CHAPTER III
CONTRIBUTIONS OF RAKHALDAS BANDOPADHYAY TO ANCIENT BENGAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

Among the twentieth century historians of Bengal, Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay is recognised as a pioneer in the field of Indological studies, especially in the regional historical studies of Bengal and Orissa. Rakhaldas considered himself to be an uttaraśādhaṅk (true successor) of the litterateur Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay who, for the first time, initiated an investigation on two fronts, namely, Bhārata Kalatika (Slur of India) and Bāṅgālīr Kalatika (Slur of Bengal) on the one hand and Bāṅgālīr Utpatti (Origin of the Bengali people) on the other. Rakhaldas considered Bankimchandra as one who introduced the scientific method of investigation following the nineteenth century European methodology and arrived at some historical conclusions, which could hardly be modified by researches extending over half-a-century. Rakhaldas was provoked by some basic questions raised by Bankimchandra in his Vividha Prabandha. One of the questions related to the conquest of Bengal by seventeen horsemen under the leadership of Bakhtiyar Khilji. In order to search for a satisfactory reply to the question Rakhaldas put in much labour and time and ultimately wrote the article entitled ‘Laksmapesna O Musalmān Vijaya’ that was published in the Baṅgadarśan, 1315 BS. Secondly, Bankimchandra’s famous article on the origin of the Bengali people (Bāṅgālīr Utpatti) suggested predominantly non-Aryan element in the Bengali population. In 1280 BS, Bankimchandra’s ‘Baṅge Brāhmanapadākāra’ was an attempt to determine the date of Aryanisation in Bengal. Following this line of investigation Rakhaldas included in the second chapter of the first volume of his Bāṅgālīr Itihiṣa a discussion on the original inhabitants in Bengal and the Aryan conquest of Bengal. So far as the historical ideas and methodology are concerned, Rakhaldas was a true successor of Bankimchandra and Haraprasad Sastri, although he did not subscribe to their view that the Kulajś texts are dependable sources for the social history of Bengal.
However, Rakhalidas has remembered Bankimchandra’s saying:

Bengal needs history. Otherwise the Bengalees will never attain manhood.

Rakhalidas has felt that if Bankimchandra would have been alive, he (Rakhalidas) himself along with his contemporaries Akshaykumar and Ramaprasad could dedicate to him (Bankimchandra) a genuine history of Bengal reconstructed following a scientific and critical method.

**LIFE SKETCH**

Rakhalidas was born at Baharampur in the district of Mursidabad of undivided Bengal on April 12, 1885. His father was Matilal Bandopadhyay, a very successful practitioner at Baharampur Court. Rakhalidas was the only survived of Matilal’s eight offspring, begotten of his second wife Kalimati Devi. Their ancestral homeland was Sagardi in the district of Dacca. His ancestors settled in the village of Dahapara near Lalbagh in the days of Mursidkuli Khan. Rakhalidas was proud to mention that his ancestors received zamindari from Aurangzeb and that they were forced to leave for taking Siraj’s side in the battle of Plassy. Naturally, Matilal was sternly anti-British and self-respectful and that was the proud inheritance of Rakhalidas.

Rakhalidas spent his early life in comfort and luxury. The environment of grandeur, excessive wealth and special care that was provided to him was sufficient enough to make him a spoilt child. But instead, Rakhalidas showed powerful imagination and spirit of energy from his childhood. He passed the Entrance examination in 1900 from the Krishnanath Collegiate School with stipend of Rs. 15. He was married to Kanchanmala Devi, daughter of Narendranath Mukhopadhyay, Zamindar of Uttarpara, before passing the Entrance examination. Kanchanmala Devi was later known as eminent Bengali novelist.

Rakhalidas left Baharampur to pursue higher education and passed F.A. examination from the Presidency College, Calcutta, in 1903 in the first division. The
year 1903 proved fatal to him, as he had lost his parents in the same year. This resulted in a break in his studies due to litigation concerning paternal properties. However, he passed the B.A. examination with Honours in History from the same College in the year 1907.

Since his college days Rakhaldas had been attached with the Indian Museum and the Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat. In the Indian Museum he used to assist Theodore Bloch in his academic pursuits and archaeological studies. This scholarly association was a blessing for Rakhaldas, because he got an invitation even in 1908 from the authorities of the Lucknow Museum to prepare a catalogue of the archaeological collections at the said Museum. Again, he had been organising the Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat and its Museum at the request of Ramendrasundar Trivedi who was Assistant Secretary of the Pariṣat from 1908 to 1911.

In 1910, Rakhaldas passed his M.A. examination in History from Calcutta University. In the same year, he was appointed as an Excavation Assistant at the Indian Museum on February 15. During 1910-11, the Archaeological Section of the Indian Museum was transferred to the administrative control of the Archaeological Survey of India and thus the service of Rakhaldas was placed under the Government of India. Sir John Marshall, the then Director General of Archaeology, was very much pleased with Rakhaldas's performance. He created a post of Assistant Superintendent of Archaeology, so that Rakhaldas might take independent charge of the Archaeological Section of the Indian Museum. However, he was promoted to the post of Assistant Superintendent of the Archaeological Section of the Indian Museum on sub-pro-tem basis on November 11, 1911. In 1912, he was confirmed in his post and continued to work as Assistant Superintendent in spite of hostilities against him. One of such hostilities was the omission of the name of Rakhaldas, at the instance of N.Anandale, from the list of Gazetted Officers chosen for the award of the Silver Durbar Medal on the occasion of the visit of His Majesty the King Emperor in 1912. However, Sir John Marshall took up the issue with Mr L.C. Porter, ICS, and Rakhaldas was duly accorded the above honour that he deserved.
In 1913, Rakhaldas applied for the post of Government Epigraphist of India. But the post was ultimately offered to H.Krishna Sastri. In the same year, Rakhaldas was awarded the Jubilee Research Prize by the Calcutta University for his ‘The Origin of the Bengali Script’ published by the same University in 1919 as a monograph. In 1914, he applied for the post of Professor of Indian History and Archaeology at the Madras University and for Professorship of Modern History at Allahabad University. Again, in 1916, he applied for the Chair of Carmichael Professor of Ancient Indian History and Culture. It is alleged by some that he was not offered any of the above posts, although he deserved them, due to an indirect interference of Sir Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay. D.R. Bhandarkar was selected for the post of Carmichael Professor. Bhandarkar, who had been previously in charge of the Western Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India in the capacity of Superintendent, was released by Marshall, the then Director General of Archaeology, so that he might join the post of Carmichael Professor at the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, Calcutta University. Bhandarkar joined the Calcutta University on July 1, 1917. As a result, it so happened that Rakhaldas was transferred to Poona as Officiating Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey of India, Western Circle.

D.B.Spooner, the then acting Director General of Archaeology of the Archaeological Survey of India, attempted to delay the effective promotion of Rakhaldas in a most clumsy fashion by administrative obstruction. However, finally he was allowed to join the post in the biggest circle of the Archaeological Survey of India. Desperate attempts were made to reduce the size of the Western Circle. Rakhaldas, being disgusted with the hostile attitudes and obstructionist measures adopted by the authorities, applied for the post of Professor at the Department of History, Dacca University. It was again due to an undue interference of Sir Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay that his appointment was strongly opposed even under the Vice-chancellorship of Rameshchandra Majumder, a friend of Rakhaldas himself.

The year 1922-23 was eventful in the life of Rakhaldas. Since the winter of 1918, he was in search of Greek Victory Pillars in the dry beds of the Indus and the
surrounding hilly areas in the Larkana district of Sind. By chance he came across a high mound, locally known as 'Mohenjodaro', its mutilation being caused by the collection of bricks from time to time. Rakhaldas decided to excavate the area in December 1922 after a careful study of the configuration and other historical remains. However, the discovery of Mohenjodaro proved to be the crowning achievement of the Archaeological Survey of India till that date.

While excavations continued at Mohenjodaro in 1923, Rakhaldas was directed to make preparations for the proposed visit of H.R.H. Prince of Wales (subsequently King George VI) to India by the Governor of Bombay. It was scheduled that during his visit the Prince would open the Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay. This was, no doubt, a recognition of Rakhaldas's expertise and the confidence His Excellency, Sir Lloyd George, the Governor of Bombay, placed in the abilities of Rakhaldas. The opening ceremony was a grand success.

Rakhaldas had to bear a great hardship during his camp-life at Mohenjodaro. As a result, he felt seriously ill and returned to Poona. Besides, he lost his beloved elder son Asim at that time. Due to his illness, both physical and mental, he took a year's leave from the Survey and joined again on June 6, 1924 as the Superintendent of the Archaeological Survey of India, Eastern Circle. During this period Rakhaldas made extensive tour in the districts of Bengal and Assam in quest of antiquities and artifacts.

In 1924, Rakhaldas was invited by the Academic Council of Benaras Hindu University to deliver a series of lectures on the history of the Imperial Guptas. He delivered those lectures before the students of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture in November 1924. It was later published by Benaras Hindu University in 1933 under the title *The Age of the Imperial Guptas* 26.

In 1925, Rakhaldas's attention was drawn towards the mounds of the ancient city of Somapura in the Rajsahi district. The preliminary excavation work at this site had been left unfinished by the Calcutta University. Subsequently the mound yielded
the famous Somapura Vihāra founded by the Pāla king Dharmapāla sometime towards the end of the eighth century AD.

Rakhaldas was compelled, under the circumstances beyond his control, to bring an end to his connection with the Archaeological Survey of India. It is alleged that the charge of theft of an image from the Chausath Yogini temple near Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, was brought against him by the temple-priest. He was suspended on and from August 16, 1926. Though the allegation was not proved conclusively, he was finally removed from the Government service by August 1927.

Sudden loss of job brought a hardship to Rakhaldas who had been accustomed to a life of ease and luxury. Moreover, he was a patient of incorrigible diabetes. He was, however, in financial stringency. At this period of crisis, two of his friends came to his rescue. Firstly, at the initiative of Ramaprasad Chanda he was appointed as the author of the history of Orissa from the earliest times to the British period by the Mayurbhañj Raj. Secondly, at the request of K.P.Jaiswal, Pandit Madan Mohan Malavya appointed him as Manindrachandra Nandi Professor of Ancient Indian History and Culture at Benaras Hindu University. Rakhaldas joined Benaras Hindu University in 1928. Under his guidance the administrative and academic position of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture was consolidated. Due to his ill health he had to take leave for sometime. He died a premature death on May 23, 1930 in Calcutta at the age of 45 only.

**RAKHALDAS'S SCHOLARSHIP: ASSOCIATION WITH LEARNED MEN & INSTITUTIONS**

Rakhaldas’s scholarship gradually developed as a consequence of his close contact with some distinguished learned men of his time and his close association with some learned institutions. A deeper study of Rakhaldas’s career shows that he came in close contact with Haraprasad Sastri and Ramendrasundar Trivedi, the stalwarts of the Vañgiya Sāhitya Pariṣat (1894), in the early stage of his life, when he was a college student. It was Haraprasad Sastri who introduced Rakhaldas to Theodore Bioch of the
Indian Museum, Calcutta. Personal contact with Bloch created an opportunity for Rakhalidas to obtain first hand knowledge of palaeography that helped him a lot throughout his academic career to decipher the texts of a large number of stone inscriptions, copper plate grants and image inscriptions. Perhaps Rakhalidas's uncommon skill in deciphering inscriptions was brought to the notice of the authorities of the Lucknow Provincial Museum and that was the reason why he was invited to decipher the Ghugrahati copper plates by H.E. Stapleton of the Lucknow Provincial Museum. Further, Rakhalidas also came into contact with J.Ph. Vogel, the then Director of the Lucknow Provincial Museum, Lucknow. The work was done probably, when Rakhalidas remained attached with Indian Museum.

Since 1907, Rakhalidas started visiting often not only the Indian Museum but also the Vaangya Sahitya Parisat and the Asiatic Society, Calcutta. Presumably, he had an opportunity to come into contact and interact with distinguished scholars working regularly at those Institutions. It may be mentioned in this connection that the Asiatic Society, Calcutta was attached with the Indian Museum till 1914. Although Rakhalidas recognised Haraprasad Sastri and Theodore Bloch as his intellectual gurus to whom he dedicated his work entitled The Origin of the Bengali Script (1919), he had been immensely benefited by his contact with Coggin Brown and Holland at the Indian Museum. While from Coggin Brown he learnt the science of anthropology, Holland introduced him into the field of palaeontology. While writing the history of Bengal, Rakhalidas collected valuable information about palaeolithic and neolithic tools found in Bengal from Coggin Brown. Hemchandra Dasgupta furnished him with various informations regarding the primitive man of the palaeolithic age. Modern Indologists have expressed their admiration for the fact that at a tender age Rakhalidas acquired scholarship in palaeography, epigraphy, numismatics, art and archaeology.

Incidentally, it may be pointed out that Rakhalidas acknowledged his indebtedness to the famous Indologist Gaurisankar Hirachand Ojha. It is said that when G.S. Ojha visited the Indian Museum, he was very much impressed by the expert knowledge of Rakhalidas in palaeography and epigraphy. At that time Rakhalidas is said to have touched the feet of Ojha and uttered the following words:
"You are my guru, I have derived enough benefit from your writings."  

The close association of Rakhaldas with the Asiatic Society is borne out by the fact that Rakhaldas devoted much time and labour to prepare the *Catalogue of Inscriptions on Copper Plates in the collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1910). The *Catalogue* contains the find-spots of the copper plates, short history of the discovery, substance of the first editing of the records, themes of the inscriptions and the names of journals in which research articles on those inscriptions were published. As many as thirty-five copper plate grants were included in the said *Catalogue*.  

The close association of Rakhaldas with the Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat has already been referred to. He was the Assistant Secretary of the Pariṣat from 1908 to 1911. At that time he prepared the *Descriptive List of Sculptures and Coins in the Museum of the Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat* (1911). The Museum of the Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat was set up in the name of Romeshchandra Dutt and accommodated in it rare sculptures, coins, copper plate grants, stone and bronze images, terracottas, potteries and manuscripts in both palm-leaf and common paper. Therefore, the catalogue prepared by Rakhaldas was of immense help to the researchers of those days. A complementary catalogue was later on prepared by Manamohan Gangopadhyay. The catalogue of course included only the sculptures and coins preserved in the Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Museum. Besides the work mentioned above, Rakhaldas also prepared a list of inscriptions in the collection of the Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat entitled *Lekhamālāmukramapī* in Bengali (1330 BS).  

Rakhaldas had a contact with the Varendra Research Society. Akshaykumar Maitreya, the Director of the Society, was a genuine admirer of Rakhaldas’s scholarship and often invited him to extend help in the archaeological explorations and to decipher some epigraphic records. It was by Akshaykumar’s encouragement that Rakhaldas wrote his work *Prāchīn Mudrā* (Ancient Coins, 1915)  

35. Academic friendship between Rakhaldas and Ramaprasad Chanda, Secretary.
Varendra Research Society, was maintained throughout, although they did not agree on all academic issues.

The long association with the Archaeological Survey of India provided Rakhaldas an opportunity to have the first hand knowledge of the archaeological sites lying in both the Eastern and Western Circles. In course of his epoch making discovery at Mohenjodaro he came in closer contact with Sir John Marshall. Marshall had already been impressed by Rakhaldas’s scholarship and by his recommendation Rakhaldas was appointed to high official position under the Archaeological Survey of India. But after the discovery of Mohenjodaro, an interaction between Marshall and Rakhaldas became more intimate, it may be presumed reasonably. But for reasons better known to Marshall himself, Rakhaldas did not remain at the site of Mohenjodaro when it was excavated stratigraphically.

There is least doubt about the fact that the researches of Rakhaldas were based on empirical methodology. Those researches yielded in course of time a large number of learned articles in both in English and Bengali and also a number of books and monographs published in both English and Bengali. The articles in Bengali on different topics like archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, political history, social history, art history, historical geography, literature etc. were published in the journals like the Bhāratavarṣa, Basumatī, Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā, Sāhitya, Mānasī, Ānanda Bāźār Patrikā, Bāñī, Mahilā, Nārāyan, Bangadarśan, Marmabāñī and other papers. His articles in English on the above mentioned topics were published in the Journal of Bihar & Orissa Research Society, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Epigraphia Indica, Annals of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Indian Historical Quarterly, Indian Antiquary, Annual Reports-Archaeological Survey of India etc. Rakhaldas had written on almost all the periods of Indian history, but his actual forte was the specialisation in ancient period. His major works on the ancient period may be divided into three categories:

1. History of the ruling families having pan-Indian significance;
2. Regional history;
3. **Total history of Ancient India.**

*The Scythian Period of Indian History* (1908) was his first publication that can be placed in the first category. Vincent A. Smith in his *Early History of India* admitted that in his book he had utilised the above scholarly article of Rakhaldas for writing the history of Kaṇiṣka. The second one of this category was *The Age of the Imperial Guptas* (Lectures delivered in 1924, published in 1933). In the category of regional history Rakhaldas made two major contributions, namely, *Bāṅgalār Itiḥāsa*, volume I (1914) and volume II, (1917) and the *History of Orissa from the Earliest times to the British period*, volume I & II (1930, 1931). Next mention may be made of the *Prehistoric, Ancient and Hindu India* (1934) that may be placed in the category of total history of ancient India. The work was meant to be a textbook for the students studying history at the graduate and post-graduate levels. Rakhaldas’s special attention to the anthropological evidence reflected in this book impressed Donald A. Mackenzie.

We may have a fair idea about Rakhaldas’s concept of total history of ancient India from the syllabus that he had drawn up for the post-graduate courses at Benaras Hindu University in the capacity of Manindra Chandra Nandi Professor and Head of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture. The syllabus offered four compulsory papers:

1. **Indian History upto AD 319 including pre-historic culture;**
2. **Indian History from AD 319 to AD 1203;**
3. **Hindu Law and Social Institutions of India;**
4. **Administration and Political Theories.**

Again, the syllabus offered two optional subjects out of the following six groups:

**Group A. Religion and Philosophy**
1. Brahmanic Religion and Philosophy
2. Jaina and Buddhist Religion and Philosophy
**Group B. Literature, Poetics and Dramaturgy**

1. Poetics and Dramaturgy
2. Sanskrit Literature

**Group C. Epigraphy**

1. Indian Inscriptions upto AD 319 including Khāroṣṭhī
2. North Indian Inscriptions from AD 319 to AD 1200

**Group D. Indian Palaeography**

1. The evolution of Indian Alphabets
2. North Indian Alphabets from AD 700 to AD 1300

**Group E. Art and Architecture**

1. History of Indian Architecture
2. History of Indian Art

**Group F. Numismatics**

1. Origin and Metrology
2. The Reformed Indian Currency.

Rakhaldas thus provided the scope of practical studies in epigraphy, art and architecture and numismatics at the *Saranath Museum* and the *Lucknow Provincial Museum*. Students opting for art and architecture had to undertake study-tours in places like Patna, Nalanda, Bodhgaya, Khajuraho, Konarak, Bhubaneswar, Puri, Mathura, Taxila etc.

From the above, it appears how Rakhaldas comprehended the total history and culture of ancient India and to what extent he felt the necessity of making the educated intelligentsia of the country conscious of the history and culture of the Indian people.
Rakhaldas was surrounded by a circle of contemporary scholars and historians. As we come to know from Rameshchandra Majumdar, Rakhaldas always entertained his friends and intellectual visitors among whom mention may be made of Sunitikumar, Rameschandra, Bodhisattva Sen (son of Ramdas Sen), Nanigopal Majumdar, Akshaykumar Maitreya, Ramaprasad Chanda, Hemchandra Dasgupta, Kalidas Nag, Amulyacharan Vidyabhusan, Narendra Dev, Jatindramohan Roy, Saratchandra Chattopadhyay. Besides, he was quite friendly towards K.P. Jaiswal of Patna, but never agreed with D.R. Bhandarkar on any academic issue. Once he involved himself in a controversy with F.E. Pargiter on the date of the Rgveda, keeping in view the evidence of an inscription recording a treaty between the Hittites and the Mitannis. The intellectual circle was in a way responsible for encouraging Rakhaldas in his academic pursuits. Because, it may reasonably be assumed that in the domestic sessions (ādāsā) of those scholars a free and fair exchange of ideas used to take place. Rakhaldas himself was never dogmatic in his attitude, when the historical problems were discussed and sorted out. From the reminiscences of Rameshchandra Majumdar it is learnt that he had made a review of Bāṅgālar Īthāṣa pointing out the mistakes Rakhaldas had committed in the journal Pratibhā. Rameshchandra was afraid that Rakhaldas might be displeased with him for his review. But in reality, Rakhaldas conveyed his gratefulness for pointing out the anomalies and then handed over to him the manuscript of Prāchāṁ Mudrā requesting him to point out the mistakes, if any, in the work. Rameschandra records of course a few instances of Rakhaldas’s controversy with some distinguished scholars. Rakhaldas had difference of opinion with Haraprasad Sastri and Ramendrasundar Trivedi. He respected them most, but never compromised in any intellectual debate.

Among the personalities with whom Rakhaldas had come into contact mention also should be made of Desbandhu Chittaranjan Das. From his article 'Deshāndhu Saṅge Seṣ Saptāha', we may trace a nationalist spirit of Rakhaldas. It is worth mentioning that he came in contact with Chittaranjan, when he had been a high official of the Government of India under the British Raj. In his college-days Rakhaldas had friendship with Rajendra Prasad and Saratchandra Basu who had been staunch nationalists. However, as pointed out by Nareshchandra Sengupta, one of his
close friends, Rakhaldas had no sympathy for Bengal Partition movement. Whatever that might be, it is difficult to rule out the possibility that Rakhaldas, in spite of his religious faithfulness to historical objectivity, could not avoid the nationalist sentiment while writing Bāṅgālī Itiḥāsa, not in English but in Bengali.

Scholarship of Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay is comparable to that of some nineteenth century historians like Theodore Mommsen, J.B.Bury and H.R.Hall who gave more importance to archaeology than literature while writing the History of Rome, History of Greece and the Ancient History of the Near East respectively. Although Rakhaldas made experiments in different fields of historical research, depending on archaeology and discarding literature as the source of history, his greatest contribution to the historical literature of Bengal in the twentieth was Bāṅgālī Itiḥāsa, volumes I & II, covering the period from the earliest times to the annexation of Bengal to the Mughal Empire.

RAKHALDAS’S APPROACH TO THE HISTORY OF BENGALE

So far as the periodisation of the history of Bengal is concerned. Rakhaldas appears to have made no distinction between ancient and medieval period. The reasons behind are not far to seek. Firstly, he might have borne in mind Bankimchandra’s ideas of history. According to Bankimchandra, who gave a call for writing the history of Bengal, the lost glory of Bengali culture could be revived by cultivating its history from the Pāla-Sena period to the regime of independent Sultans. Bankim thought that the decline of the Bengali society, economy and culture had its beginning with the beginning of the Mughal rule in Bengal. Secondly, Rakhaldas, himself as an archaeologist, did not distinguish between ancient monuments of the Pāla-Sena period and those of the period of independent Sultans. Because, those monuments had a bearing upon the continuity of the history and culture of the Bengali people. Perhaps, none would disagree with the view that the seeds of distinctive culture of Bengal were sown, when the foundation of Gauḍa’s greatness was laid under the rule of Śaśāṅka and the Pāla-Sena dynasty. But the people of Bengal had to
wait till the fifteenth-sixteenth century AD, when they reaped rich harvest in the field of cultural attainments and consolidated their nation-hood.

The history of Bānglādes (Bengal) is a small part of the history of Bhāratavarṣa (India), according to Rakhaldas. The history of Bhāratavarṣa or India includes the history of Uttarāpatha (North India), the history of Bengal being a part and parcel of Uttarāpatha. Therefore, while planning to write the history of Bengal Rakhaldas set a pan-Indian vision and thus kept himself above regionalism. In his view, in the historical period Gauḍā, Magadha, Aṇga and Vaṅga formed a homogenous unit for the first six centuries of the Christian era. Magadha maintained its predominance. Gauḍā-Vaṅga might have achieved an independent status during this period. But, the independent status did not last long. Till the Muslim invasion, for the remaining period of six centuries, Gauḍā-Vaṅga enjoyed its separate independent existence for a long period, while Magadha and Aṇga could not maintain their independent status for a long time during this period. However, in Rakhaldas’s view, the history of Gauḍā-Vaṅga included the history of Aṇga-Magadha.

While writing the history of Bengal from the pre-historic age to the Muslim conquest of Bengal, for which he spent ten years for collecting materials, he felt that due to the paucity of materials it was hardly possible to make the history of Bengal comprehensive. He observed:

The country where except epigraphs, copper plates, ancient coins and traditions recorded in literature no other reliable evidence have so far been discovered, one can not expect for that country more than a skeleton of history.

So, Rakhaldas being extremely handicapped by the lack of sufficient dependable sources of information, had no alternative but to depend entirely upon archaeology. But it was hardly possible to reconstruct the social history of a country in the light of archaeological sources only. From the archaeological remains discovered on a particular site or from some references in the epigraphs one might at best infer
whether they had a bearing upon a rural or urban social complex, whether the people were dependent on agriculture, industry or trade. But such inferences could hardly lead a historian to obtain a total picture of the society. Rakhaldas had, therefore, to limit himself within the boundaries of political history, the data for which were more or less available from the dependable sources at his disposal. While writing the history of Bengal he distanced himself from the literary tradition as far as possible. He entirely ignored the tradition recorded in the *Kulaśāstras* or *Kulajīs* like his predecessors Akshaykumar Maitreya and Ramaprasad Chanda.

Previously attempts were made by some to write the social history of Bengal on the basis of the *Kulajī* texts. For instance, Lalmohan Vidyanidhi’s *Sambandhā Nīrpaṇa* (1874), Nagendranath Vasu’s *Vaiṅgar Jāṭya Itihāsa*, Part I (1305 BS). Mahimachandra Majumdar’s *Gauḍe Brāhmaṇa* (1889), Umeshchandra Gupta’s *Vallaḷamohamudgara* (1905), Sadananda Misra’s *Kulatattvārpaṇa* (1927) etc. were written in the light of the *Kulaṇjī* texts. Even scholars like Haraprasad Sastri, Dineshchandra Sen and Ramendrasundar Trivedi for sometime believed that the *Kulajī* texts might be utilised for the reconstruction of the social history of ancient Bengal. Even Bankimchandra who was a follower of scientific methodology of history did not hesitate to make use of the *Kulajī* texts in his essay ‘*Baiṅge Brāhmaṇādhiṅkara*’. In this background Akshaykumar Maitreya, Ramaprasad Chanda and Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay made a common cause against the use of the *Kulajī* texts as a source of history.

Rakhaldas questioned the authenticity and historicity of the *Kulajī* texts in his article entitled ‘*Adiśūra O Kulaśāstra*’. ‘*Bhojavarmā Tāmruḥāsan*’, ‘*Kulaśāstrer Aitihāśikatār Drṣṭānta*’ and also in two Appendices in his *Bāṅgālār Itihāsa*, volume I. He showed the discrepancy between the evidence furnished by the epigraphic records and coins on the one hand and that of the *Kulaṇjī* texts on the other. Obviously he preferred the epigraphic and numismatic evidences and discarded the structure of history as reconstructed by Nagendranath Vasu and others on the basis of the *Kulaṇjī* texts. It is true that Ramaprasad Chanda held similar scientific approach in his *Gauḍērājāmālā*, but Rakhaldas’s *Bāṅgālār Itihāsa* was based upon more accurate planning, had greater expansion and was placed in a wider canvas.
of history. Ramaprasad began his Gaudarājāmaḷā from the Maurya period (fourth century BC). A few years later F.J. Monahan also wrote *Early History of Bengal* from the Maurya period. But Rakhaldas began his work from the pre-historic Stone Age followed by ancient world history and immigration of the Aryan in India. He added an all-India and worldview to his *Bāṅgalīr Itihāsa* by introducing an account of expansion of the Aryan culture in Vaṅga and Magadha. The chapters seem to have been written in a more systematic manner. The discussion in each chapter seems to be more exhaustive and the entire history is, no doubt, faithful at every step to the original source. Being himself an experienced palaeographist and epigraphist, Rakhaldas was in a position to scrutinise the evidence of each and every inscription used by him. Besides, he himself edited some of the inscriptions having bearing upon the history of Bengal. Besides, he was also quite aware of the North Indian inscriptions having bearing upon the history of Bengal. He made use of footnotes referring to the text and translation of different inscriptions edited previously by other scholars. Therefore, the history of Bengal as reconstructed by Rakhaldas was based upon pāhure pramāṇa (most dependable evidence) and can be relied upon without any scope of doubt. In some cases, the views and conclusions of Rakhaldas seem to be more dependable than those of Ramaprasad Chanda. Let us have an overview of the chapters contained in Rakhaldas’s *Bāṅgalīr Itihāsa*.

**REVIEW OF RAKHALDAS'S WORKS**

**A. BĀNGĀLĀR ITIHĀSA, PRATHAMA BHĀG**

(*HISTORY OF BENGAL, VOLUME ONE*)

**Chapter I. Prehistoric Age**

According to the study of the geologists, the territory of Bengal was formed much later in age and therefore the discovery of the specimens of primitive man in this country is not expected. However, the prehistoric tools discovered till the time of the author have indicated two periods in the Prehistoric Age, namely Palaeolithic and Neolithic. The author could not trace any specimen of bronze, not to speak of iron. From whatever is learnt from the chapter, it appears that the author had very scanty material at his disposal. In fact, even today, pre-historic study in Bengal is in its
infancy. The pre-historic tools have been discovered mainly in West Bengal on a large scale in recent times. Nowadays, Pre-historic Age has got three divisions, namely, Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic. The age of the Chalcolithic culture that followed the Neolithic period was discovered in Pāṇḍu Rājār Dhibi and Bharatpur, the two sites located in the Burdwan district. Although bronze is not found in any part of Bengal it was discovered in the Indus valley and at places like Brahmagiri, Maski etc. in South India. The existence of the Chalcolithic culture is attested by its distinguished pottery known as Black and Red Ware. In some cases copper tools have been found out. But, in most of the archaeological sites one may trace the existence of iron along with the Chalcolithic wares. However, Rakhaldas took an anthropological view of the pre-historic age and distinguished the stages of food-collection, food-production at the subsistence level and surplus food-production as characteristic features of the socio-economic life of the Pre-historic age.

Chapter II. Aboriginal Settlers of Bengal and the Aryan Conquest

The question of migration of the Aryans from their original home and their subsequent advent and settlement in India has been discussed. Before the original inhabitants of Bengal came into contact with the Aryan culture, they were looked down upon by the Aryans. In the Vedic literature the people known as the Vaṅgas and the Māgadhas are referred to as barbarians. But Rakhaldas was not in a position to analyse the exact composition of Bengal’s population before the process of Aryanisation was complete. That is probably the reason why he has subscribed to the view of Herbert Risley that the original settlers in Bengal represented a mixture of the Dravidian and the Mongoloids. But, in fact, the Niṣādas or the Austric-speaking people who formed the main sub-stratum of the population in Bengal were missed by Rakhaldas most probably due to the paucity of anthropometric data at his disposal. Ramaprasad Chanda, Birajasankar Guha, Haranchandra Chakladar, Minendranath Basu, Prasantachandra Mahalanobis and other anthropologists took the exact measurement of the people in Bengal and analysed their blood group from the point of view of physical anthropology. It seems that Rakhaldas, by any chance, could not consult Ramaprasad Chanda’s Indo Aryan Races.
It is extremely difficult to explain why Rakhaldas has not given an account of the historical geography of ancient Bengal. Ancient *janapadas* were so many tribal settlements. Each and every tribe was associated with a particular territory or *janapada* like Puṇḍra, Varendra, Rāḍha, Samatāta, Sūhma, Vaṅga etc. There is a difference of opinion among the scholars whether the *janapadas* were known by the names of the tribes who settled over there or the tribes were named after the *janapadas* in which they lived. The question is discussed at length by Sukumar Sen in his *Prāchīn Bāṅglā O Bāṅgālī* (1943) and *Bāṅgabhūmikā* (1974). In fact, the impact of Aryanisation was felt positively in Bengal when there was amalgamation of the tribes and territories leading to the transformation of the tribal society and state into the caste society and territorial state.

**Chapter III. Maurya and Saka Rule**

During the period between the last quarter of the fourth century BC and the end of the third century AD occurred the rise and fall of the Maurya Empire and subsequent rise of the Śaṅgas to power. The history of the Sākas, Pallavas and Kuśānas is included in the same chapter that concludes with an account of Chandravarmāṇ of Puṅkaraṇa (Bankura District, West Bengal). Two kingdoms in Eastern India – *Prasioi* and *Gangaridai*, which were in existence at the time of the fall of the Nandas and the rise of the Mauryas, find mention in the beginning of the chapter. *Gangaridai* was an independent kingdom. But from the Mahāsthāṅgarh inscription it is known that at least a part of Bengal, more specifically Puṇḍra, was included within the Maurya Empire. The Śaṅgas had nothing to do with Bengal. The Saka rule was limited within North-West and parts of Northern India. The author is not sure whether Magadha and Vaṅga were annexed to the Kuśāna Empire. But the discovery of some coins bearing the names of Huviṣka and Vāsudeva seem to indicate that their authority was recognised in Magadha. But in recent times some Kuśāna coins have also been discovered in Bengal that might indicate the expansion of the Kuśāna hegemony up to the Easternmost part of India. Lastly, the author has suggested the identification of King Chandravarmāṇ of the Suśunia inscription with the ruler of the same name.
mentioned in the Allahabad pillar inscription and also King Chandra of the Meherauli pillar inscription. Recent researches have confirmed the first part of the author’s view regarding the identification of Chandravarmaṇḍ of Puṣkaraṇa with Chandravarmaṇḍ defeated by Samudragupta ⁶⁶. But King Chandra of the Meherauli pillar inscription is generally identified with Chandragupta II Vikramāditya ⁶⁷.

**Chapter IV. The Age of the Imperial Guptas**

This chapter covers the period from the beginning of the fourth century AD to the middle of the sixth century AD. The author has given an account of the rise of the Imperial Guptas and extent of their power from the time of Chandragupta I to that of Chandragupta II. Next, he has mentioned how during the reign of Kumāragupta I, who performed the Aśvamedha sacrifice, there took place the rebellion of the Puṣyamitra tribe and the invasion of the Hūṇas. The role of Skandagupta in this background has been discussed. Skandagupta was followed by Purugupta. Narasirṅhagupta, Kumāragupta II, Budhagupta, Bhāṇugupta, Chandragupta II and Viṣṇugupta. Rakhaldas’s view that Chandragupta-Kumāradevī type of coins was issued by Chandragupta I has been confirmed by A.S.Altekar ⁶⁸. The names of South Indian rulers defeated by Samudragupta are more or less accepted. According to him, the Gupta era was introduced by Chandragupta I after his accession to the throne. The author’s view that Samudragupta’s Gaya copper plate inscription is forged has been confirmed. Later, he revised his view and considered it as original ⁶⁹. That Kumāragupta I performed the Aśvamedha sacrifice is attested by the Lucknow Museum stone horse bearing the legend Śrī Mahendrāditya. So far as the Gupta genealogy is concerned, Bhāṇugupta is no longer regarded as a ruler of the Imperial Gupta dynasty. Besides, the author has referred to Vainyagupta known from the Gunaighar copper plate inscription. It has been suggested in recent times that Bhāṇugupta ruling in Eran and Vainyagupta in East Bengal were contemporaries of Narasirṅhagupta Bāḷāditya ⁷⁰. The local rulers might have taken an opportunity of the decline of the Gupta power to assert their independence in their own regions. There is a controversy among the scholars regarding the genealogy and chronology of the successors of Kumāragupta I. Whatever that might be, Rakhaldas has not considered
the impact of the rise and fall of the Gupta Empire on the political fortune of Gauḍa-Vaṅga, probably because he assumed that it was after the downfall of the Gupta Empire that Gauḍa-Vaṅga was recognised as a separate independent political unit.

Chapter V. Gupta Dynasty of Magadha

This chapter begins with the history of North India from the middle of the sixth century AD, the period that witnessed a long drawn struggle between the Later Guptas and the Maukharis. It also includes the rise of Saśāṅka to power, expansion of his kingdom in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and his long drawn struggle with Harṣavardhana of Thaneswar, on the one hand and Bhāskarvarman of Kāmarūpa, on the other. The rise of Saśāṅka was preceded by the rule of Dharmaditya, Gopachaṇḍra and Samāchāraṇadeva, rulers of Vaṅga, who are known from the five Faridpur copper plate grants and some stray rulers in East Bengal like Śrī Sudhanyāditya, who are known from a series of Gupta imitation-coins found in East Bengal. Although Rakhaldas originally assumed that the Faridpur grants were spurious and his view was confirmed by Spooner, he later revised his opinion after Pargiter had testified to the authenticity of the records concerned. However, he attached historical importance to the coins mentioned above. In the light of the researches done in the light of newly discovered epigraphic records, which were not available to the author, the Later Guptas are distinguished from the Imperial Guptas. But he has opined that Kumāragupta I’s second son Govindagupta is to be identified with Kṛṣṇagupta (known from the Apsad stone inscription) who was responsible for the foundation of a branch line of the Imperial Guptas. Secondly, the author is of opinion that Saśāṅka, King of Gauḍa, belonged to the Imperial Gupta dynasty, as he is believed to have been either the son or nephew of Mahāsenagupta. It therefore appears in the light of modern researches that the genealogy and the chronology of the Imperial Guptas as well as of the Later Guptas as suggested by Rakhaldas require revision. Further, Saśāṅka has been represented by Rakhaldas more as the king of Magadha than of Gauḍa. Karnāsuvarṇa, which is now recognised by modern historians as the capital of Gauḍa and centre of Saśāṅka’s authority, is placed by Rakhaldas in Kāmarūpa. as Bhāskarvarman is known to have issued his Nidhanpur copper plate from
Karṇasuvanā. The archaeological discoveries at Murshidabad were not brought to light at that time. There is no doubt about the location of Karṇasuvanā near Raktamṛttikā Mahāvihāra brought to light by archaeological excavations in Murshidabad.

Chapter VI. Political Chaos

This chapter deals with a period of political chaos and anarchy that followed the reign of Śaśāṅka and continued till the election of Gopāla as king of Bengal, that is, from about the middle of the seventh century AD to the middle of the eighth century AD. The political anarchy was caused by internal troubles and invasions from outside. Rakhaldas has taken into account the conquest of Pundradesa by the Śaila dynasty, the conquest of Gauḍa by Harṣadeva, king of Kāmarūpa, invasion in Magadha by Yaśovarman and Lalitāditya, appearance of Jayāpīda, grandson of Lalitāditya and his involvement in the politics of Pūṇḍravardhana and the struggle between Vatsarāja, the Gurjara-Pratihāra king and Dhrūva, the Rāṣṭrakūṭa king. It appears that the author has considered the political chaos in Gauḍa-Vaṅga as a part of the same that occurred all over Northern India. He has not yet distinguished Gauḍa-Vaṅga in Eastern India as a separate political entity. According to him, the history of Bengal comprised the history of Gauḍa-Vaṅga and Magadha. However, while the author has referred to the circumstances leading to the political chaos in Gauḍa, he has not referred to the condition in Samatāta (South Eastern Bengal) ruled over by the Rātas, the Nāthas, the Khaḍgas and the Devas. This is obviously due to the non-availability of relevant epigraphic records. However, it is on the basis of the evidence furnished by the Khālimpur copper plate that the author has concluded that Gopāla, the founder of the Pāla dynasty, was elected by the people to bring an end to māśyaṇāya (anarchy). The election of Gopāla was made in the background of constant strife and struggle among the feudal lords in Gauḍa-Vaṅga and Magadha. This hint of Rakhaldas was later on followed by some historians to suggest that Gopāla was actually selected by the feudal chiefs who were anxious to bring to an end the constant struggle among themselves for power and not by the common people (praktibhiḥ).
Chapter VII. Rise of the Pāla Dynasty

This chapter covers the period from the middle of the eighth century AD to the middle of the ninth century AD. According to Rakhalidas, Gopāladeva, founder of the Pāla dynasty, ruled upto AD 790-AD 795, and after him Dharmapāla ruled for thirty-five years. This chronological position is not accepted now-a-days. It is held that Gopāla ruled sometime between AD 750 and AD 770 and Dharmapāla’s reign extended from AD 770 to AD 810. However, the author has discussed the origin of the Pālas, their original home in Varendra (Pitṛbhumi or Janakabhū), consolidation of the Pāla kingdom in the reign of Gopāla, Dharmapāla’s involvement in the struggle for the occupation of Kanauj, his defeat at the hand of the Pratihāra King Nāgabhaṭa II and his ultimate political success due to the intervention of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler Govinda III. In fact, the struggle between Dharmapāla and the Pratihāra ruler Vatsarāja was followed by an intervention of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler Dhruva. But the account of the invasion of Dhruva in Northern India has been considered in the preceding chapter, assuming it to be one of the causes of the political chaos in Northern India. The chronological framework in which Rakhalidas had worked requires revision in the light of recent epigraphic discoveries and their interpretations. Akshaykumar Maitreya’s Gauḍālekhamā furnishing the text and translation of the Pāla records was very much available to Rakhalidas. The structure of the history of the Pāla dynasty as it has been reconstructed in Bāṅgālī Itihāsa has remained almost unchanged, although it remains true that the writing of history is a continuous process through changes.

Chapter VIII: Gūjrā - Rāṣṭrakūṭa Struggle

This chapter deals with the long drawn struggle between the Gūjrā-Pratihāras and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas. In this background course of the Pāla history is considered from the time of Devapāla, son and successor of Dharmapāla till the time of Gopāla II who was seventh in descent from Gopāla I, according to the genealogy adopted by Rakhalidas. An account has been given of Devapāla’s conquests with imperialist designs, expansion of his power from the Himalayas to the Vindhyas and recognition of his political authority in Kāmarūpa and Utkala. Rāmabhadra, a weak successor of
Nāgabhaṭa II, seems to have been defeated by Devapāla. But Rāmabhadra’s son and successor Mihirabhoja firmly consolidated his political sovereignty in Northern India with his capital at Kanauj. The power of the Pālas was on the wane at that time. In the time of Devapāla’s successors, Magadha and even parts of North Bengal were conquered by the Gurjara-Pratihāras. The Pratihāras in Northern India often suffered political reverses due to repeated interventions of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas in North Indian politics. Therefore, it was difficult for the Pratihāras to maintain their command in Eastern India when the Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler Indra III, grandson of Kṛśṇa II, destroyed the Pratihāra capital at Kanauj. The author has surmised that at the time of Indra III’s invasion in Northern India Gopāla II availed of the opportunity to recover parts of paternal kingdom in North Bengal. During the time of Vigrahapāla II, the successor of Gopāla II, Gauḍa-Vaṅga was subjected to invasions, launched by the Chandellas, the Kalachuris and the Kāmbojas. Thus, the Pāla Empire gradually disintegrated in the time of Devapāla’s successors. The story of Pāla decline has been integrated with the rise of Pratihāra power and subsequent incursions of the Chandellas and the Kalachuris who had carved out independent kingdoms taking an opportunity of the downfall of the Imperial Pratihāra power that had been expedited by the Rāṣṭrakūṭa invasions.

Chapter IX: Second Pāla Empire

This chapter deals with the restoration of Pāla imperial power under Mahipāla I. It discusses how Mahipāla I recovered the paternal kingdom (Janakabhū) by ousting the Kāmbojas. It goes to the credit of Mahipāla I that he brought about the integration of the Pāla Empire when North Western India was subjected to repeated invasions of the Turks. The reign of Mahipāla I witnessed the invasion of the Cholas in Bengal. The invasion of the Cholas paved the way towards the political unification in Bengal. Although in the beginning of his reign Mahipāla I had to face the Chandella invasion led by Dhaṅga who claims to have conquered Aṅga and Rāḍha, Mahipāla I succeeded in expanding his imperial power in the west up to Vārāṇasī where his Sāranāth record was found out. The author has probably misplaced the Chandella invasion in the reign of Mahipāla I. It had actually occurred in the time of Mahipāla I’s predecessor
Vigrahapāla II. However, in the time of Nayapāla, successor of Mahipāla I, the Kalachuri king Karṇa launched a military campaign in Bengal. The Pāla-Kalachuri struggle continued up to the time of Vigrahapāla III, successor of Nayapāla. The Kaivartta rebellion took place in the time of Vigrahapāla III himself, as suggested by the author. But modern historians think that the Kaivartta rebellion took place during the reign of Mahipāla II, son and successor of Vigrahapāla III. However, it appears from the account of Rakhaldas that Mahipāla I was the founder of the Second Pāla Empire. But his successors proved themselves inefficient and therefore could not maintain the imperial fabric of the Pāla Empire. The title of the chapter does not justify the inclusion of an account of the Pāla decline. The chronology of the Pāla history as reconstructed by Rakhaldas has been revised by modern historians.

Chapter X: Downfall of the Pālas

Rakhaldas has considered in this chapter how the Pālas made a desperate attempt to maintain their authority in Gauda-Vaṅga in spite of a threat from the growing power of Varmanṣ in East Bengal and the rise of the Kaivarttas to power in Varendra or North Bengal. The author has combined the evidence of the Gaṇḍalekhamalī with that of Sandhyākara Nandi’s Rāmcharita to suggest how Rāmapāla organised a circle of feudatories (sūmantachakra) to subdue the rebellion of the Kaivarttas and recover the authority of the Pālas in Varendra. The foundation of Rāmapāla’s capital at Rāmāvati and his conquest in Kaliṅga and Utkala seem to have indicated the last flicker of the lamp. But the successors of Rāmapāla did not prove themselves to be equal to the task that Rāmapāla had left for them at the time of his death. The genealogy and chronology of the Pāla rulers after Rāmapāla, as suggested by the author, requires modification in the light of recently discovered epigraphic records.

We are given to understand that the Buddhist Chandra dynasty came to power in South Eastern Bengal sometime after the downfall of the Khaḍga dynasty. Again, it is understood that the Varman dynasty ruled in South Eastern Bengal, when the Imperial power of the Pālas faced a crisis with the rise of the Kaivarttas in rebellion. No separate account either of the Varmanṣ or of the Chandras is to be found in
Rakhaldas seems to have been not yet in possession of all the epigraphic records belonging to Varma and Chandra dynasties, so that their exact genealogy and chronology could be reconstructed. Nanigopal Majumdar’s *Inscriptions of Bengal*, volume III, that included texts and translations of the Sena, Varma and Chandra records was published in 1929, whereas Rakhaldas’ work had been published fifteen years earlier. Therefore, Rakhaldas was not in a position to derive any help from Nanigopal Majumdar’s work. Besides, Dineschandra Sircar’s *Epigraphical Discoveries of East Pakistan* (1973) brought to light many more important records.

**Chapter XI: Sena Dynasty**

This chapter deals with the origin of the Sena dynasty founded by Sāmantasena and the growth of its power in the time of Vijayasena and his grandson Laksmaṇasena. The author's view that the Pālas lost their authority in Gauḍa in the eighth regnal year of Madanapaśa is accepted by modern scholars. The growth of the Sena power was made possible by the conquests of Vijayasena which are attested by the Deopāra Praśasti. According to Rakhaldas, the reign of Laksmaṇasena witnessed the climax of progress made by the Sena dynasty. He has opined that the accession of Laksmaṇasena was marked by the beginning of an era (AD 1118-19) known as Laksmaṇāśa, Laksmaṇa Sarivat or La Saṃ. Dr. Kielhorn subscribed to this view. There is a controversy among the scholars regarding the Laksmaṇa era. However, it is suggested by Rakhaldas that the sāmanta rulers of the Gopa or Kāyastha caste assumed the title of Mahāmāṇḍalika and asserted their independence in the twelfth century AD. In the last quarter of the same century, Buddhasena and Jayasena ruled in the southern part of Magadha. But, it is not certain whether they belonged to the same dynasty or not.

**Chapter XII: The Muslim Conquest**

This chapter deals with the decline of the Sena dynasty and the Turkish invasion of Bengal. An account of the invasion led by the Turkish general Bakhtiyar Khilji has
been furnished. The survival of the Sena power in East Bengal ever in the later part of the thirteenth century AD is indicated. Among the successors of Lakṣmaṇasena mention is made of Mādhavasena, Viśvarūpasena and Keśvasena. The existence of Mādhavasena has not yet been proved beyond doubt.

The Turkish invasion of Bengal has been discussed in the background of Muhammad Ghorı’s invasion leading to the defeat and death of Prithvirāj Chauhān, and later, of Gāhaḍavāla Jayachandra. The Turkish rule that began with the accession of Kutub-ud-din Aibak to the throne of Delhi was the background of Turkish invasion of Eastern India. Rakhaldas has traced the existence of a king named Govindapāla ruling in Magadha at the time of the invasion led by Muhammad Bakhtiyār Khilji. After the conquest of Magadha, Bakhtiyar Khilji invaded Bengal and caused the decline of the Sena power. So far as the account of Minhaj-ud-din in regard to the fall of Nadiā caused by the invasion of seventeen horsemen led by Bakhtiyar Khilji is concerned, Rakhaldas’s analysis attracts our attention. It is admitted that the rule of the Sena kings in Gauḍa and Rāḍha was brought to an end by Bakhtiyar Khilji. But the account of this conquest is not believable on grounds more than one. Firstly, if Nadiā is identified with Navadvīpa, some sāṃanta rulers under the Sena kings might have been defeated by Bakhtiyar. There is no proof that Navadvīpa was ever a capital of the Senas. Secondly, it was easier to plunder Magadha from Kānyakubja, but from Magadha it was not at all possible to besiege Gauḍa or Rāḍha with a small number of soldiers. The route followed by Bakhtiyar for invading Nadiā has not yet been exactly ascertained. If Bakhtiyar followed the route from Rājmahal by the southern bank of the Ganga he could never come with a small number of soldiers. In that case, he should have made his advent in Nadiā after conquering the capital of Gauḍa at Lakṣmaṇāvatī. At that time, it was not possible for a group of eighteen horsemen to move through the forest regions of Jhārkhāṇḍ. Thirdly, Lakṣmaṇasena was not alive at the time of invasion. It is not known who among the successors of Lakṣmaṇasena was occupying Gauḍa at that time. This much can be said that the account of Bakhtiyar’s conquest of Nadiā appears to be a myth. If the myth be taken as reality, then it would be difficult to explain the fact that half-a-century after Bakhtiyar, Mughis-ud-din Ujbek, the independent Sultan of Bengal issued new coins to commemorate the
conquest of Nadīa. Lastly, Rakhaldas has pointed out that even after the Muslim conquest of Gauḍa, the successors of Lakṣmaṇasena maintained their independent status in Vaṅga. It is evident from the account of Minhaj-ud-din in Tabaqat-i -Xasiri. Most of the arguments put forward by Rakhaldas have been confirmed by later historians. By exploding the myth of eighteen horsemen bringing about the fall of Nadīa, Rakhaldas fulfilled his pledge to replace the distorted version of the history of Bengal as written by foreign historians in the light of the Persian account by a genuine history of Bengal.

AN ASSESSMENT OF BĀNGĀLĀR ITIHĀSA

It is learnt from Rameshchandra Majumdar’s autobiography that he made a review of Bāṅgalār Itihāsa in the journal entitled Pratibhā published from Dacca. Presumably, he pointed out some errors in the book which Rakhaldas had the courage to admit candidly in presence of the reviewer himself. If we deeply study the author’s Introduction to the first edition of Bāṅgalār Itihāsa we may trace his constant awareness of the paucity of materials. It was not possible for him to produce a comprehensive history of Bengal, as he had to depend on the evidences furnished by some epigraphic records, coins and monuments. Although, in general, he was fastidious in utilising the data available from the literary texts, in some cases he had to depend upon such sources as Bāṇa’s Harṣacharita, Vākpati’s Gaudavaho, Chaturbhujā’s Haricharita and Sandhyākara Nandi’s Rāmcharita. Of course, he completely rejected the tradition of the Kulajī texts as unhistorical. However, we are informed that nine years after the publication of Bāṅgalār Itihāsa, Part I, when he was requested to prepare the second edition of the book by the publisher, he included the evidences furnished by the epigraphs, coins and other antiquities accumulated by that time and rewrote chapter IV and from Chapter VII to chapter XI. The evidences of the Vappaghosavāta grant of Jayanāga and Tippera copper plate grant of Lokanātha were brought to his notice. He also studied carefully the summary of Akshaykumar Maitreyā’s lecture on the ‘Downfall of the Pāla Empire’ published in the weekly magazine Marmavāni. Besides, he had an opportunity to make use of the published or unpublished articles of Rameshchandra Majumdar, Nalinikanta Bhattachari.
K.N.Dixit and Hirananda Sastri. It may, therefore, be reasonably assumed that if Rakhalbals were alive till the middle of the twentieth century he could produce many more editions of his Bangal Itihasa by incorporating newly discovered materials as found in Dineshchandra Sircar’s Pal Panvayuger Varshamuchariit and Pal Sena Yuger Varshamuchariit. In that case, Rakhaldas’s history of Bengal would have occupied an unrivalled position in the historiography of ancient Bengal.

Whatever that might be, we may pause for a moment to have a peep into the observations on Bangal Itihasa made by some erudite scholars at the time of Rakhaldas himself. Ramendrasundar Trivedi wrote to the author thus:

_Bangal Itihasa_ well deserves the position of evidence of your scholarship and talent. Bengali literature also remains indebted to you, for, to know the history of Bengal even foreign scholars will have also to depend upon this book.

Vincent A. Smith informed Rakhaldas by a letter that one should learn Bengali language in order to read this book (Bangal Itihasa), but unfortunately he is too old to learn a new language. Padmanath Devasharma in his review of Bangal Itihasa observed that Rakhaldas’s Bangal Itihasa should have borne the title ‘Bhurutvar cher Itihasa’ with more justification. Because, the author has taken into consideration the epigraphic evidences from all-over India in such a way that some little additions to the book might have well justified its title ‘Ancient History of India’. In Early History of India of Vincent A. Smith there are additional chapters on one or two more topics only, if it is compared with Bangal Itihasa of Rakhaldas. This observation of Padmanath Devasharma seems to indicate that Rakhaldas did not concentrate on Bengal, but his attention was focussed on the whole of India. Rakhaldas himself in his Introduction to the first edition of his Bangal Itihasa has clearly stated that this was an attempt to study the history of Bengal as a branch of the history of India. In fact, for a historian it is impossible and also unusual to concentrate on regional history without any consideration of the contemporary background.
Padmanath Devasharma has criticised Rakhaldas’s view that the Aryans came to India from outside. Secondly, he has not favoured Rakhaldas’s aversion to the evidences furnished by the Epics and the Purāṇas. Thirdly, the reviewer was not in favour of rejecting altogether the evidences furnished by the Kulaśāstras. According to him, the traditions and legends are attached with historical importance by the Western historians from whom we have learnt to reject them. In this connection, he has quoted from Sanderson’s Outlines of the World’s History (Part II, p. 176):

Our ideas of Roman characters are derived in some degree from the legends which appear in the earlier part of the Roman story and which we have rejected from history. Those legends however were universally received as true by the Romans themselves and therefore they are, as a distinguished writer (Dr. Merivale) says “true to the genius of the time and of the people. true in the lessons of Roman character which they inculcate, true for the practical purpose of teaching us what manner of men those old Romans really were.” Legendary lore possesses in fact a formative power in moulding the national character by consecrating traditional types of men for the admiration and imitation of posterity. The Romans thought of early Rome and of her heroes as the poets and orators taught him to think and so from the legends we can understand in a measure the thoughts and actions of those who implicitly believed them.  

In recent times, the joint editors of Bāṅgālī Itihāsa have opined that the structure of the history of Bengal as reconstructed by Ramaprasad Chanda and Rakhaldas was later on followed by Rameshchandra Majumdar, Hemchandra Roy, Radhagovinda Basak, Pramod Lal Paul, Benoychandra Sen, Abdul Momin Chaudhury and Dineshchandra Sircar. There is no doubt that as a result of new discoveries of archaeological material and epigraphic data the histories written by later historians have become more enriched. In some cases, the conclusions arrived at by Rakhaldas in the light of the records available to him required additions and alterations. The genealogy and the chronology of the Pāla and Sena dynasties, as suggested by Rakhaldas, have been revised to a great extent by modern historians. Again, it may be
observed that Rakhaldas should have written a separate chapter on the administrative system during the Pāla-Sena period. Because, the administrative system is closely related to the political history. The author of *The Age of the Imperial Guptas* knew very well how to integrate administrative, religious and cultural history with the political history of a particular age. Therefore, Rakhaldas who devoted himself to the study of Bengal as a part of India should have attempted to take into account the political history as a background of the total history of Man.

The reconstruction of total history required collective effort of a group of scholars specialised in different branches of history and culture. Such a prospect of collective effort was upheld in 1916, when Mr. W. R. Gourley, ICS, Private Secretary of Lord Ronaldsay, the then Governor of Bengal, wrote to Dineshchandra Sen a letter requesting him to undertake the project of reconstructing a brief but genuine history of Bengal. According to the proposal of Mr. W. R. Gourley time had come for writing a history of Bengal by a collective effort of a group of historians. Mr. W. R. Gourley of course meant that the history of Bengal should be written from the earliest times to the modern period for which experts in the histories of different periods – ancient, medieval and modern – should be requisitioned. In the proposed history of Bengal the first part would contain three chapters:

- Chapter I: Hindu Rule upto 150 BC
- Chapter II: Gupta Rule, 150BC-AD600
- Chapter III: Pāla-Sena Rule, AD600-AD1200

Haraprasad Sastri & Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay

The project was discussed in several meetings held at the Governor’s House. But, ultimately it fell through due to some unavoidable circumstances. This episode occurred in the life of Rakhaldas himself and therefore, deserves particular mention.

A few years earlier in 1912, Lord Carmichael had given the proposal of writing a comprehensive history of Bengal on modern scientific lines and invited
Haraprasad Sastri to prepare the scheme. Several meetings were held in the Governor’s House, Calcutta. But, ultimately the plan was not executed. Some years later, Raja Prafulla Nath Tagore, the grandson of Kalikrishna Tagore of Calcutta, volunteered to pay the entire cost of such a publication, invited Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay to draw up a plan along with some other well known scholars of his time. Several meetings were convened by the Raja, but ultimately nothing came out of it. It seems that the main thrust of the plan was to cover the Hindu, Muslim and British period of Bengal in three volumes. We are not, however, sure whether the initiatives taken by Mr. Gourley, Lord Carmichael or Prafulla Nath Tagore emphasised upon the construction of the ancient, medieval and modern history, with the purpose of providing the Bengali people with a history of Bengal in all its aspects, that is, political, administrative, social, religious and cultural. Because, we have not at our disposal the blue-print of the history submitted by either Haraprasad Sastri or Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay.

The above episodes are, no doubt, very significant in the history of historical writings on Bengal. When we witness the result of collective effort of a group of scholars in Dacca History of Bengal, volume I, (1943), it is reasonable for us to surmise that the proper execution of the plans of Haraprasad Sastri and Rakhaldas might have yielded a comprehensive history of Bengal at least a few decades before the publication of History of Bengal, volume I, from Dacca University. Rakhaldas did not make an attempt to write on all aspects of history in Bāṅgālār Itihāsa perhaps with an expectation that in future a collective effort of a group of scholars would fulfill the much-awaited need. Besides, he was quite justified in assuming that the writing of political history on modern scientific lines was a prerequisite for socio-economic and cultural history. Even after the publication of Ramaprasad Chanda’s Gauchārājamātā Rakhaldas felt the necessity of reconstructing a dependable structure of political history and that was the reason why he concentrated on the political history of Bengal in the wider context of the history of India and the world. In recent times, a new trend in historiography has set in indicating that political history should be treated as an epitome of all histories. Rakhaldas might have reasonably assumed that the people’s conditions, socio-economic and cultural, are susceptible to changes with the change of
the policy followed by the ruling authorities. In fact, society and economy were to a great extent fashioned by the ruling classes in different ages\textsuperscript{101}.

However, whatever has been said about Bāṅgāḷār Itihāṣa, volume II, by Sir Jadunath Sarkar is equally applicable to Bāṅgāḷār Itihāṣa, volume I:

...a landmark in the growth of our historical knowledge since the days of Stewart...

...a complete index volume of Bengal inscriptions and coins, learned dissertations, genealogical lists and extracts from sources known upto 1915.\textsuperscript{102}

B. THE PĀLAS OF BENGAL: 1915

In course of making a review of Rakhaldas’s contributions to the history of ancient Bengal we have also to take into consideration his monograph entitled The Pālas of Bengal published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1915. The inspiration for writing this monograph came to Rakhaldas from the ground-plan already laid down by Haraprasad Sastri in his Introduction to Sandhyākārā Nandi’s Rāmācharīta (1910). The author maintained the same pattern, design and concept and completed the work by October 1911. Binod Behari Vidyabinod helped him in deciphering some relevant inscriptions\textsuperscript{103}. The author himself edited some of the inscriptions. The historical information supplied by each record has been given in the form of a summary in the body of the text. He has also derived substantial help from Haraprasad Sastri. D.B.Spooner, J.Ph.Vogel, J.N.Sarkar, K.P.Jaiswal and S.N.Kumar\textsuperscript{104}. F.W.Thomas translated for the author various documents in French and German\textsuperscript{105}. A.F.R.Hoernle helped him in obtaining photographs of historical colophons of manuscripts preserved in the collection of the Royal Asiatic Society of London library\textsuperscript{106}. Thomas obtained two impressions of votive inscriptions of Mahipāla I from the British Museum. London\textsuperscript{107}. G.H.Tripper obtained for the author photographs of the historical colophons of manuscripts preserved in the Cambridge University library and also from the collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal\textsuperscript{108}. 
The Memoir entitled *The Pālas of Bengal* comprises six chapters and covers the history of Bengal from the origin of the Pāla dynasty to the downfall of the Pālas followed by the rise of the Senas. The following are the chapters:

Chapter I: Introduction
Chapter II: Gopāla and Dharmapāla
Chapter III: The Struggle with the Pratihāras
Chapter IV: The Second Empire
Chapter V: The Decline of the Pālas
Chapter VI: The Last Kings.

The account of the Pālas as given in this Memoir is not different from that found in the *Bāṅgaḷ ār Itihāsa*, volume I, already discussed above. The characteristic of this work is profuse quotations from the relevant inscriptions and manuscripts. In fact, he has not only given quotations from the inscriptions of the Pālas but also have given the translations of the lines quoted. Special mention may be made of the Gaya Viṣṇupāda Temple inscription of Nārāyaṇapāla’s seventh year edited by the author himself (pp.20-21). Again, the Gaya Narasimha Temple inscription of Nayapāla’s fifteenth regnal year has been deciphered and edited on page 38. The Aksyavaṭa Temple inscription of Vigrahapāla III has been edited on pages 41-42. The Gaya Gadādhara Temple inscription of Govindapāla, first edited by Kielhorn, has been re-edited by the author on pages 56-57. A posthumous record of Gopāla III discovered by Akshaykumar Maitreya has been dated on palaeographic grounds to the latter part of the eleventh and earlier part of the twelfth century. Although it is full of mistakes and untranslatable, the text of the inscription is quoted on page 62. Again, the author has quoted extracts from the colophons of the following manuscripts:

1. *Āstasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (last page only; acquired by Haraprasad Sastry).
2. *Amalakośa* in the collection of the *Asiatic Society*.
5. *Yogaratnamāla* by Kāhṇa or Kṛṣṇāchārya in the collection of the Cambridge University.


From the above manuscripts it is derived that *Gauḍēśvara* Govindapāla who ruled in the lower part of eastern Magadha till the 38th year of his reign had to face the invasion of Bakhtiyar Khilji. Rakhaldas has concluded his monograph with a significant statement regarding Govindapāla:

> He managed to continue his reign till 1199, when Chauhān Gaharwār, Pāla and Sena were all swept away by the whirlwind of Muhammadan invasion. ¹⁰⁹

Lastly, he had added a Postscript containing an inscription of the time of Vighrahapāla III found by the author himself on the pedestal of an image of the Buddha in the Indian Museum, Calcutta.

As we have already stated above in connection with *Bāṅgalī Itihāsa* volume I, some of the conclusions arrived at by Rakhaldas are not acceptable on chronological ground. For instance, he was of opinion that *māsyanyāya* in Bengal before the accession of Gopāla was caused by the invasions of the Gurjara King Vatsarāja and the Rāṣṭrakūṭa King Dhruva. But according to modern historians, both Vatsarāja and Dhruva were contemporaries of Dharmapāla, son and successor of Gopāla. Likewise, the Pāla genealogy as reconstructed by Rakhaldas has been modified to some extent.

**C. ORIGIN OF THE BENGALI SCRIPT: 1919**

Script is the carrier of language in written form, that is, literature, and therefore, is the foundation of culture. Rakhaldas's work on the origin of the Bengali script has, therefore, a significant bearing upon the history of the Bengali culture. Till the
seventies of the nineteenth century scholars had a very limited idea about the origin and development of the Bengali script. In 1867, Rajendralal Mitra traced ancient Bengali script in a manuscript of *Setubandha* copied in the eleventh century AD. In 1833, Bendell discovered the *Hevajratantra* of AD 1198 written in Bengali script. But those manuscripts do not determine the exact nature of the Bengali script before the Muslim rule. Haraprasad Sastri, for the first time, made an attempt to trace the origin and development of the Bengali script in the light of some Buddhist manuscripts, already referred to above, and determined the date of the origin of the Bengali script in the tenth century AD. In fact, the proto-Bengali script had its origin much earlier. Haraprasad Sastri not only took into consideration the manuscript of the pre-Muslim and the post-Muslim period, but also consulted a number of epigraphic record like the Bhuvaneswar *Praśasti* of Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva, Deopāra *Praśasti* of Vijayasena, Silāhaṭi *Praśasti* of Vallālasena, Tarpaṇḍighi copper plate grant of Lākṣmanaśena, copper plate grant of Viśvarūpasena and Chaṭṭagāra copper plate grant of Dāmodaradeva. It appears thus that Haraprasad Sastri laid the foundation of the studies on the origin and development of the Bengali script that was undertaken by Rakhaldas.

Rakhaldas necessarily followed the footsteps of George Bühler who is supposed to be the father of Indian science of palaeography. Though Burnell's work on the subject was published long ago, the accuracy of the narrative and the scientific arrangement of Bühler's work entitled *Indische Palaeographie* published in 1896 made his claim to the title of a pioneer in this particular field of study indisputable. Bühler's work dealt with the development of the Indian alphabet upto twelfth century AD. The development of the Indian alphabet from 350 BC to AD 600 is clearly described in this work, whereas after that period a development of Northern alphabet has been considered as a whole and not according to its varieties obviously due to the lack of materials. But, the discoveries made during the subsequent period made it possible for Rakhaldas to undertake the project of tracing the origin of the Bengali script. Rakhaldas has followed the arrangement of Bühler from the dawn of the historic period to the sixth century AD, but has adopted a different pattern with regard to the subsequent period. In later periods, more attention has been paid to the
specimens from North-Eastern India, and the latest discoveries added to the list of epigraphs have been analysed.

Under the section of Northern Indian alphabets (1350 BC-AD 600) Rakhal das has discussed the following:

A. The Older Maurya Alphabet.
B. Varieties of the Older Maurya Alphabet.
C. The Younger Maurya Alphabet.
D. Kuṣāṇa Inscription.
E. The So-called Gupta Alphabet of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries AD.

The next two sections are The Eastern Alphabet, AD 550-1100 and The Final Development of the Alphabet. From the second section onward the alphabet of the North-Eastern inscriptions of the sixth and seventh centuries AD have been analysed. In the eighth century, there were three different varieties of the alphabet in Northern India, or more strictly four, if the alphabet of Afghanistan is counted. It has been shown by the author that the Western and Afghanistan varieties were developed from old Western variety, while the Central and Eastern varieties were evolved out of the old Eastern. The Eastern variety lost ground and its western boundary gradually receded eastward. The author has shown that proto-Bengali forms were evolved in the North-East, long before the invasion of Northern India by the Nāgarī alphabet of the South-West, and that Nāgarī had cast very little influence upon the development of the Bengali script.

With the introduction of the Nāgarī script in the tenth century, the western limit of the use of the Eastern alphabet was still further reduced. In the eleventh century, it was found out by the author that there was very little similarity between the alphabet used in Benaras and that used in Gaya. The process of the changes had been so rapid that in the eleventh century AD the complete proto-Bengali alphabet was formed. In the eleventh century, further changes led to the complete formation of the modern Bengali alphabet. The changes in the thirteenth or fourteenth century are
difficult to trace due to the dearth of records, manuscripts and epigraphs. Of course, very few changes are found in the Eastern alphabet from the twelfth century AD down to the nineteenth century. Some noticeable changes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have been illustrated by the alphabet used in two manuscripts written in Bengali, namely,

1. Sāntideva’s *Bodhicharyāvatāra* copied in Vikrama *Satavat* 1492 (AD 1435). discovered by Haraprasad Sastri in Nepal and collected for the * Asiatic Society of Bengal*.


According to Rakhaladas, the script of the manuscript makes it impossible to assign it any date than the fourteenth century AD.

The completely developed alphabet did not change at all during the seventh and eighth centuries AD. As a result of the contact with the West in the nineteenth century, the vernacular and classical literature received a fresh impetus, but the alphabet remained changed. The forms of the alphabet were stereotyped by the introduction of the printing press.

D. **THE EASTERN INDIAN SCHOOL OF MEDIAEVAL SCULPTURE: 1933**

*Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture*, completed probably sometime before 1928 and posthumously published in 1933, was the most outstanding contribution of Rakhaladas to the history of Bengal’s culture. Taking a clue from the seventeenth century Tibetan historian Tāranātha, who mentioned in his *History of Buddhism in India* that there flourished a School of Art in Eastern India under two artists, Dhimāna and Bitpalo, Rakhaladas Bandopadhyay in the nineteenth century gave the same appellation to his work. Rakhaladas’s scholarship in the field of art history is known
from the work like *The Temple of Śiva at Bhumiira, Caves of Bālāmi, Hauhayas of Tripurī and their Monuments* and the chapter on Gupta architecture and sculpture in *The Age of the Imperial Guptas*. He did not add a chapter on art in his *Bāṅgalār Itiḥāsa*, volume I, probably because he had a plan to write a separate book on Eastern Indian art. It was under the inspiration of Theodore Bloch that Rakhaldas undertook the task of writing a ‘thesis’ on the chronological sequence of artistic development in the North Eastern Provinces of India on the basis of palaeography. At the suggestion of Bloch, Rakhaldas undertook the palaeographical examination of inscribed images from Bengal and Bihar, preserved in the archaeological section of the Indian Museum as early as 1904. Gradually, he brought under his study the sculptures preserved in the Museums of Vāngiya Sāhitya Parishat, Varendra Research Society, and the Patna Museum. Besides, he used those sculptures, which he came across in the course of his exploratory tours as a Field-archaeologist in different part of Bengal and Bihar. The sculptures that have been discussed in this work mostly belong to the Pāla-Sena period extending from the eighth to the twelfth century AD. In Crown Octavo size it consists of more than two hundred pages and about four hundred illustrations of Eastern Indian sculpture.

The work is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter, which is an Introduction, has discussion on the sources of materials used, the methodology adopted and a preliminary discussion on Indian sculpture. This chapter concludes with the following observation, which indicates the aim of his work:

The conclusion which I have sought to establish in these pages is that from the eighth century to the twelfth, in the eastern provinces of North India artistic activity is evident on a scale, which other provinces of the north and the south failed even to approach in magnificence, excellence and extensity. Here the Pāla and the Sena excelled and even the proud Gurjara-Pratiharas of Kanauj, the Haihayas of Tripuri, the war-like Chāhamāna lords of Śākambhari, the learned Paramāra chiefs of Ujjayini and Dhārā and the proud Chaulukyas of Aṇahilapāṭaka were compelled to yield the first place to them. Mediaeval sculptures have been discovered in varying numbers, in Mahārāṣṭra, Gujrat.
Rajputana and the Antarvedi, but nowhere is their total number comparable to the output of a single century in Bengal and Bihar.¹¹⁵

The second chapter entitled Early History of Sculpture in Eastern India contains a complete description of sculpture recovered in the eastern provinces of Northern India, during the first seven centuries of the Christian era. The third chapter entitled The Rise and Evolution of the Eastern School of Medieval Sculpture is devoted to a detailed palaeographical analysis, which forms the framework of this monograph. The fourth chapter is named as The Representation of the Buddhacharita. The special style adopted by the artists of the Eastern School of medieval sculpture in the delineation of the life of the Buddha is described in this chapter. The fifth chapter entitled Buddhistic Pantheon begins with a discussion on the Sāthana literature and then deals with the Buddhist iconography in the images of the Buddhhas, Bodhisattvas, Lokeśvaras, Maitreyas, Mañjuśrī and emanations of Amitābha, Akṣovya and four dhyāni Buddhas are described. Chapter VI deals with The Orthodox or Brahmanical Pantheon. In this chapter, the author has considered the iconography of the Vaiṣṇava images, the images of ten incarnations, the Saiva images, the Śākta images and miscellaneous images of Sūrya, Kārttikeya, Gaṇeṣa, Brahmā, Gaṅgā, Lakṣmī, Chaṇḍi, Manasā and Sarasvatī. The seventh chapter is entitled Metal Casting and Jaina Images. In the first section of the chapter there is a discussion on metal images, chaityas and utensils of workshop. The second section of the chapter deals with the Jaina images discovered in different parts of Bengal and Bihar. Chapter VIII entitled Temples and Architecture contains a discussion on temple types in the first section and architectural members, such as decorated pillars, finials, Torāṇa, door flames, lintels, stone windows, arches etc. in the second section.

However, the methodology adopted by Rakhaldas was to establish the chronological sequence of the Pāla-Sena sculptures according to their epigraphical and palaeographical evidence. In his article entitled ‘Gauḍyā Silper Itihāsa’ a significant statement has been made by Rakhaldas:
Ancient sculptures discovered in the Gauḍa kingdom, which bear no date or king’s name, but have on them inscribed the name of the donor only or a mantra, can be dated on palaeographical ground. Such an image bearing inscriptions can be decisively dated in the time of the kings belonging to the Pāla or Sena dynasty. It has become possible to trace the origin and development of the art style of Gauḍa on the basis of a chronological arrangement of the inscribed images preserved in the Museum of Calcutta, Patna, Dacca and Varendra Research Society of Rajsahi.\textsuperscript{116}

Therefore, in tracing the stylistic evolution of the sculptures, Rakhaldas has attached more importance to the epigraphical data than on the cognizable stylistic features of the sculptures under study. His approach is more historical than aesthetic. On this question of methodology, Rakhaldas had an interaction with O.C. Ganguly who was of opinion that “spades, estampages and inscriptions film their (archaeologists’) aesthetic judgement.”\textsuperscript{117} In a personal discussion with Rakhaldas, Ganguly claimed that it is possible to determine the date of a sculpture or an image on consideration of its form and style even without knowing the date inscribed on it. He explained his view by determining the dates of five or six Indian sculptures by analysing their stylistic features. Rakhaldas verified the dates suggested by Ganguly by examining inscribed dates of the images concerned. In O.C. Ganguly’s language:

...the famous archaeologist had to admit his defeat before the theory of aestheticism.\textsuperscript{118}

We may also take into consideration Rakhaldas’s understanding of the ideal of art. In his article entitled ‘Silper Ādarṣa’ published in the journal Sachitra Śīrśa he observed:

The ideal of art is beauty. The concept of beauty is determined by the intellectual power of a nation. In different times and different places concept of images varied.\textsuperscript{119}
Again, he has pointed out that the canons of art are for bearing the medium: an artist should supersede them in his creation. It is stated in the article mentioned above:

The *Silpaśāstra* may teach about the proportion of the face in relation to the body; but what would be the expression of the face after its delineation that depends on the power of realisation and self-consciousness of the artist himself. No teacher of the canonical injunction can advise him on it.

Therefore, Rakhaldas believed in the spirit of freedom of expression in art.

The methodology adopted by Rakhaldas to trace the origin and development of the Gauḍa style of art has been explained in his Introduction to *The Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture* thus:

1. A comparison between an image of the Buddhist goddess Tārā in the collection of the Varendra Research Society with an inscribed image of Tārā of the Indian Museum shows that the latter belonged to the eighth century AD in all probability, while the former has to be placed in the twelfth century AD.

2. The palaeographical examination of the inscribed specimens in the Indian Museum proves that the decline of the political fortunes of the Pāla kings in the ninth and tenth centuries (between the reign of Devapāla and Mahipāla) was not parallel with the decline of artistic creations in the eastern provinces. In these two centuries the artists of Eastern Bengal were much more active than those of Northern and Western Bengal. The specimens, which can be definitely assigned to these two centuries also, come from Magadha or South Bihar.

3. The reign of Mahipāla I brought about an artistic renaissance in which Northern Bengal took the leading part. The new style, successor of the old style of the tenth century, lacked the supreme vigour of the eighth century in the reproduction of ideal beauty of form and benign expression with firm adherence to the canons of the *Silpaśāstras*, Northern Bengal specimens of the eleventh century show that sufficient liberty was given to the artist’s expression in accordance with individual capability.
4. With the rise of the Senas and the decline of the Pālas, Bihar and Eastern Bengal once more took the lead in the field of artistic activity. However, the sculpture of the twelfth century was degraded, disproportionate and limited within the boundaries of tradition. Yet the artists employed their skill in depicting significant smile on the face of an image or in imparting to the countenance of Lokeśvara an expression of ethereal grace. The slavish obedience to the rules of the Śilpaśāstras made it possible to distinguish a Bihar image from an Eastern Bengal example. With the fall of the vast monastic establishment of Uddānapura and Nālandā in AD 1199 by the invasion of the Turks under Bakhtiyar Khilji, the history of Magadha art came to an end.

5. Laksmanāvatī fell within the next two decades by Turkish inroads and artistic activities were brought to a sudden end in North-Western and West-Central Bengal in the earlier decades of the thirteenth century. Eastern Bengal continued its existence as an independent kingdom till the first quarter of the thirteenth century. Its artists continued to produce decadent stylised imitations of the twelfth century specimens. The supply of slates and basalts from Bihar had stopped and the artists of Eastern Bengal were compelled to have recourse to wood as the only cheap material available for plastic work. Wooden images discovered in parts of Dacca district betray poverty of imagination, and sign of extreme decadence.

6. The Turkish kings of Bengal employed Hindu artists in decorating their mosques and tombs. The decorative motifs found in the Adina mosques, the Eklakhī Tomb and the other specimens of pre-Mughal architecture of Bengal show an assimilation of pre-medieval style with that of the medieval period.

7. Modern stone carving of Bengal is but a mere shadow of its former grandeur. Modern sculptors imitate the soulless hybrid schools of stone carving prevalent at Benaras and Jaipur. It has no connection with the ancient school of sculpture of Bengal.

8. From the eighth to the twelfth century, artistic activity in Eastern India reached such a height that could not be reached by other provinces of the North and the South.
From the above it appears that Rakhaldas traced the origin, development and decline of art activity of early medieval Bengal purely from a historical and chronological point of view. However, being a parallel publication of Nalinikanta Bhattashali’s *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum* (1929), *The Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture* showed Rakhaldas’s independent scholarship in the newly developing discipline of iconography based on his command over the ancient Brahmanical and Buddhist texts. He explained the myths behind *dhyānas* of the Pāla-Sena images with the help of illustrations. Moreover, he succeeded in interpreting a number of enigmatic icons including one, which he identified as of Viṣṇu-Lokeśvāra in cognizance of its combined features of the Brahmanical god Viṣṇu and the Buddhist Bodhisattva Lokeśvara.

The history of Gauḍa art that we find in the Eastern school of medieval sculpture was also traced by Rakhaldas in a series of essays in Bengali published in the journal *Pravāṣi* between 1927 and 1930. Those essays are:

1. ‘*Gaudīya Silper Itihāsa*’
2. ‘*Gaudīya Silper Āṣyyuga*’
3. ‘*Daśam Satake Gaudīya Šilpa*’
4. ‘*Gaudīya Silper Punaruthān*’
5. ‘*Dakṣiṇ – Paśchim Vaṅger Šilpa*’
6. ‘*Gaudīya Silper Dākṣiṇāyya Prabhāv*’

The following outline of the history of Gauḍa art may be reconstructed in the light of the articles mentioned above, as it has been done by Kalyankumar Dasgupta.

A. In *Gaudadeśa* art flourished in the eighth-ninth century under the patronage of the Pala Kings Dharmapāla and Devapāla, as it once flourished with new inspirations under the Indo-Greek rulers in Gandhara region and at Mathura under the Śaka-Kuśāṇas. (‘*Gaudīya Silper Itihāsa*’
B. During the early centuries of the Christian era, the art of Mathura spread to different parts of the country as the most dominant style of the time. Similarly, the art of Gauḍa travelled to distant parts of Northern India, from Sravasti in the west to Assam in the east, as the leading style of the period extending from the eighth century to the twelfth century AD. ('Gaud̄ya Silper Itihāsa')

C. The artistic activity at Dhara in Malwa, Tripuri in Baghelkhand, Kharjuravahaka in Bundelkhand, Kanyakubja in the United Provinces and Mathura in the Delhi-Agra region was consolidated in the tenth-eleventh centuries AD. But, the art of Gauḍa flourished much earlier in the eighth-ninth centuries due to peace and prosperity established in Bengal (Gauḍarāja) in the time of Dharmapāla and Devapāla. ('Gaud̄ya Silper Itihāsa')

D. Although the history of Gauḍa art covered four centuries, from the eighth to the twelfth century AD, the artistic activity sometimes flourished and also met decadence at some stages. The excellence and magnificence of the Gauḍa art did not enjoy an unbroken continuity. ('Gaud̄ya Silper Itihāsa')

E. The influence of the Karnataka sculpture on that of Gauḍa is marked sometime before the Turkish invasion of Bengal. The influence of the Karnataka style was brought to Gauḍa in course of the conquest of Bengal and Mithila by two military chiefs coming from Karnataka country in the Western Deccan sometime in the eleventh century. A new stylistic trend blended with the prevalent Gauḍa style to give birth to the fully developed medieval style. ('Gaud̄ya Silper Dākṣināya Prabhāḥ')

F. A comparison between the Hindu and Buddhist images could show that a common ideal of art emerged by way of synthesis in Gauḍarāja. ('Gaud̄ya Silper Punaruththān')

G. The images of the Buddhist and Brahmanical deities followed the same art ideals in portraying the anthropometric forms and attires. Therefore, the classification of Indian art in terms of their religious affiliations such as Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu, has to be discarded. On the other hand, emphasis should be laid on the study of art in relation to chronological and regional developments. ('Gaud̄ya Silper Punaruththān')
H. The regional stylistic development of sculpture is found in south-west Bengal. It indicates the existence of a sub-school within the Gaudīya or Pāla-Sena school. ('Dakṣiṇ-Paśchim Vanger Silpa')

Whereas Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay’s approach was historical and chronological at the same time, at a later period the art historians like Niharranjan Roy attempted to trace the stylistic evolution of Bengal sculpture from the eighth to the twelfth century AD. It is pointed out that in the eighth century AD, there were very features of the contemporaneous Māgadhī style of sculpture in the short, stocky body as well as in the facial expressions. The modest bodily adornment and elegance of figure were artistic ideals of the early stages of the Pāla period. In the ninth century, a gentle fleshiness within the inert physique and body-outline of the body emerged as an ideal of art. In a very few cases there is an indication of lofty thought or profound insight. Going beyond the fleshly elegance within a strong, sharply defined outline, the tenth century ideal was in the creation of bold, strong bodies. There was, in the posture and form, a clear suggestion of self-consciousness and restrained vigour illuminating the entire body. It is the grand vivacity, which transforms the soft fleshiness of the ninth century into the immeasurable vigour of the tenth century.

The tenth century was the golden age of Bengali sculpture. The sculptural style of the eighth century was placid and without focus, and in the ninth century, there was still a fleshly looseness although there was a clear endeavour to confine it within line. In the tenth century, there was an awareness of a totality of vision, an appearance of strength in the relaxed, though fleshly body, and a suggestion of characteristic firmness.

In the first half of the eleventh century, there was a balance between the image and the bordering deities, and the image in the background, but in the latter half of the century the original grace and beauty of the image were almost eclipsed by the profusion of adornment. Whatever the mould in which the body was cast, the facial style was sensuous, and gracefully and delicately shaped. The sensory elegance and
the long, slender, graceful bodies were the principal features of the eleventh century sculpture.

In the twelfth century, not only was the polished beauty of the tall, slender and graceful body encumbered in excess of embellishment and over decorative background, but also the ninth century flexibility had been reintroduced. However, the bodily appearance was gradually transformed by a lifeless, cumbersome inertia. The graceful animation of bodily shape and its gentle elegance had started to disappear. Niharranjan Roy, however, did not ignore the chronological dating of the sculptures on the basis of an analysis of the epigraphs found on them. It may, therefore, be assumed that he blended together the chronological cum historical approach with the stylistic approach to the history of art.

**HISTORICAL NOVELS OF RAKHALDAS BANDOPADHYAY**

There is a long drawn controversy over the question whether history is a science or not. Following the statement of J. B. Bury, 129 "history is a science, no less and no more", several arguments were advanced to prove that history is a science. Firstly, the goal of both science and history is the same, namely, the establishment of truth. Secondly, science aims at framing a body of general laws, which would be applicable to the phenomena at all times. History is also concerned in determining the principles that direct historical forces. Finally, science depends heavily on observation and experimentation to prove the validity of its premises, and history too, in a sense, adopts this method in a limited degree. The method adopted by a historian is indirect: for, the nature of historical data is quite different from scientific findings. It is not the direct observation of the past by the historian, but indirect observation through those who have either witnessed the drama themselves or had heard of it through others or had by some other method come to know of it. A scientist is fortunate in not merely observing facts directly but also in being able to verify his conclusions through repeated experimentation. A historian comes somewhat closer to it through the corroboration of several sources so that he can check the veracity of one with reference to another. No doubt the precision of science is denied to a historian, but a
historian can claim to be a scientist if he has consciously attempted to be objective, if
he has painstakingly consulted all available sources, and if he has intelligently
corroborated all available sources to arrive at the historical truth. So far as the
methodology of research adopted by Rakhaldas is concerned, we may call him a
scientist, for he believes in scientific method, that is, keen observation of facts and
inferences drawn from them scientifically. Rakhaldas considered archaeology as
the main source for reconstructing the early history of the country and there is no
denying the fact that archaeology is a science. He was well-equipped in interpreting
archaeological sources, including inscriptions, coins, images and monuments in the
broader historical context. Moreover, while reconstructing the history of a dynasty, he
not only examined the epigraphic records of that dynasty, but also had them
corroborated by the epigraphic records of other contemporary dynasties. For example,
while reconstructing the history of the Pālas, he used the epigraphic records of the
Pratihāras and the Rāṣṭrakūtas. Again, he attempted to explain the causes of shifting
of balance of power and the rise and fall of the dynasties. So, as a historian, he not
only presented the facts, but also tried to understand the truth underlying them.

Rakhaldas was not only a scientific historian but also an artist. His
performance as an artist is evident from his creative literature. The genre of literature
that he created mainly comprised the historical novels, although the texts of histories
written by him may also be considered as historical literature. But while the
historical literature is based upon objective facts, the historical novels are found to
have accommodated both history and romances. The novels are written in the
background of history, where the hero and the heroine transmit to the reader’s mind
their feelings of pain and pleasure. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries some
eminent Bengali writers produced brilliant historical novels. Among them mention
may be made of Bankimchandra, Rameshchandra, Haraprasad and Rabindranath.
Rakhaldas’s historical novels are not comparable to those written by professional
novelists. Again, the novels written by Bankimchandra and others are not comparable
to those written by professional historians like Haraprasad and Rakhaldas. It appears
that Bankimchandra and Tagore intended to create aesthetic pleasure by making
suitable use of the historical background, whereas Haraprasad, Rameshchandra and
Rakhaldas intended to make history popular by making suitable use of some imaginary episodes intended to provide an aesthetic taste. However, it goes to the credit of Rakhaldas that he did not confine his talent to the historical writings like *Bāṅgalār Itiḥāsā*, but also picked up some heroes of history from his own historical writings and made a sincere attempt to spin around them the story of personal life with its failures and successes, pain and pleasure.

As a scientific historian Rakhaldas was proverbially known as one who only searched for facts depending on *pāhure pramāṇa*. That is, the proof based upon archaeological evidences was the only foothold for Rakhaldas to stand upon. He took a vow not to take into account any oral tradition or local tradition prevalent at the folk level. In this connection, it may be mentioned that he straightway rejected the evidence of the *Kulajīs*, which were very popular in Bengal. Even he was reluctant to attach much value to the information furnished by the historical *Kāvyas* until and unless those were verified in the light of available archaeological evidence. He carefully weighed the importance of the foreign accounts and tested their acceptability for reconstructing history in the light of what he called solid proof or *pāhure pramāṇa*. The objectivity of Rakhaldas may be traced in his historical writings including *Bāṅgalār Itiḥāsā*. Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to hold that the historian had a scientific bent of mind. If the reader turns over any page of history written by Rakhaldas it will be his privilege to discover how a historian searches for dependable material of his history by subjecting to each and every source of information to different types of tests or verifications.

Rakhaldas appears to have been inclined towards writing novels with the purpose of enjoying relief or relaxation from strict injunctions of objectivity to be religiously followed by a true historian. Interestingly enough, while he was writing *Bāṅgalār Itiḥāsā*, at the same time he made use of the heroes of Bengal history like Śaśāṅka and Dharmapāla for writing novels. In other words, the progress of serious historical research continued simultaneously with an exercise for making an application of his talent for producing creative literature in the form of novels. *Śaśāṅka* or Dharmapāla or any other historical figure for that matter was a part and
parcel of the on-going process of history. It was difficult to consider them in isolation in serious historical writing. It was difficult also to make an evaluation of their status as individuals in polity and society of the country. But in the novels the historian enjoyed to the fullest extent the liberty and licence of hero-worship. Obviously, Rakhaldas had his own personal likes and dislikes. He might recognize Šašānka and Dharmapāla as the heroes of early Bengal history. But he should not have given expression to his personal likes and dislikes in his serious historical writing like Bāṅglār Itihāsa, because he had to remain faithful to the principle of objectivity.

Again, it may be reasonably assumed that Rakhaldas wrote the historical novels with the purpose of making the history of Bengal popular. He had before him the inspiring example of Gaston Maspero, the Egyptologist, famous both for collecting archaeological information for the history of Egypt and using that information for writing vibrant historical novels. Rakhaldas did not expect that his history of Bengal written in a technical framework would prove to be tasteful to the general public. But he intensely felt that the history of Bengal should be known to each and every Bengalee. The life-stories of Šašānka and Dharmapāla should be talked about in every nook and corner of the country, he felt. In the Khalimpur copper plate inscription it has been stated that Dharmapāla was so popular in Bengal in his time that everybody in villages and towns used to gossip about him and even a bird in the cage used to pronounce his name every morning and evening. Rakhaldas probably aimed at such popularity of Šašānka and Dharmapāla in his own time. The heroes of history gained popularity by their achievements, having bearing upon the welfare of the people at large. Mere conquests or Digvijaya did not make the historical heroes worthy of popularity. Rakhaldas probably thought that Šašānka and Dharmapāla had to their credit some noble achievements providing an all-India status for the people of Bengal, not only in the political but also in the cultural field. He also thought that such heroes should appear again in Bengal to augment the prestige and status of the people of Bengal in contemporary times. The expectation of the historian would have been fulfilled if the people in general could share with Šašānka and Dharmapāla their feelings of pain and pleasure through the novels created by Rakhaldas himself.
Sasāṅka, the first historical novel by Rakhaldas depicts the political developments of Bengal and Northern India after the decline and downfall of the Imperial Guptas. The hero of the novel, Sasāṅka, the king of Gauḍa, plays a key-role in the fast moving political drama that culminated in the rise of Harṣavardhan as the supreme power of North India in the early part of the seventh century. The theme of the novel is based on the basic political and religious conflicts of the age – the aspiration of the regional feudatories for carving out independent kingdoms on the ruins of the Gupta Empire and the conspiracy designed by the Buddhists against rulers attached with the Brahmanical faith. In it only a few characters are taken from history, namely, Sasāṅka, Anantavarman, Bhāskarvarman, Prabhākaravardhan and Rājyavardhan, while the other characters are not gleaned from history. However, let us take a brief survey of the novel. The novel is divided into three parts, namely, Prabhāle, Madhyāhe and Sāyāhe implying Sasāṅka’s rise to power, apex of his career and decline. Sasāṅka is said to be the son of Mahāsenagupta, a scion of the Imperial Gupta dynasty. Mahāsenagupta is terrified at the inevitability of the downfall of the Gupta dynasty due to the enmity of Prabhakaravardhan of Thaneswar and of the Buddhists. In the meantime, Sasāṅka rose to power with the untiring efforts and help of Yasodhabaladeva, the lord of Rohiṣaghar fort. It brought him into conflict with his younger brother Madhavagupta, who was in good terms with Thaneswar. At the next stage, a description is given of Sasāṅka’s conquest of Bengal from his seat of power at Pātaliputra, his victory against Bhāskarvarman of Kāmarūpa and his expedition to Thaneswar. In this expedition, Rājyavardhan of Thaneswar was defeated and murdered in a duel. Sasāṅka captured Charanāḍri and Pratiṣṭhāna forts, which had been the centres of Thaneswar power. Kanauj, the centre of North Indian politics, was brought under the command and control of Sasāṅka for a short while, when Harṣavardhan seized power at Thaneswar. Harṣa began to put political and military pressure on Sasāṅka with the help of Madhavagupta and Bhāskarvarman. Sasāṅka shifted his capital to Karṇasuvarna. Bhāskarvarman captured Karṇasuvarna and Sasāṅka’s life came to an end in a battle fought against Bhāskarvarman.
Some special features of the novel *Sāśānka* are worth mentioning. The unavoidable failure of Sāśānka in spite of his indomitable courage and heroism is predicted by the astrologers. Further, the fall of Sāśānka is associated with the extinction of the glory of Pāṭaliputra, the capital of Magadha that was once the seat of Gupta imperialism. The role of fate in the career of Sāśānka is an innovation made by Rakhaldas for the purpose of his novel only. More importance is attached with Pāṭaliputra and Rohiṣgarh than Karnaśurvarṇa. The pomp and splendour of the royal court, of course, suits the purpose of the novel. It has been shown how the hero of the novel, Sāśānka has become the victim of the conspiracy of circumstances. The antagonism of the Buddhist church against him and his retaliation against it, his heart-breaking disillusionment in the love-affair and his involvement in a series of battles and wars gradually paved the way towards a tragic end. It may, therefore, be said that although Rakhaldas has incorporated all necessary elements in his novel, fatalism has been highlighted without any justifiable reason behind. The novel begins with a melancholy note manifest in the behaviour pattern of aged Mahāsenagupta and ends with the death of Sāśānka in a battle fought against Bhāskarvarman. The entire course of events appears to have been predestined. The novel, therefore, may be considered as a tragedy, in which fate plays a dominant role as in Greek tragedy. Perhaps, the people might expect the delineation of Sāśānka’s brilliant political and military career crowned with a series of successes. But to our utter disappointment we find in the novel a series of failures of Sāśānka, which inevitably pulled him down to his own grave.

The history of Sāśānka is shrouded in mystery due to the paucity of evidences. Evidences at our disposal do not conclusively prove Sāśānka as the son of Mahāsenagupta of the Imperial Gupta (?) dynasty. That Mahāsenagupta belonged to the Later Gupta dynasty is now established beyond doubt. But it is evident from Rakhaldas’s serious historical writing on the history of Bengal that he is inclined to consider Sāśānka as the son of Mahāsenagupta \(^{138}\). Again, the historicity of conflicts among different powers cannot be denied. The Rājyavaradhan - Sāśānka episode is the centre of a long-drawn controversy in the history of Bengal. Rakhaldas has refused to accept the views of Bāṇabhaṭṭa and Hiuen-Tsang as biased in his history of
Bengal as well as in his novel. Moreover, Rakhaldas has tried to refute the charges levelled against Sasāṅka regarding his hostility towards the Buddhists in the novel on the same line of arguments followed in the Bāṅgālī rītīhāsa. So, it appears that there is very little distortion of history in the novel.

The theme of the novel Dharmapāla may be considered as a continuation of the previous novel Saśāṅka. The novel portrays the most prosperous time of Bengal history that begins in the second half of the eighth century following a period of political turmoil. The story begins with the depredation of one feudal chief by another, indicating the period of māsyanyāya (anarchy) in Bengal that terminated with the election of Gopāla by the people as a king. The hero of the novel, Dharmapāla, was the son and successor of Gopāla. Its main theme is the struggle for supremacy over Kānyakubja or Kanauj, the centre of North Indian politics since the time of Harṣavardhan. The contestants were the Pālas of Bengal, the Gurjara-Pratihāras of Rajasthan and the Rāṣṭrakūtās of the Deccan. Dharmapāla intended to place his nominee Chakrāyudha on the throne of Kanauj, while the Pratihāras claimed the throne in favour of their nominee Indrāyudha. Dharmapāla succeeded in his mission at least for a period and consecrated Chakrāyudha as the king of Kanauj in the presence of a host of North Indian rulers. But the Pāla supremacy was not destined to last long, for ultimately Dharmapāla was defeated by the Pratihāras. The intervention of Govinda III, the Rāṣṭrakūta king of the Deccan, however, came to the rescue of the Pāla fortune, but not without cost. Dharmapāla fell in love with Kalyāṇi, the daughter of the chief of Gokarna fort, whom he had saved from being captured by the enemy. The death of Gopāla, wars and other events stood in the way of their marriage. Now, Govinda III desired to give in marriage his daughter Raṇṇādevī to the young prince Dharmapāla. Dharmapāla disagreed and married Kalyāṇi. The enraged Rāṣṭrakūta king immediately attacked the Pāla kingdom. Kalyāṇi, on realisation of the fact that she was instrumental in creating problems for Dharmapāla and his subjects, voluntarily committed suicide by fasting in a Buddhist temple. In this novel, too, Rakhaldas describes the religious developments of the time and introduces characters like Viśvānanda, a Buddhist monk, who helped in mobilizing resources in favour of Dharmapāla. In this novel characters like Dharmapāla, Vākpāla, Gargadeva,
Indrāyudha and Chakrāyudha, Nāgabhaṭa, Vāhukdhabala, Govinda III etc. are taken from history. Other characters are imaginary. The main story of the novel appears to be true to history. In one aspect, Rakhaldas has tried to establish his own view through the novel. Most of the scholars have taken the implication of the verse 4 of the Khālimpur plate to mean that Gopāla was elected by the people. But Rakhaldas is inclined to interpret the term prakṛti of that verse as feudal lords. Rakhaldas has developed the story of the novel in accordance with this view.

Historical novel is a fiction woven around the historical characters. Rakhaldas's historical novels may be considered as successful from this perspective. Although the motive of the author is always tilted towards maintaining the historicity, the life-story, with its pain and pleasure is not conspicuous by its absence. The main merit of the novel Saśānīka is its narrative that moves over a broad space. In this novel, historian Rakhaldas is more prominent than the novelist. But in Dharmapāla he succeeds in balancing actual history and fiction with a brilliant artistic sense. Rakhaldas has shown strict restraint in handling situations and portraying characters in Dharmapāla.

Rakhaldas writes his novels under the strong shadow of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, whose success in historical fiction is phenomenal in Bengali as well as in Indian literature. Bankim's interest is more in human nature as expressed in love and hate, pain and pleasure, success and failure than in depicting the period in its moving spirit and social nuances. But Rakhaldas's endeavour is to treat history within the borders of its time and space relying on evidence, and create situations and characters to make that period graphically vivid. Notwithstanding his indebtedness to Bankimchandra in style and expression, and even in portraying certain characters, Rakhaldas succeeds in distinguishing himself from his great predecessor. Moreover, like Sir Walter Scott, the dominant historical novelist of the nineteenth century Europe, Rakhaldas sets his plots on the major political crises of history, depicts a period meticulously, its art and architecture, social customs and prejudices, people's belief in magical feats, astrologer's prophecy and other obscuranticities, and thus reveals the psyche of characters in conformity with the age they belong to.
While writing his historical works Rakhaldas was extremely handicapped by the lack of sufficient sources of information. In his own words:

The country where except epigraphs, copper plates, ancient coins and tradition recorded in literature no other reliable evidence have so far been discovered, one can not expect for that country more than a skeleton of history.  

But from archaeology, which includes epigraphs, coins and monuments, it is hardly possible to reconstruct the social history of the country. While writing history, as it has been mentioned earlier, Rakhaldas distanced himself from the literary sources. But for social history of India, one has to depend more on literary sources. Probably Rakhaldas realized this fact and switched over to writing historical novels in which he could enjoy the liberty of making use of the literary tradition. So it may reasonably be held that Rakhaldas wrote his historical novels not only to popularize history but also to depict the age in its true colour.

We may consider in this connection, Rakhaldas's concepts of inter-relationship of political history and social history. The social history generally incorporates caste-structure and class-system as well as inter-relation between castes and classes. The age-old tradition, beliefs and practices are also considered in the background of social history. Rakhaldas of course has not directly entered into the history of castes and classes, but has shown his deep insight into the close bondage between society and polity. It seems that he realized that the state originated for the society, was formed by the society and maintained its existence on the foundation of the social will. Participation of different grades of people belonging to the society in the affairs of the state was essential, and, therefore, the political history itself has an undercurrent of the evolution of the society. The functioning of the seven organs of the state, namely, king, bureaucracy, population cum territory, capital, treasury, military and ally were mostly dependent on the co-operation of both the higher and lower varnas or castes of the society. Rakhaldas's socio-political thought in this line is suggested by the representation of different state functionaries and their functions in
the novels, *Śaśāṅka* and *Dharmapāla*. It appears that the historian-cum-novelist Rakhaldas did not miss the opportunity of highlighting the values of different state organs and the social values attached with them. Perhaps, he believed in the organic theory of state in which not a single organ could be isolated from others and could hardly function without co-operation of all the organs. Although the heroes of the novels set up monarchical form of government, Rakhaldas did not seem to have subscribed to the Kautilyan theory of upholding the king as the most important and essential organ of the state. In these two novels we find how the king took his actions in collaboration with the bureaucracy on the one hand and the military on the other, and how he collected the resources of the state with the co-operation of the population inhabiting under his jurisdiction. Alliances and counter-alliances played a prominent part in contemporary politics, and, therefore, allies and enemies were considered as determining factors in inter-state relationship. It is interesting to note that attention focussed by the novelist on these aspects of socio-political history have been omitted by the historian in his serious historical writing.

The question has been raised at the very outset whether Rakhaldas was a scientist or an artist or both. The proposition implies that as a historian he might prove himself to be the sincerest follower of the scientific methodology. Again, as a novelist he could also claim to be a creative artist. The question is whether he could be both at the same time. Perhaps he was not both at the same time. Because, when he wrote serious history, he was highly conscious of his commitment to the observation of and inference from the facts deduced directly or inferred indirectly from the most dependable source, archaeology. It can hardly he said that the historical writings of Rakhaldas had a taste of literature, just as we find in Carlyle’s works or in recent times in the works of Trevelyan or Toynbee. And in Bengali Niharranjan Roy deserves mention in this connection. Rakhaldas had to change his *modus operandi* when he chose to appear in the role of a creative artist. He switched over to the writing of fiction in the background of historical facts. He was successful in showing the magic of creating fiction without distortion of facts. This has been tested by us on the basis of an analysis of the two novels, namely *Śaśāṅka* and *Dharmapāla*. Perhaps it may be said that in spite of his liberty and licence as a creative artist he could never
make any compromise with the distortion of the known history. This might go more to the credit of a historian and less to the credit of a fiction writer. In this connection we are reminded of Bankimchandra’s *Rajasiṅha* and Tagore’s *Bouḥākurāṇī* Hāṭ where one may have more of the taste of aesthetic pleasure than of fulfilling the expectation of collecting historical knowledge. In recent times Rahul Sankrityayana in his *Volgā Se Gaṅgā* (From the Volga to the Gaṅgā) and *Sīrīha Senāpati* (in Hindi) has mixed up history and fiction in such a way that one can have both aesthetic pleasure as well as a vivid idea of an age. Leaving apart comparison with other more successful creative artists working within the framework of history, it may be modestly claimed that Rakhaldas made an attempt to create fiction, the basis of which was more imagination than reality, from his own point of view. Merits and demerits might occur in any creative writing.

Therefore, we should recognize Rakhaldas’s place in the history of Bengali literature as one of the writers of historical novels. However, it may be reasonably held that Rakhaldas served the Bengali language and literature by writing *Bāṅgālār Itīhāsa* on the one hand and *Saśānika* and *Dharmapāla* on the other. He reminds us of Sabyasāchī (Arjuna), the hero of the *Mahābhārata*, who was skilful in fighting with both hands. Rakhaldas was skillful in both science and art of history.

**AN EVALUATION OF RAKHALDAS BANDOPADHYAY**

At the conclusion of our discussion on the position of Rakhaldas in the historiography of ancient Bengal an evaluation of his scientific attitude towards consulting history is quite relevant. There is little difference of opinion among the scholars that Rakhaldas consistently and rigourously followed the method of collecting facts of history and interpreting them. Because, he was very cautious in making selection of the sources of history and often questioned and criticised the authenticity of the available sources. For instance, he was against making use of the tradition recorded in the available literary texts such as the *Kulajī* texts or *Kulasūtras*. The proverbial expression *pāhure pramāṇa* or solid proof and most dependable evidence is quite well-known in the methodology adopted by Rakhaldas. Obviously, he had to fall back upon
archaeology comprising epigraphy, numismatics and monuments as the most dependable source of history. But, even in case of archaeology, Rakhaladas often tested the veracity of the epigraphic and numismatic sources. He did not remain satisfied with whatever data might be forthcoming from any epigraph or coin. He was conscious of the fact that the probability of forging an epigraph or a coin could hardly be ruled out. As he himself was an expert in the sciences of epigraphy and palaeography, he could very well judge whether a particular inscription was spurious or genuine. The nature of his fastidiousness is evident from his original view that the Faridpur copper plate grant referring Dharmaditya, Gopachandra and Samachārādeva were spurious. His doubt was, however, removed by later researches. It is the sacred duty of a historian to question again and again the credibility of the data at his disposal. From that point of view, Rakhaladas was faithful to the religion of a historian.

According to Kalhana, a true historian must keep a detached mind and like a judge should recount events after having discarded bias and prejudice. Sir Jadunath Sarkar, the greatest historian of modern India, observed in 1915 in his Presidential Address in Bengali Literary Conference:

I would not care whether truth is pleasant or unpleasant, and in consonance with or opposed to current views. I would not mind in the least whether truth is or is not a blow to the glory of my country. If necessary, I shall bear in patience the ridicule and slander of friends and society for the sake of preaching truth. But still I shall seek truth, understand truth and accept truth. This should be the firm resolve of a historian.

Rakhaldas chiefly aimed at discovering the 'dry truth' from the mass of facts and in this respect he seems to have approached the ideal set by the German historian Ranke: 'as it actually happened'. In fact, he belonged to the school of Rajendralal Mitra and Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar. Like Rajendralal and Bhandarkar, Rakhaldas, while interpreting the historical data, tried to keep himself above all prejudices. He did not hesitate to criticise even his teacher, Haraprasad Sastri, when he saw the patriotic feelings of the latter prevailing over historical objectivity. He also
criticised Akshaykumar Maitreya for his attempt to exonerate Siraj-ud-daullah and to depict him as a good ruler.

In spite of the above, history is “necessarily subjective and individual, conditioned by the interest and vision by the historian”, as Namier believed. Rakhaldas was no doubt the historian of his own age and was bound to it by the condition of human existence. He did his historical researches as well as wrote the historical novels, when the struggle for Indian independence was in progress and the nationalist consciousness was at its peak. It was, therefore, but natural for Rakhaldas to be stimulated by the nationalist spirit. Kalyan Kumar Dasgupta has attempted to study the mental make-up of the historian from some of his historical writings thus:

1. There was a tendency to glorify the Gupta rulers as the conquerors of the Saka and Kušāṇa invaders of India. (*The Age of the Imperial Guptas*)
2. Like a contemporary extremist Rakhaldas was against the cult of non-violence and that explains why he has made Aśoka’s policy of non-violence responsible for the downfall of the Maurya Empire.
3. In his novel *Karupā* it is said how Agnigupta embraced death in the battlefield for the sake of the motherland in his fight against the Hūṇas. This is comparable to the sacrifice of the patriots who lost their lives like the martyrs in their fight against the British.
4. An undertone of Hindu nationalism characterises the writings of Rakhaldas. The submission of the Hindus to the Turkish invaders seems to have pained the historians. (*Prehistoric, Ancient and Hindu India*)
5. In the case of Bengalee Hindu King Saśāṅka, relatively anti-Buddhist bias of the historian seems to be articulate. He rejected the charges of Hiuen-Tsang against Saśāṅka that they were levelled against a Hindu king by a Buddhist pilgrim. Again, he laid an emphasis on the Hindu-Buddhist conflict in his novel *Saśāṅka*.
6. Rakhaldas was not free from Bengalee bias and expressed unequivocally his love and regard for Bengal and Bengali culture. Bengalee king like Saśāṅka and Dharmapāla were his heroes, eminently fit to be the heroes of his novels of the same names. While making an assessment of the art of Gauḍa, Rakhaldas
observed that the artistic activity in Eastern India from the eighth to the twelfth century AD excelled other provinces of the North and the South in magnificence, excellence and intensity.

Therefore, from Dasgupta’s point of view, Rakhaldas as a historian was not above bias and prejudice, although he himself has stated, “Rakhaldas tried to keep himself above all prejudices – chauvinism, parochialism and the like.” Secondly, he has further stated:

Rakhaldas was on guard against being swayed away by extra-historical considerations – regional, religious or otherwise – and tried to take his stand on the terra firma of facts and to uphold the truth.

Thirdly, it is admitted by Dasgupta that the two novels of Rakhaldas, *Mayūkha* and *Lutfullāh*, bear a testimony to the fact that Rakhaldas was conscious of the need for Hindu-Muslim unity, so essential for the integrity and prosperity of the country. Therefore, in Dasgupta’s assessment itself there are contradictions and inconsistencies.

It would be quite unreasonable to attribute to Rakhaldas anti-Buddhist Bengalee Hindu nationalist bias and at the same time hold that like a true historian, he was above all prejudice. Whatever nationalist sentiment might be traced, directly or indirectly, in the historical writings of Rakhaldas was due to the unavoidable influence of his age in which he lived. This was but natural. It would be relevant in this context to refer to an observation of Collingwood, quoted by E.H.Carr:

St. Augustine looked at history from the point of view of the early Christian: Tillamont, from that of a seventeenth century Frenchman; Gibbon, from that of eighteenth century Englishman; Mommsen from that of nineteenth century German. There is no point in asking which was the right point of view. Each was the only one possible for the man who adopted it.
The evaluation of Rakhaldas's historical scholarship would remain incomplete if we do not understand his view about periodisation in Indian history. Rakhaldas did not favour the idea of using the nomenclature 'Hindu' for ancient Indian history. Because, Indians and their religion and culture were named as 'Hindu' by the foreigners and the 'Hindu' nomenclature came to be prevalent on a wider scale under the Muslim rule. Rakhaldas has shown in his works that in pre-historic and ancient India there took place an inter-mixture of different ethnic groups, their religion, language and culture. The synthesis ultimately gave birth to the Hindu culture in the sixth-seventh century AD. He is found to have been quite unwilling to give Hindu appellation to Indian culture and civilisation before the medieval period. Therefore, it appears that in Rakhaldas's view 'Hindu India' was equivalent to medieval India. It is interesting to note in this connection that his History of India (1926) is divided into three periods, namely, ancient, medieval and modern. His concept of 'medievalism' is apparent from his The Eastern Indian School of Mediaeval Sculpture where the medieval period begins in the post-Gupta period, more specifically from the end of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth century AD. This was the period when an all-India character of polity, society, economy and culture came to an end by the rise of independent provincial and local kingdoms along with their own characteristic society, polity, economy and culture, as it was found in the eastern provinces of India. Although Rakhaldas in his greatest historical work Bāṅgalē Itihāsa (1915) showed no periodisation, we may, however, reasonably assume that in the first volume, pre-historic age is followed by the ancient period continuing upto the fall of the imperial Guptas and the rise of an independent state in Gauḍa-Vaṅga. And the medieval period had its beginning when the separate existence of Bengal and Bihar, that is, Aṅga, Vaṅga and Magadha together, were brought under an independent ruling dynasty, that is, the Pālas. The separate entity of Eastern India continued till its annexation to the Mughal Empire. Rakhaldas was, therefore, quite justified in maintaining the continuity of the history of Bengal till the end of the independent Sultanate in Bengal. Although the division of history is artificial, as history records a continuous process, the periodisation makes evident remarkable changes in socio-political institutions at different stages.
References

2. Ibid., p.598.
3. Ibid., p.599.
4. Ibid., p.599.
5. Ibid., pp. 604-58.
6. Ibid., p.605.
7. Supra. Ch. II, Section ‘Nagendranath Vasu’.
27. Order from the Secretary, Dept. of Education, Health and lands, Govt. of India addressed to the Director General of Archeology in India, vide his letter No. 1392 dated 29th June 1927 in reply to the letter of DGA, ref. no. 560 – 358/c dated 28th May 1927.


40. *SARDB*, p. 15.


47. ‘Preface’ to the first edition of *Bāṅgalar Itihāsa*, p. 753.


52. Supra. Chapter II, Section ‘Nagendranath Vasu’.


54. *Bāṅgadarśan*, 1280 BS.

55. Supra. Chapter II, Section ‘Nagendranath Vasu’.

56. *Mānasī, Āṣādh*, 1320 BS.

57. *Pravāśī, Śrāvaṇ*, 1320 BS.

58. *Pravāśī, Āśvin*, 1320 BS.

59. *Pravāśī, Śrāvaṇ*, 1319 BS.
60. These were published in the pages of Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Epigraphia Indica, Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute etc.

61. Rupendra Kumar Chattopadhyay, Pre-historic and Early Historic Archaeology of West Bengal, (Unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, Delhi University, 1982).


63. The view of Chanda is nowhere mentioned in Chapter II, Bāṅgalar Itihāsa. Vol. I.


65. Ibid., pp. 238 ff.


67. Ibid.


71. Ibid., pp. 608-609.


75. Amita Chakrabarty, History of Bengal (circa. 550-circa. 750), Burdwan University, 1991, Chs. V, VI, VII.

76. R.C. Majumdar, History of Ancient Bengal, Calcutta, 1971, Abdul Momin Chowdhury, Dynastic History of Bengal, Dacca. 1963 etc.

86. Ibid., p. 760.
87. Ibid., p. 760.
92. Ibid. pp. 783-784.
96. Ibid., p.
97. Ibid., p.
98. R.C. Majumdar, Jīvaner Smṛtiḍīpe, p. 72.


129. J.B. Bury in his inaugural address (1902) as successor to Lord Acton in the Regius Chair at Cambridge.
132. For a critical survey of historical novels in Bengali literature see, Bijit Kumar Datta, *Bāṅglā Sāhiṭya Aitiḥāṣik Upanyāṣ*, Calcutta, 1369 B.S.
134. *Bāṅgalī Itihiṣa*, published in A.D. 1915/1322 B.S. after twelve years’ research; *Sāśānika, Sāhiṭya*, 1318 Bhādra & Kārtik; *Mānasī*, 1319 Aghrāṇ – 1321 Māgh; Monograph with the same title published in 1915/1321 B.S. ‘Dharmapāla’, *Pravāśi*, 1321 Vaiśākh – 1322 Āśvin; Monograph of the same title published in 1915/1322 B.S.


142. Introduction to *Bāṅgālīr Itihāsa*.


