragedy was established beyond doubt by the manuscript of Tvarikh-i-Bangla-Mohabbat-Jangi written by Yousuf Ali Khan, son-in-law of Nawab Sarafraj Khan. Even Rabindranath took Akshaykumar to task for indulging in emotional bias for Siraj-ud-daullah. Whatever that might be, Akshaykumar Maitreya’s works like Siraj-ud-daullah, Mirkaśim and Firingi Vānık bear testimony to his noble determination to combat against any distortion of Indian history made by the motivated colonial historians. Rameshchandra Majumdar’s observation in this connection is relevant:

The two volumes of Siraj-ud-daullah and Mirkaśim which were the first fruits of his study, took the country by surprise. Everybody felt that a new star has arisen in the firmament.

The nationalist spirit that inspired Akshaykumar Maitreya to undertake the first writing on history involved him in the Bengal Partition Movement and diverted his attention to the ancient period of Bengal. At this stage Akshaykumar laid emphasis upon the archaeological evidence, often referred to as pāhure pramāṇa. O.C.Ganguly has written:

Maitreya Mahasay was the pioneer on the path of collecting new historical data with the aid of pathure pramana or most dependable evidence obtained from excavation.

The most brilliant example of this was Akshaykumar’s Gaũḍalekhamāḷā (1912). In Gaũḍalekhamāḷā, Akshaykumar criticised the excessive reliance on the genealogical traditions as done by Nagendranath Vasu and his colleagues in unearthing the ancient history of Bengal. He felt that only with coins and inscriptions history can hardly be reconstructed. In his words, where written history of the past is absent, old records of this type are important. But those records by themselves can not be called history. nor were they devised for that purpose. He underlined the importance of
archaeological excavations and explorations. He himself set the example by attempting excavation at Paharpur with his devoted band of researchers. However, Akshaykumar's epigraphical study was able to fill up the great lacunae, which existed so far as the problem of the collection of the materials for reconstruction of the history of Bengal was concerned. Rameshchandra Majumdar was of opinion that "the publication of the copper plate grants and stone inscriptions belonging to the Pāla kings along with their Bengali translation paved way of research in the history of Bengal."\textsuperscript{125}

Many more new epigraphs in relation to the history of Bengal have been discovered since the publication of the \textit{Gauḍalekhamāla}. As pointed out by D. C. Sircar:\textsuperscript{126}

\begin{quote}
While Akshaykumar has discussed only Dharmapāla's Khalimpur copper plate inscription, year 32 and the Bodhgaya stone inscription (\textit{Keśava Praśasti} of the year 26), the following records are to be added:

1. Nālandā copper plate inscription
2. Balgudar image inscription
3. Nālandā inscription and
4. Paharpur terracotta seals.
\end{quote}

Akshaykumar discussed in \textit{Gauḍalekhamāla} Devapāla's Monghyr copper plate grant of the regnal year 33 and the Ghoṣarāvan stone inscription (\textit{Viradeva Praśasti}). The following records are to be added to the above:\textsuperscript{127}

\begin{quote}
1. Nālandā brass image inscription of regnal year 3.
3. Hilsa image inscription, year 25.
4. Nālandā copper plate grant, year 35.
5. Nālandā inscription.
\end{quote}
7. Ashutosh Museum inscription.

Any epigraphic record of the time of Devapāla’s son Šūrapāla I is conspicuous by its absence in the Gaṇḍalekhamāla. But, during the last half a century, the following records attributed to Šūrapāla have been found out:

1. Mirzapur copper plate grant, year 3.
2. Buddhist image inscription, year 3.
4. Rajauna image inscription, year 5.
5. Nālandā image inscription.

Nanigopal Majumdar’s Inscriptions of Bengal (1929) containing the original text, notes and translation of the inscriptions of Chandra, Varman and Sena rulers was the complementary to the Gaṇḍalekhamāla.

Whatever might have been the number of epigraphic records newly discovered, the value of Akshaykumar’s work remains forever. But, in some cases the new discoveries brought to light have shown that Akshaykumar was mistaken in his interpretation of some expressions occurring in the epigraphs. For instance, in the Manahali copper plate grant, Gopāla III is described as Dhārtipālana-jmbhamāna-mahima. According to Akshaykumar’s explanation, the above expression suggests that Gopāla III died in his childhood when he was being brought up by the nurse (Dhārī). But from the Manda stone inscription it is understood that Gopāla III died in the battlefield, when he attained the age of fighting against the enemies. This is also confirmed by verse 12 in the fourth chapter of the Rāmācharita. Therefore, the expression Dhārtipālana in the Manahali copper plate grant should signify Prthivipālana. In other words, Gopāla III began to rule in his boyhood.

In his Introduction to Gaṇḍalekhamāla Akshaykumar suggested the close connection between the epigraphic records of the Pāla-Sena dynasties with Varendramāṇḍala. Because, most of the records were discovered in Varendra and the
centres of Pāla-Sena powers were in Varendra. Secondly, the importance of epigraphy as a source of history was emphasised, the echo of which is to be found in the following observation of John Faithful Fleet:

Rich as have been their bequests to us in other lines, the Hindus have not transmitted to us any historical works which can be accepted as reliable for any early times. And it is almost entirely from a patient examination of the inscriptions, the start in which was made more than a century ago that our knowledge of ancient political history of India has been derived. But we are also ultimately dependent on the inscriptions in every line of Indian research. Hardly any definite dates and identifications can be established except from them. And they regulate everything that we learn from tradition, literature, coins, art, architecture, or any other source.\textsuperscript{130}

Thirdly, Akshaykumar distinguished between two categories of epigraphy, namely, stone inscriptions and copper plate inscriptions. From chronological point of view, stone inscriptions are much older than copper plate grants, also known as Śānas. It was rightly observed by Akshaykumar that those Śānas represented permanent records of the land system prevalent in ancient Bengal\textsuperscript{131}.

At the invitation of the University of Calcutta Akshaykumar delivered a course of lectures in English on the ‘Fall of the Pāla Empire’ in 1915. The fresh light thrown by him the interpretation of some stanzas of Sandhyākara Nandi’s Rāmcharita was highly appreciated by the circle of scholars\textsuperscript{132}. A short summary of the lectures was prepared in Bengali by Rameshchandra Majumdar and was published in the Bengali monthly Mānasī O Marmavānī\textsuperscript{133}. Akshaykumar in his Preface to the main text of the lectures\textsuperscript{134} stated thus:

I propose to discuss the principal materials and to examine some of the interpretations which have been or may be put upon the same. I propose also to discuss the origin of the Pāla kingdom, the genealogy of the successive rulers, their rise, progress and minor vicissitudes of fortune, before I deal with
the fall. ... Our sources of information are by no means exhaustive. The most important source, presumably the most authentic, the royal grants of land.  

Dineshchandra Sircar, while giving an introduction to the above work of Akshaykumar, published by North Bengal University in 1987, has correctly observed:

There are certain aspects of Akshaykumar’s approach to the history of the Pālas as well as the interpretation of the Rāmācharita which invite scrutiny especially because meagre information on the topics are not clear in all cases and might sometimes be variously interpreted.

Akshaykumar's whole findings in Gauda were later on compiled in a full-length essay named Gauḍer Kathā. It was the first systematic attempt to write a sub-regional history, its traditions and culture. The entire Bengal, according to Akshaykumar, was known as Deśa, though specifically it was not Bengal. He has referred to the specific area of the study as Gauḍamārdalā, the formal Benagli language as Gaudīya Śākhābhāṣa and Bengalees as Gauḍajana. Thus he developed a new discipline of historiography of early Bengal known as Gauḍatattva. Akshaykumar’s articles on ‘Gauḍamārdalā’ and ‘Gauḍanagara’ published in different journals were later collected in a book form. In Gauḍer Kathā Akshaykumar wrote on the Gaudiya fort, Gaudiya City, Gaudiya Hindu Empire, Gaudiya poet Sandhyākara Nandi, Gaudiya literature etc. Gauḍatattva. to Akshaykumar, meant an investigation on how the Aryanisation of the Gauḍamārdalā took place, how the dominating influence of Buddhism gradually declined and Gauḍa was integrated into the development of the country as a whole. He found the whole epoch of transformation through successive religious upheavals, that is, the age of collision, the age of contact and the age of union. During the age of collision there was a quarrel between the old and the new religion. The age of contact witnessed a rapport between the Buddhist and the Hindu religions. In the age of union, Hindu religion was firmly established on the ruins of Buddhism; rather, Buddhism was totally absorbed into the fold of Hinduism. The entire transformation, according to Akshaykumar, was reflected in art and architecture. Gauḍa became a separate and
independent political-cultural entity. In its age of independence, education spread. Art flourished, trade links developed and the monarchy grew powerful. However, it has been pointed out by Krishna Samaddar that Akshaykumar failed to follow the footsteps of Haraprasad Sastri who had delved deep into the popular life of those days and had brought out a social significance of religious transformation.

One of the most important phases of Akshaykumar's historical investigations was constituted by his studies in the history of Indian art. The articles written by him on art, ten in number, were first published in different journals and were later collected in a book form under the title Bhārat Śilpa Kathā (The Story of Indian Art). Of the articles special mention may be made of 'Vaṅga Bhāskaryā Nidāraśau' (A Critical Study of the Specimens of Bengal Sculpture). Akshaykumar wrote about the ideal of Indian art thus:

...art in India has in all ages been the favourite handmaid of spiritual culture. The art ideal can, therefore, be studied with best advantage in Indian sacred images of old.

In one of his letters written to O.C. Ganguly Akshaykumar indicated that the Gaudī Rāti or style of art had its origin in Varendra and later flourished in Magadha and Utkala. This has also been admitted by Vincent A Smith in his A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon from the earliest times to the present day. However, what Akshaykumar liked to stress is that the art of Gauda originating in Varendra and flourishing in Magadha and Utkala ultimately influenced the art of South East Asia, especially Javadvīpa or Java. The observation of O.C. Ganguly on Akshaykumar's findings in respect of the art history of Bengal deserves our attention:

Maitreya Mahāsaya's theory regarding the Gauda art and its relation with the art of the islands has been partially proved true. Perhaps with new discoveries in Bengal, his theory will be fully proved in future. ... He opened before my eyes different ways of tracing the origin of the art of Java.
That the art flourishing in the East Indies was borrowed from Gauḍī Rūṭī was also been shown by Akshaykumar in his essay ‘Sāgarikā’148. Akshaykumar was of opinion that the election of Gopāla as king of Bengal that put an end to the māṣyanyāya was an epoch-making event, as it marked the beginning of progress in polity, society, economy and culture. The expansion of the Pāla Empire caused self-confidence among the people of Bengal. As a result, the Gauḍī Rūṭī in literature and Gauḍī Rūṭī in art expanded in different directions. In this age of glory of Gauḍa, Nālandā, Vikramaśīlā, Jagaddala, Tamralipti became the centres of knowledge. In fact, the expansion of the political influence of Gauḍa coincided with the cultural expansion of Gauḍa. The culture that had its origin in Varendra did not remain confined within the boundaries of Bihar and Orissa, but expanded further in Greater India.

Akshaykumar, like Bankimchandra, felt that the Bengalees had lost their history and for that reason the proof of the physical strength of the Bengalees had been lost 149. Therefore, the main motivation behind Akshaykumar’s historical research was to recover the history of the Bengali people. Sarasikumar Saraswati pointed out that Akshaykumar was inspired to reconstruct the genuine history of ancient Bengal. Gradually, he felt the necessity of historical facts and evidences and the justification of analysis of those evidences. Again, as there was scarcity of evidences, Akshaykumar stressed on the necessity of investigation. Thus his investigative mind was absorbed in life-long enquiry 150.

There is little doubt that Akshaykumar’s feeling of patriotism was the keynote of his historical research. However, with this feeling in mind he set up before himself a definite perspective of history, which was manifest in his ‘Foreword’ to Ramaprasad Chanda’s Gauḍarījāmālā.

Kings, kingdoms, capitals, wars, conquests and defeats, all these are constituents of history. But with these alone history cannot be written. The history of the Bengalees is the history of the Bengalee community and commonality. 151
Again, it was also underlined by him that:

Like a judge, steadfast in law, the historian should strike only for truth and truth alone without any prejudice.

He seems to have derived the ideal of history from the Rājatarāṅgini of Kalhana where a person who explains history dispassionately and without any bias is lauded. There is no doubt that this judicial neutrality is a standard for historians of all ages. According to Prabodhchandra Sen, the ideal of history stated by Kalhana was in all probability first followed by the senior historian Akshaykumar Maitreya. This is attested by Akshaykumar’s editorial to his journal Aitihāsik Chitra:

Needless to say, Aitihāsik Chitra shall not be the mouthpiece of an individual, or a family or a community. It will take care to collect archaeological evidences having bearing upon India in general and Bengal in particular.

Again, in his Presidential Address at the History Section of the Seventh Bengal Literary Conference held at Calcutta in 1320 BS Akshaykumar upheld the historical methodology in which freedom from prejudice or bias was deemed the sine qua non. He went to such an extent as to make the following statement:

Love of one’s own country (Swadeśprāti), love towards one’s own nation (Swajātiprem), faithfulness towards one’s own religion (Swadharmanāshīthā) is the greatest faculty of human mind. But, truth is greater than that.

Akshaykumar Maitreya is supposed to be the inheritor of the methodology that had been followed by Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar and Rajendralal Mitra. There is least doubt about the fact that he was a devoted investigator of historical evidences and also an interpreter of those evidences without bias or prejudice. But there remains little doubt that he was motivated towards historical investigation by a feeling of patriotism, love for his countrymen, that is, the Bengali people whose history was required to be recovered for the revival of the glorious past. Again, he began his
historical writing as a crusader against the motivated historical writings of the foreigners in order to make his own country and people free from all sorts of slander or stigma. Above all, Akshaykumar time and again represented Varendra or Varendri as the political-cultural centre of Bengal. Although, as pointed out by Dineshchandra Sircar, the Pāla-Sena kingdoms included besides North Bengal, South Eastern Bengal, Bihar and sometimes parts of Orissa, in his Gaucdr Kathā Akshaykumar could not suppress his feeling that Gauḍā formed the centre of political and cultural empire not only within India but also in Greater India. Therefore, it would not be unreasonable for us to assume that although Akshaykumar made sincerest efforts to maintain objectivity, it can hardly be denied that: “History is ... necessarily subjective and individual conditioned by the interest and vision of the historian.”

RAMAPRASAD CHANDA : 1873 - 1942

Ramaprasad Chanda’s source of inspiration for historical investigation was Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, although he critically evaluated his views on different aspects of the history of Bengal. Ramaprasad’s centre of work was the Varendra Research Society and he was in full agreement with its Director Akshaykumar Maitreya, so far as the historical methodology was concerned.

While Akshaykumar Maitreya in his Gaucḍalekhamāḷā exposed for the first time a systematic study of the most dependable sources of the history of ancient Bengal, Ramaprasad Chanda made the best utilisation of those sources to provide to the Bengali people the most dependable scientific history of the ancient period. Gaucḍarājamāḷā. The trend of looking at the history of the country as a whole with a dispassionate and liberal approach began with this work published in 1912. In his introduction to Gaucḍarājamāḷā, Akshaykumar repeatedly used the expression “Bāṅgāḷī Itihāṣa”, that is, history of the Bengali people and not “Bāṅgāḷī Itihāṣa” or the history of the country, named Bengal.

Before we enter into the discussion on the merits of Ramaprasad Chanda’s work, we should pause for a moment to consider how desperate attempts were made in the
beginning of the twentieth century to compile a dependable history of ancient Bengal by some writers who were not so eminent as Akshaykumar or Ramaprasad. In 1904, Nilmani Mukherjee published his *Sanikṣipta Bāṅgalīr Itiḥāsa* that was useful for school going children. Side by side with the scholarly works, school textbooks on the history of Bengal used to be written since the days of Rajakrishna Mukhopadhyay's *Prathama Śikṣā Bāṅgalīr Itiḥāsa* (1874) in order to cater to the needs of the school curriculum prevalent in the nineteenth-twentieth centuries. In 1907, Pareshchandra Bandopadhyay in his *Bāṅgalīr Purāṇā*, Part I, made a sincere endeavour to write a complete history of ancient Bengal. The author reported:

In this volume, everything worth knowing about Bengal up to the twelfth century has been incorporated.

The author was conscious of the fact that "the real history of Bengal has not yet been written", and that is why he made an attempt to incorporate almost all the known facts within the narrow space of fifteen chapters and 349 pages. Again, a continuous course of the history of ancient Bengal was presented by Rajanikanta Chakravorty in his *Gauḍer Itiḥāsa*, volume I, published in 1910. But the attempts made by the above authors were gradually forgotten by the Bengalees after the publication of Ramaprasad Chanda's *Gauḍarājamatā* that fulfilled the long awaited desire of the Bengali people to have their own history written in a critical method.

Ramaprasad Chanda has put forward his view about the history of Bengal in his essay entitled 'Bāṅgalīr Prāchīn Itiḥāsa'. According to him, the entire history is to be viewed as 'social history. On one side of the social history one may trace the influence of kings, officials and great men as the determining factor. Generally, the facts of this part of the social history are commonly known as 'history', which has to be reconstructed by a critical method applied to the available sources of information. In doing so, the historian should not be guided by any prejudice or bias but has to adopt a method of inductive reasoning. The other part of the social history is determined, according to Ramaprasad Chanda, by the law of evolution that is explained in the science of anthropology or ethnology. Although the materials for the
general history of the Bengali people are scanty, the materials for ethnological history are profuse in quantity. In order to measure how the people of Bengal gradually made their progress from the stage of savagery or barbarism to that of civilisation the historian has to take into account whatever is available from the Tantric texts. The folk-literature comprising Chandimarga, Annadamaṅgal, Dharmamaṅgal, Padmapurāṇa etc. and also the folk-lore that may be traced in the rituals practised by the common folk, the bratas, local traditions and customs and folk-stories and legends.

The contributions of Ramaprasad Chanda require to be examined in two phases, viz., mainly the ethnological history of the Bengali people and the socio-political history of the Bengalees. In his article entitled 'Bāṅgalir Utpatti', Ramaprasad Chanda has explained the ethnological background of the Bengalees. He has criticised the view of Herbert Risley on anthropological and linguistic grounds to show that the Bengali people originated not from the Dravidians but from the pre-Dravidians referred to as Niṣādas by Chanda. Those Niṣādas are represented by the Sāntāls and the Munḍās, the descendants of the Austric-speaking people according to the findings of modern linguist, Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay.

Ramaprasad Chanda's Indo Aryan Races, published by the Varendra Research Society in 1916, was a collection of anthropological papers, originally written in Bengali in the first decade of the twentieth century and published in some Bengali journals. At the request of Saratkumar Roy, Ramaprasad Chanda prepared the revised English version of those Bengali papers and gave to them a final shape in his book Indo Aryan Races which gave him almost world-wide recognition. However, the papers collected in this book have a bearing on the historical migrations of the past, of which the migration of the Aryans was the most significant one.

When Ramaprasad Chanda concentrated on the history of Bengal in a general sense, he produced the Gauḍārjñamāla that dealt with the political history of Bengal from the earliest times to the beginning of the Turkish rule. His methodology is explained in the article entitled 'Bāṅgalir Ithāšer Upādān', where it is pointed out
that no history could be written without examining the authenticity of the materials to be utilised for it. Further, in his view, although the Great Epic contains valuable materials for history, the historian should adopt the method of higher criticism before making an attempt to utilise them. Secondly, he questioned the historicity of most of the Kulaji texts on which Haraprasad Sastri and Nagendranath Vasu had firm faith. He preferred to depend on the epigraphic sources. In his article 'Kāmarūpaśāsanāvali' he opined that the Kāmarūpaśāsanāvali was a mine of information of the history of Bengal. Akshaykumar Maitreya made a review of Gauḍarjamālā thus:

Still now, our individual, caste and communal prejudices have influenced our judgements in favour or against of any preconceived conclusion. What was the condition of the country during the reign of the Pāla and Sena kings does not receive the attention of the historians. They are more concerned about the castes to which these rulers belonged. The name of traditions (as recorded in certain Kulaji texts) what is going to be presented as the condition of the country is nothing but a complete denial of the sense of historical judgement. For this reason the writer of the Gauḍarjamālā has rejected altogether the baseless traditions as a result of which Ādiśūra, the principal character of the traditional history, could not have been regarded as a historical personality. The myth has been rejected simply on the ground that Ādiśūra does not figure in the copper plates or stone inscriptions or the contemporary literature. How carefully should the textual and epigraphic information be worked out. the competent author of the Gauḍarjamālā has demonstrated in his treatment of Šaśānka, the lord of Gauḍa.

The Gauḍarjamālā constituted the first volume of a comprehensive political and cultural history of Bengal planned by the Varendra Research Society under the title Gauḍavivarana. This book begins with an account of Gangaridi. It is followed by the history of Bengal in the Gupta period. No account has been given of the three rulers of Bengal known from five Faridpur copper plate grants, namely, Dharmāditya, Gopachandra and Samāchāradeva. But their historicity has been established beyond dispute by historians at a later period. However, Ramaprasad Chanda is the first
historian who has recorded a genuine history of the Gauḍa King Saśānka whose suzerainty was recognised from Orissa in the south and Kānyakubja in the west. Further, he has also put forward arguments to remove the stigma on the character of Saśānka attributed by Bāñabhaṭṭa in the Harṣaṛaita. Of course, there still remains a controversy whether Saśānka did any act of betrayal by killing Rājyavardhana. It again goes to the credit of Ramaprasad that he has presented before the Bengali people the memories of the past glory by giving a faithful description of the achievements of the Pāla rulers. Ramaprasad has shown that the original home of the Pālas was in Bengal itself and not in Bihar. But, as pointed out by Dineshchandra Sircar, Ramaprasad’s Pāla chronology is not acceptable to modern historians. Chanda has shown that Dharmapāla began to rule in AD 815. But in the light of modern researches it is held by the historians that the reign of Dharmapāla come to an end sometime before AD 815. According to the traditions of the Kulajī texts, the Brahmanas and the Kāyaṣṭhas of Bengal were the descendants of the five Brāhmanas and Kāyaṣṭhas brought by king Ādiśūra from Kānyakubja. The social history of Bengal was written on the basis of this tradition. But Ramaprasad Chanda has reasonably questioned the historicity of the tradition regarding Ādiśūra as recorded in the Kulajī texts. Again, Kielhorn’s view about the Sena period in Bengal has been criticised by Ramaprasad Chanda on reasonable grounds.

Dineshchandra Sircar has pointed out the necessity of making a revision of the Gauḍarājamaṭa in the light of newly discovered epigraphic records. For instance, it was learnt from the Tirumalai inscription of Rajendra Chola that King Govindachandra of Vaṅgāla was defeated by the Chola army sometime about AD 1025. But, in recent times the historians have constructed a detailed account of the Chandra dynasty of which the greatest ruler was Śrīchandra (AD 925-975). Again, the discoveries of some epigraphic records attest the rule of the Rāta dynasty in Samataṭa in the seventh century AD. The capital of the Rātas was Devaparvata (Maināmati in Comilla district). Copper plate grants were also issued by Bhavadeva of the Deva dynasty in the eighth century AD from Devaparvata. In spite of the fact that some additions and alterations in the Gauḍarājamaṭa are found necessary in the light of the newly discovered epigraphic records, Ramaprasad Chanda’s recognition as the first
scientific historian of Bengal remains as ever. This has been admitted by Dineshchandra Sircar who has written an Introduction to the new edition of Gaucārājamaṇḍaṇa. The value-judgement on Ramaprasad’s work may be given in this way:

No work on the early history of Bengal barring Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay’s Bāṅgāḷīr Itiḥāsa could be its peer prior to the publication of the Dacca History of Bengal in 1943.173

As it has been pointed out above, Ramaprasad Chanda considered ancient history of Bengal as the social history of the Bengali people. While his Gaucārājamaṇḍaṇa covers a particular aspect of social history his book entitled Indo-Aryan Races covers a more important aspect of social history, according to his own view 174. He has discussed the anthropology of Bengal in the light of Indian anthropology and has drawn our attention to the contributions of the non-Aryans to the Indian culture. His views regarding non-Aryan influences on Vaisnavism and Saktism are more or less accepted by modern scholars. Ramaprasad has made a brilliant study of the anthropometric data along with the evidences deduced from ancient and medieval texts. In this work, Ramaprasad Chanda has excelled not only as a historian but also as an anthropologist and archaeologist. The great Indologist A.B.Keith made the following observation regarding the Indo Aryan Races in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland in 1917:

This forms a valuable addition to the literature dealing with the origin of the Indo-Aryan peoples. ... His opinions gain greatly both in value and clearness from their ordered exposition; and whatever conclusion he arrived at as regards his main thesis, all interested in the question must recognise the catholic character of his erudition, and the ingenuity and effectiveness of his arguments which render his work a serious contribution to the subject with which it deals. 175
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22. *Ibid*.

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26. ‘Sūchana’, *Aitihasik Chitra*, Year 1, No. 1.

27. *Bhāratī*, Bhādra, 1305 BS, pp. 466-77.


33. ‘On the aims and objects of the Bengal Academy of Literature, read by Mr. Liotard in the 8th session of The Bengal Academy of Literature on September 10, 1893’; see Madanmohan Kumar, *Op. Cit.*., p. 23.

34. President’s speech on the occasion of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay’s birthday on Āśādh 16, 1380 BS; vide Kumar, *Op. Cit.*., p. 24.


42. Haraprasad Sastri’s Address at the Seventh Bangiya Sāhitya Sammelan. 1320 BS.


44. Those eleven texts are:

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ii. *Kṣatrabhaṅgasiddhi* (the same)

iii. *Vajrāvāli* of Abhayākara-gupta (between the end of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth century AD)

iv. *Kālachakrāvatāra* of Abhayākara-gupta (1125 AD)

v. *Charyāgītī* (beginning of the twelfth century AD)

vi. *Kuṭṭanāmata* of Dāmodara-gupta (1172 AD)

vii. *Hevajratantratattākā* (1198 AD)

viii. *Rāmcharita* of Sandhyākara Nandi (twelfth century)

ix. *Rāmcharitratattākā* (the same)

x. *Dohākoṣapāṇī* of Advayvajra (twelfth century)

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89. *BOS*, p. 11 (Introductory).


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