CHAPTER IV

NEW TREND IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ANCIENT BENGAL: FROM BĀNGĀLĀR ITIHĀSA TO BĀNGĀLĪR ITIHĀSA

The writing of a history of ancient Bengal in the Bengali language was begun as early as the middle of the nineteenth century and continued till 1923 when the second edition of Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay’s Bāngālār Itihāsa, volume I was published, although attempts were made by some to write the history of Bengal in English also. Exception to the prevalent trend of making use of Bengali as the medium of writing the history of Bengal were found even in the implementation of the project Gauḍa Viśvaśa undertook by the Varendra Research Society. Besides, individual attempts at writing the history of ancient Bengal in English language were becoming gradually more and more acceptable since the second decade of the twentieth century. Learned articles on the different aspects of the history of ancient Bengal were published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Journals like the Indian Culture and the Indian Historical Quarterly, although the Sāhitya Pariśat Patrikā continued its existence carrying on the tradition of publishing some of the research articles having bearing on the history of Bengal. However, it appears that the learned scholars were anxious to see to it that the results of their research should reach the wider circle of readers and should not remain confined within the Bengali speaking areas. Most probably with this intention in view, Rameshchandra Majumdar made his maiden attempt of writing Early History of Bengal (Dacca, 1924). F.J. Monahan published a series of articles on the early history of Bengal in the Journal, Bengal: Past and Present. Monahan’s intention was to write the history of Bengal ‘from the establishment of the Maurya Empire down to the first Mohammedan invasion’. His Early History of Bengal was published in 1925. In his own words:

The subject of the present volume is the Maurya period, the establishment of the Maurya dynasty on the throne of Magadha having been chosen as the
starting point, because, in the present state of our knowledge, it is the earliest event in the history of Bengal to which an approximate date can be assigned.  

Side by side with the change in the medium of expression from Bengali to English, an intensive and extensive exploration of the epigraphic sources was the characteristic of Bengal historiography in the first half of the twentieth century. Such exploration continued simultaneously with individual attempts at discovering the roots of the Bengali society and culture and scholars in general were no longer prepared to confine their researches within the framework of political history. In this context attention was especially drawn to the linguistic and anthropological researches in the first half of the twentieth century, as it was felt that without following an interdisciplinary approach the genuine history of Bengal on a comprehensive scale could hardly be constructed.

SUNITIKUMAR CHATTOPADHYAY: 
THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE BENGALI LANGUAGE

Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay traced the origin and development of the Bengali language in his book entitled The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language first published in 1926 by the University of Calcutta. Later, his further researches on the subject came out in his Indo-Aryan and Hindi (1942). He found speeches of the following language-families spoken within Bengal since very early times: the Austric (Mon-Khmer and Kol), the Dravidian, the Sino-Tibetian or Tibeto-Chinese. and lastly, the Indo-European (Aryan). The Negroid speech, if it was ever current in very ancient times among the Negroid people, became gradually extinct although some of its vocabularies might have survived in the Austric and its derivatives in Bengal. The speakers of the Austric are believed by some to have first entered Bengal from the North-East. Their dialect seems to have agreed with the Mon-Khmer group of Austric rather than with the Kol or Munḍa group. The latter might have been a variation of the original Austric in Central India or Upper Gangetic India. The Austrics were succeeded by the Dravidian speakers who probably grouped themselves in the west of Bengal and also penetrated into the heart of Bengal. Then came the Tibeto-Chinese
people who overlaid the earlier Austic settlers in North and East Bengal. Finally, the advent of the Aryan-speakers made the process of the formation of the Bengali people and the Bengali language almost complete. According to Sunitikumar, within two centuries following the foundation of the Pāla dynasty, Bengali language originated from the Apabhraṃśa of the Māgadhi Prākṛt. Since the tenth century AD the Buddhist Āchāryas began to write Dohās in the ancient Bengali language and those Dohās were known as Charyāpadas. However, the linguistic researches leave little scope of doubt that the Bengali speaking people represented a mixture of the Austics (Niśāda), the Dravidians, the Tibeto-Chinese (Kirāta) and the Aryan speakers (Ārya).

HARANCHANDRA CHAKLADAR: ARYAN OCCUPATION OF EASTERN INDIA

&

PRASANTACHANDRA MAHALANOBIS: 'ANALYSIS OF RACE MIXTURE IN BENGAL'

Side by side with the linguistic researches, anthropological studies were on with the purpose of tracing the origin of the Bengali people. Anthropology tells us that the people of Bengal are composed of diverse racial elements, namely, North Indian long heads, Alpine short heads, Dravid-Munda long heads and Mongolian short heads. Risley's view, referred to above, that the Bengalee was a mixture of the Mongolian and the Dravidian races has been criticized by later anthropologists including Ramprasad Chanda. H.C. Chakladar in his Aryan Occupation of Eastern India (1925) stated in the Appendix (‘Problems of the Racial Composition of the Indian Peoples’) that he had collected the anthropometric data of a hundred individuals belonging to the Rādhiya Brāhmaṇas of Bengal and a hundred of the Muchis of the district of Birbhum. From an analysis of the data he concluded that there existed among the Bengalees a predominant Alpine type and an appreciable Mediterranean or Brown race type. The work of Chakladar was followed by that of P.C. Mahalanobis whose paper entitled ‘Analysis of Race Mixture in Bengal’ was published in 1927. He introduced most scientific statistical method in order to analyse the caste-resemblance in Bengal. He selected thirty typical castes of North India for which
anthropometric data were published by Risley in his *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1891). The selected castes represent six geographical divisions, namely, Bengal, Chhotonagpur, Bihar, North Western Provinces and Oudh, the Punjab and Eastern districts. Again, in the cultural classification of those castes Mahalanobis followed the orthodox theory as expounded in Nagendranath Vasu’s *Vaiṅger Jāṭya Itihāsa* and Lalmohan Vidyanidhi’s *Sambhanda Nirṇaya*. The thirty castes were put into six cultural classes with the purpose of comparisons. Out of those thirty castes Mahalanobis selected seven Bengal castes for detailed analysis. Those were Brāhmaṇas, Kāyasthas, Sadgopes, Kaivarttas, Bāgdīs, Mālpāhāris and Mohammedans. On the basis of the above analysis, he found out that an intermixture within Bengal varied with the degree of cultural proximity. Again influence from outside Bengal had followed two well-defined and clearly distinguished streams, one from the castes of Northern India (chiefly from Bihar and the Punjab), and the other from the aboriginal tribes of Chottonagpur. The Brāhmaṇas alone could justifiably claim definite connection with the Upper India, particularly with the Punjab. On the other hand, in the case of other Bengal castes the influence of the Northern Indian castes decrease and that of the aboriginal tribes of Chottonagpur increase as we go down the social scale. It may be added that two elements in the people of Bengal might be distinguished, one consisting of the primitive tribes (referred to by Mahalanobis as Chottonagpur aboriginal tribes), and the other consisting of the higher classes of people like the Brāhmaṇas, Vaidyas, Kāyasthas etc. It has been accepted by scholars that the so called primitive tribes like the Kols, Santals, Mālpāhāriās etc. represent the descendants of the original inhabitants of Bengal, who are referred to as Niṣādas in the Vedic literature and proto-Australoids in the terminology of the anthropologists.

Before the beginning of the third decade of the twentieth century some scholars, both Indian and foreign, came forward to throw light on the history of Bengal by their researches in the history of art and iconography that is unanimously supposed to be an index of culture.
J.C. FRENCH: THE ART OF THE PĀL EMPIRE OF BENGAL

J.C. French published his monograph entitled The Art of the Pāl Empire of Bengal in 1927. The author in his 'Preface' observed thus:

This book is concerned solely with art. It does not profess to deal with iconography or history. For such historical setting as is necessary I have gone to such recognized authorities as Mr. R.D Banerjee's Pālas of Bengal.\footnote{13}

Again, as regards the subject of this book the author expressed his deep indebtedness to Mr. R.D. Banerjee\footnote{14}. A perusal of the work would show that Mr. French followed the methodology adopted by R.D. Banerjee's Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture (1933). This was possible because, according to the author himself, Mr. R.D. Banerjee "placed his unrivalled knowledge" at his disposal\footnote{15}. The author has begun his discussion with the figure of goddess Chaṇḍī bearing an inscription that gives its date as eighth century AD. The image was found in the district of Tippera in Eastern Bengal. The author has assigned the image of Viṣṇu found on the site of the ancient city of Mahāsthāna to the eighth century on the ground of its artistic resemblance with the image of goddess Chaṇḍī. The next five images of Loknātha, Durgā and Siva are assigned to the eighth century AD on the ground of their affinity to the image of goddess Chaṇḍī bearing an inscription that fixes its date in the eighth century. Rakhaldas also preferred the chronological approach to the stylistic approach\footnote{16}. It is significant that Mr. French has given a list of images bearing inscription of the Pāla dynasty at the end of the monograph. Mr. French, while tracing the history of the Pāla art, has closely followed the changes in the political fortune of the Pāla dynasty. According to him, the Pāla art had its beginning when Gopāla ascended the throne and put an end to the anarchy and chaos in Bengal. The consolidation of the Pāla Empire in the reign of Dharmapāla was followed by Devapāla’s reign in the first half of the ninth century AD that witnessed a flourishing period of art. In order to establish this point Mr. French has put forward two arguments:
1. Works executed in Devapāla’s reign can be dated with singular precision. “The design is perfect, and the whole figure is permeated with the fierce and mysterious significance and vitality characteristic of this period of art”. 17

2. From Tāranāth’s History of Buddhism it is learnt that in the time of King Devapāla their lived in Varendra an exceedingly skillful artist named Dhīmāna whose son was Bītpalo. Both of them produced many works in cast-metal, as well as sculptures and paintings. While Dhīmāna gave rise to the Eastern school of painting, Bītpalo was the founder of the Madhyadesa School of painting. 18

In the time of the successors of Devapāla, when the fortunes of the Pāla dynasty sunk to low ebb, the artists’ desperate effort to maintain the standard of the great art of the older days was manifest in the exaggerated simplification and the symbolism carried even to the extent of distortion. After Mahipāla I recovered the lost glory of the Pāla dynasty late in the tenth century AD a strenuous effort was made to restore the great art of the earlier days. In this connection an observation of Mr. French is worth quoting:

There is no more ruthless mirror of the spirit and the soul of the nation than its art. As the morale and essential vitality of a people wane, so does the art. The political, social, military, artistic, cultural entity we call a people or a nation or an empire has little just as an individual man has, and the Hindu Empire was on the downward way. In composition, workmanship, details and finish the work of the artist of Mahipāla’s reign is by no means discreditable: All that it lacks is that mysterious element which is the life-breath of a work of art. 19

The successors of Mahipāla I’s could not resist the disintegration of the Pāla Empire, which ultimately led to formidable revolt of the Kaivarttas against the Pāla dynasty in the eleventh century AD. About the beginning of the twelfth century AD the Pāla dynasty was finally overthrown and was succeeded by the Senas. It is said that during the Pāla age Buddhism and the Brahmanical form of Hinduism existed
peacefully side-by-side, but in the twelfth century AD under the Senas there was a reactionary tendency on the part of the Brāhmaṇas against the democratic and vulgarising spirit of Buddhism.

Mr. J.C. French has traced in the Pāla age the Tantric system, which was one of the most startling and intricate element of Hinduism. The author thinks that it is this Tantric cult “which gives to the art of the Pāla age its mysterious vitality and weired power and contrasts it so strongly with the classical spirit of the earlier art”. that is, the Gupta art.

Lastly, the author has made an attempt to compare the Pāla art with the art of Ellora and Elephanta, that is, the art of the medieval period as opposed to the Gupta classicism. Again, he thinks that the Hindu art of Java might or might not be derived from Bengal. But, in comparison with the art of Java the art of the Pāla Empire was more virile. The comparison of the Pāla art with the cotemporary art in China under the great Tang Empire was striking. But the similarities might also be superficial. Because, although Buddhism served as a temporary bridge between the art and culture of India and China, India represented in fact the ancient Brahmanical culture and China stood for Taoism. However, the art of Nepal was deeply influenced by the artists of the reign of Devapāla, as pointed out by Taranātha and “this Nepalese art continues to the present day”.

N.K.BHATTASALI:
ICONOGRAPHY OF BUDDHIST AND BRAHMANICAL SCULPTURES IN THE DACCA MUSEUM

J.C. French did not concern himself with the iconography that was perhaps left for N.K. Bhattacharji whose *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum* was published in 1929. Bhattacharji’s work is practically an iconographical survey in Eastern Bengal comprising ancient *janapadas* of Vaṅga and Samanta. Although the nucleus is the collection in the Dacca Museum, obtained mostly from the places within the limits of Vaṅga and Samata, due consideration
has been given to the images which were originally discovered in Eastern Bengal but remained in collections outside its limits, such as the collections in the Museums of the Varendra Research Society, Vaṅgiya Sāhitya Parishat in Calcutta Indian Museum, Calcutta, the Nāhār Collection and the collections of the Rangpur, Dacca and Comilla branches of the Sāhitya Parishat. Besides, the images discovered from places outside the limits of Vaṅga-Samata have also been referred to in some cases in order to explain a new type or to prove a point.

The majority of the images belong to the period from about 1000 AD to 1200 AD. Those images are almost invariably carved in the ‘black chlorite stone’. The number of images in which gold and silver are used was not large. Most of the metal images are carved out of ‘octo-alloy’ (Aṣṭadhātu). Again, wood might have also been used, though the perishable nature of the material has not allowed any considerable number of specimens of this class to come down to the time of the author. Lastly, there are also specimens of images made of clay, such as the terracotta plaques found at Paharpur and large slabs of terracotta from Savar. The use of terracotta appears to have been discontinued in Bengal in later ages.

Bhattasali thinks that “the history of Bengal sculpture has yet to be written”. It has, however, been assumed by him that the fine arts began to flourish in Bengal in the pre-Pāla days. But except Chauddagrām Sarvāṇī image bearing an inscription of Prabhābaṭī, queen of Devakhaḍgā, the author has not been able to describe any other early image. He feels that “it is always hazardous to depend on the ‘style’ to fix the age of any detached piece of sculpture and always safe to be guided by inscriptions in the matter”. For this reason, Bhattasali has taken particular care to read the inscription and inscribed labels that often appear in the pedestals of the images. On the basis of methodology adopted by him, Bhattasali has found very few images of the pre-Pāla and the early-Pāla period, whereas the images of the period between 1000 AD and 1200 AD are found by him by thousands.

While describing the Buddhist images Bhattasali has carefully considered the Buddhist Sādhanās or tracts on the worship of the Buddhist deities, which he could
procure with the help of Benoytosh Bhattacharya. For the Brahmanical portion of his work, the author has depended on the various Tantras occupying the same place in the Brahmanical system of worship as works like Sādhanamāla do in the Buddhist worship. Besides the Tantras, he has also utilized some of the Purāṇas. Varāhamihira’s Bhātārīhitī and many other Brahmanical texts. While giving iconographic description of the Buddhist and Brahmanical images, Bhattasali has been careful to focus attention on costume, ornaments and domestic articles associated with the images. Because, he thought that the society is reflected in Bengal sculpture, especially in the dress, ornament and other things found sculptured on the images.

In the section ‘Buddhist Sculpture’ the following male divinities are included: Ādi Buddha (Vajrasattva), Bodhisattvas (Avalokiteśvara and Manjusri), Gautama Buddha (Mānuṣi Buddha), Tutelary deities (Jambhala and Heruka) and the defied personage Piṇḍola. The female divinities brought under this section are Prajñā pāramitā, Mārichī (goddess emanating from Vairachana), Vajratārā (goddess emanating from Ratnasambhava), Sitātapatrā and Bhṛkuṭī Tārā (goddess emanating from Amitāva), Syāmā Tārā and Paṇaśabarī (goddess emanating from Amoghasiddhi), Mahāpratisarā (the Paṇcharakṣā) and Hārīti. In the section of the Brahmanical sculptures we find among the images of gods Vaiṣṇava images. Saiva images, images of the sun god and images of Revanata. Among the Barhmanical goddess there are Vaiṣṇavī, images of Sarasvatī and images of Śakti in various forms, such as Mahāmāya, Mahiṣamarddini, Gaurī Pārvatī, Chandī. Sarvāṇi. Ugra Tāra, Chāmuṇḍa and Manasā.

According to N.K. Bhattasali, the geographical limit of the circulation of the sculpture is a sure index to the spread of culture. It is known from the find of the images that the districts of Sylhet, Tippera, Noakhali and the plains of Chittagong were inhabited in pre-Mohammedan days by people professing either Brahmanical or Buddhist faith. But, the places in Dacca and Maymansingh districts, were either Buddhist or Brahmanical images dated upto 1200 AD are few and far between, it is
difficult to ascertain whether those areas are inhabited by people belonging to Buddhist or Brahmanical faith before the Muslim faith.

The chronological approach to the history of Bengal sculpture as it has been adopted by Bhattasali is also found to have been followed in Rakhalda's *Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture*. While Bhattasali has focussed his attention to the images found in Vaṅga-Samataṭa region, Rakhalda's area of study comprised the entire eastern region of India that included Gauda, Vaṅga and Magadha. What is appreciable is Bhattasali's study of iconography as a part of cultural history of Bengal. There is least doubt that Bhattasali's broad based iconographic study of the images found in Bengal in general and of those found in Eastern Bengal in particular laid a strong foundation of the religious history of ancient Bengal. Because, those who reconstructed the religious history had to depend more on the data furnished by the Buddhist and Brahmanical images discovered so far.

**STELLA KRAMRISCH: PĀLA - SENA SCULPTURE**

In spite of the contributions to the art history of Bengal made by scholars like Rakhalda Bandopadhyay, N.K.Bhattasali and J.C.French, Stella Kramrisch's article 'Pāla and Sena Sculpture' published in *Rūpam* (no.40, 1929) has an uniqueness. as it upholds the sociological outlook on the art history of Bengal. It is pointed out by her that a progressive development from the primitive to classical and from there to the Baroque is unknown to Indian art as a whole. But, the Pāla-Sena phase of Indian art conformed to this general rule. The Pāla-Sena art having a chronological sequence and geographical limitation in Bengal and Bihar represent in artistic form the mixture of the varieties of races. The four centuries of continuous East Indian artistic productiveness covered a period of political unrest and frequent changes in the political geography. But, such an unrest in the political arena did not touch the artistic vitality of Bihar and Bengal. Because, Kramrisch thinks that the battles were an internal affair of the warrior caste, whereas the occupations of the other spiritually, economically or commercially productive caste remained undisturbed. The chief factor of the Pāla-Sena art are said to be the court, the cult, the prosperous lay
communities and the workshops. Again, she thinks that Tantrism was the main inspiration of East Indian art development. "Whether the figure is Brahmanic or Buddhist, Viṣṇu or Avalokiteśvara, the treat is identical, it has Tantrism for its inspiration." In respect of Sena art Kramrisch thinks that "the lavishness of Sena sculpture was promoted by that of Kāṇḍa country from where the dynasty came". The author does not think that the Pāla-Sena art did not inherit anything from the Gupta art. In fact, the translation of the inner state of mind into posture of icons, that is to be found in the Pāla-Sena period, was the artistic tradition of the Gupta period. But, fleshiness and sensuousness are also to be found in the sculpture of this period. The human figure is the chief medium of the sculpture and its typical feature is "the union of abstraction and realism with its religious and sensuous suggestiveness". Kramrisch is of the opinion that the art of Bengal reached Kashmir and Nepal by land, Burma and Java by sea. In her own inimitable language she has observed:

When transplanted in new soil this art, so comprehensive in its features, proved great stimulus and provoked provincial and colonial schools that variegated the language of the motherland by a vernacular of their own.

In the Pāla-Sena art one may find out an oscillation between the reality of flesh and reality of abstraction, perhaps between two minds one deeply imbued the Śādhanā of the Tantra that knows this physical body to be the abode of heavenly bliss, and the other aspiring after the abstract, the godliness of man out of his material body itself, the ideal of Brahmanical Hinduism. Again, we find in the Pāla-Sena art a tendency from simple and quiet to agitated and frivolous general appearance verging on exaggeration.

Stella Kramrisch concludes her evaluation of the Pāla-Sena sculpture thus:

The first generation of the ninth century lends softly sensuous bodies to the deities. During the second generation, these stiffen, and during the third became still more severe and abstract, until at the beginning of the tenth century a new reality is given to the stiffened mass, the abstract treatment of
which is replaced by a livelier form. With the transformation, the next two generations are engaged. The evolution in the ninth century leads from the reality of flesh to that of abstraction. The tenth century achieves a ponderous, sensuous grandeur. The eleventh century in its turn works in a downward direction; it values cool regularity over the sensuous wealth of form, but in its second and third generation the sensuous perception grows strong once more, and celebrates its final trial in the twelfth century. But for a short time only, for at the end of the century there are clear signs of the approaching end, with its inevitable rigidity. 40

In tracing the history of Bengal art Stella Kramrisch seems to have been more dependent on stylistic developments than on chronological sequence.

SWING BACK TO THE EARLIER TREND

The process of collecting and editing more and more epigraphic records and reconstruction of the history of Bengal in their light was an on-going process. Some scholars are found to have remained engaged in the above process for many years to come.

NANIGOPAL MAJUMDER: INSCRIPTIONS OF BENGAL, VOLUME III

In 1912, the Varendra Research Society brought out a compilation in Bengali, of the principal inscriptions of the Pāla period known at that time, in a volume entitled Gauḍālekhamālā, volume I, edited by Akshaykumar Maitrey. An intention was there at that time to bring out similar volume containing inscriptions of the Senas and other dynasties 41. In December 1924, when N.G. Majumder came to Rajsahi as Curator of the Society's Museum, he was assigned the aforesaid task by the Council of Management 42. It was decided that the proposed volume containing newly discovered inscriptions of the Senas and other dynasties should be edited in English, so that it might reach a wider circle of readers. The work was complete by 1926. But it was published in 1929 43. The Varendra Research Society had a contemplation of
publishing two companion volumes, one dealing with the Gupta and the other with the Pāla inscription. As the present volume would come after them in chronological order it was published under the title *Inscriptions of Bengal, Volume III*. Altogether seventeen inscriptions were edited in this volume and six more inscriptions were in the Appendices. The inscriptions of Bengal edited by N.G. Majumder belong roughly to the eleventh and twelfth century AD and include practically all the inscriptions of Chandras, the Varmanś and the Senas that were known till date. Two isolated inscriptions, which do not belong to any these dynasties, were also included. Those were Ramganj copper plate of Iśvaraghoṣa and Chittagong copper plate of Dāmodara. Besides, the Ādābādi copper plate of Daśarathadeva was included in the Appendix.

The author while editing the inscriptions has taken precaution to steer clear of legendary data and give matter of fact account of the records. It has been observed by the author:

...legends unsupported by reliable evidence cannot be allowed to take the place of scientific, documented history.\(^4^5\)

In this connection, mention has been made of a copper plate grant issued by a king called Śyāmalavarman, identified by some with Sāmalavarman, the father of Bhojavarman of the Belāva copper plate. The said grant was quoted by Mahimchandra Majumdar in *Gauḍe Brāhmaṇa* and by Nagendranath Vasu in *Vanīg Jāṭăya Itihāsa: Brāhmaṇa Kāṇḍa*. In fact, Vasu quoted it from an old manuscript of the Kulapaṇijīka of the Vedic Brāhmaṇas. But the record was never brought out before the public. Besides, the royal titles like *Vṛṣabhaśaṅkara Gauḍeśvara* prefixed to the name of Śyāmalavarman in the aforesaid quotation are known to have been assumed by the Sena kings and are conspicuous by their absence in the Belāva copper plate. On this ground, N.G.Majumder has left out the evidence of the grant of Śyāmalavarman while dealing with the Belāva copper plate\(^4^6\).

In appendices, the author has quoted some extracts from the *Adbhutasāgara* and the *Dānasāgara* having bearing on the history of the Senas. Besides, a map has
been provided showing the find-spots of the inscriptions. In all, four inscriptions of
the Chandras, three inscriptions of the Varmanas and thirteen inscriptions of the Senas
find their place in this volume entitled *Inscriptions of Bengal*, volume III.

The publication-date makes it evident that the present volume was not
available to Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay when he completed *Bāṅgālār Itihāsa*, volume I
(1915). Even in 1923, when Rakhaldas published the second edition of *Bāṅgālār
Itihāsa*, volume I, he was not in a position to utilise N.G.Majumdar’s *Inscriptions of
Bengal*, volume III.

**HEMCHANDRA RAY: DYNASTIC HISTORY OF NORTHERN INDIA, VOLUIME I**

H.C.Ray’s *Dynastic History of Northern India*, volume I, was published in 1931 and
accommodated in itself the evidence deduced from the epigraphic records discovered
till date. In the sixth chapter of the *Dynastic History of Northern India*, Volume I, is
included the history of Bihar and Bengal from the post-Gupta period to the Turkish
invasion. It may reasonably be assumed that H.C.Ray has considered the history of
Bengal and Bihar as part and parcel of the history of Northern India that includes the
history of the Śāhis of Afghanistan and Punjab, of Kashmir, Nepal, Assam and Orissa.
of the Gāhādavālas of Vārānasi and Kānyakubja, of the Rāṣtrakūtas of Northern India
and of the later Gurjara-Prañihāras of Kanauj. According to D.C.Sircar, *Dynastic
History of Northern India* is “a valuable guide to all students of the medieval history
of India” 47. There might be difference of opinion of some scholars with H.C.Ray in
regard to the origin of the Kāmboja family or the interpretation of a passage in the
celebrated colophon of the *Saduktikarpāṃṭa* signifying the regnal year 21 of
Lakṣmanaṇasena.

However, the genealogical tables provided at the end of the chapter dealing
with the history of Bengal and Bihar one may trace the list of rulers belonging to the
dynasties of the Khaḍgas (AD 650 - 700), the Pālas (AD 765 - 1162), the Chandras
(AD 950 - 1050), the Kāmbojas (AD 911 - 992), the Śūras (AD 950 – AD 1100), the
Varmaṇṣ (AD 1050 – AD 1150), the Senas (AD 1050 – AD 1280), the line of Śudraka (AD 1100 – AD 1150), the Mānas (AD 1100), the Kāivarttas (AD 1080 – AD 1100), the Chikkoras of Pithī (AD 1050 – AD 1150), the Senas of Pithī (AD 1200 – AD 1270) and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas of Anāga (AD 1050 – AD 1150). The author himself has indicated at the top of the genealogical tables that approximate dates have been provided for the dynasties mentioned above. However, there is little scope of doubt that the dynastic history of Bengal and Bihar in the early medieval period is more comprehensive than that we find in Rakhaldas’s Bāṅgalī Itihāsā. The reason is not far to seek. The author had at his disposal all the epigraphic records discovered by that time. One of the most remarkable characteristic features of the work is the provision of the contents of the epigraphic records relevant to the reign of each and every ruler belonging to the dynasty concerned. Besides, a map of Bengal and Bihar has to a great extent made the account of the author meaningful.

**PADMANATH BHATTACHARYA : KĀMARŪPAŚĀSANĀVALĪ**

Padmanath Bhattacharya collected and edited ten copper plates and a rock inscription of ancient Kāmarūpa belonging to the period from the seventh to the twelfth century AD in his Kāmarūpaśāsanāvalī published in 1931. Most of these records are noticed by H.C.Ray in his dynastic history of Assam, referred to above. Because those records, important landmarks in the early history of Assam, had previously been edited in various Journals. N.G.Majumdar has observed in his review:

Mr. Bhattacharya has done well in bringing them together in the form of a corpus, which will prove indispensable to all the students of archeology of the Eastern most province of India. The author has given an account of the kings of Kāmarūpa who issued the documents in the Introduction of the book, which is full of information. The texts are Nāgarī characters and the notes and the translations are in Bengali.

As it has been aptly remarked by Prabodhchandra Sen, the history of ancient Bengal and Kāmarūpa are very intimately related and the history of Bengal and
Assam is complementary to each other to a very considerable extent. For instance, Bhāskaravarman, king of Kāmarūpa, who issued the Nidhanpur copper plate grant from Karṇsuvarna in Bengal, seems to have made a common cause with Harṣavardhan against Saśānka, King of Gauḍa. As the Nidhanpur copper plate was issued from Karṇsuvarna, it has been surmised by some that Bhāskaravarman was able to drive away Saśānka from Gauḍa for sometime or it might be that he ruled in Karṇsuvarna for sometime after Saśānka’s death. Again, Bhāskaravarman was succeeded by a dynasty founded by Sālastambha, which was again followed by a new dynasty, founded by Brahmapāla. The seven kings of the dynasty founded by Brahmapāla had their names ended in ‘Pāla’. They ruled from the latter part of the tenth to the end of the twelfth century AD, when the neighbouring province of Bengal was held in the possession by the rulers of the Pāla dynasty. “Whether the Pālas of Kāmarūpa represented a collateral branch of the Pāla dynasty of Bengal requires investigation.”

KANAKLAL BARIJA: EARLY HISTORY OF KĀMARŪPA

K.L. Barua’s *Early History of Kāmarūpa* (1933) presents a connected history of Kāmarūpa from the earliest times to the end of the sixteenth century AD. The author has discussed the geography of the ancient kingdom of Prāgijyotiṣā or Kāmarūpa, the history of Assam from the pre-historic period up-to the time of the dynasty of Brahmapāla, cultural and material progress of the country during the time of the dynasty of Brahmapāla, the history of the later kings of Kāmarūpa, Mohammedan invasions, the king of Kāmata and the early Koch kings, and lastly, the history of Vaiśāvavā reformation in Assam and the growth of the Assamese literature. However, there is a scope of difference of opinion in some parts of the work. Firstly, the author thinks that it is a mistake to associate the Puṇḍras with a stretch of the territory which came to be known as Puṇḍravardhan in the Gupta period. But, the discovery of Mahāsthān inscription in Bogra district leaves no scope of doubt that there was a Puṇḍra country in the North Bengal long before the time of the Guptas. Again, the reference to King Harṣa of the Bhagadatta dynasty in a Nepalese inscription as the lord of Gauḍa, Oḍra, Kaliṅga and Kośala has been interpreted by the author to suggest
that Harṣa’s empire comprised Assam, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa with eastern part of U.P and the northern part of Madras. This is, no doubt, an exaggeration. At best, it might be inferred that Harṣa either invaded or temporarily occupied Bengal and Orissa in the eighth century AD. Further, the author has also exaggerated the extent of territory under the occupation of the rulers of Kāmarūpa. There is no doubt that in ancient time North Bengal sometimes formed a part of the kingdom of Prājyotisa. But the author has gone so far as to say that the Nidhanpur charter which was issued by Bhāskarvarman granted land in the present Purnea district of Bihar. In fact, the lands granted by the Nidhanpur charter were situated in the Pañchakhaṇḍa pargana of the Sylhet district. It may also be pointed out in this connection that the western boundary of the kingdom of Bhūti varman, who originally granted the lands mentioned in the Nidhanpur copper plate could hardly have extended up-to the Purnea district, because in the time of Bhūti varman the Imperial Guptas were the master of Purāśravardhan or North Bengal which intervenes between Purnea and Kāmarūpa. In spite of these minor misinterpretations on the part of the author we may safely hold that without Barua’s Early History of Kāmarūpa it would have been difficult for us to have a clear understanding of the history of ancient Bengal in some parts.

REVIVAL OF THE NEW TREND

From the third decade of the twentieth century individual efforts were made by some scholars to reconstruct the history of ancient Bengal accommodating both its political and non-political aspects. It was believed that only the political aspect represented a partial history of a country. Therefore, in order to make the history more comprehensive scholars devoted themselves to reconstruct the socio-economic and cultural profile of ancient Bengal. There is no doubt about the fact that the socio-economic and cultural history actually reflected the history of the people, whereas the political history was mainly concerned with the rise and fall of the dynasties and kingdoms.
Radhagovinda Basak began his career of research when he came into close association with the Varendra Research Society and its Director Akshaykumar Maitreya. This close association enabled Basak to utilise his knowledge of Sanskrit, epigraphy and palaeography in deciphering and editing inscriptions which the Society along with other antiquities had been collecting at that time. Basak edited for the first time the Belāva copper plate of King Bhojavarmaṇ and most of the land-sale documents of the Gupta period including those found at Dāmodarpur. The career of an epigraphist was pursued by Basak at a later period. Some of his research papers published in the volumes of the Epigraphia Indica contained original materials as provided by the Rāmpāl and the Madanpur copper plate of Srichandra (tenth century AD), the Belāva copper plate of Bhojavarmaṇ (twelfth century AD) and the Silimpur stone inscription of the time of Jayapāladeva of Kāmarūpa. The Rāmpāl copper plate, along with others discovered subsequently, disclosed the existence of a family of Chaṇḍra kings who ruled between AD 825 and AD 1035. This particular record offers a glimpse of the emergence of the rise of the Chaṇḍra dynasty holding sway over Chandradvīpa and Harikela (East Bengal and the coastal area of Southern Bengal). It is also learnt that Survarṇachandra, the second member of the Chaṇḍra dynasty embraced Buddhism, perhaps suggesting that until his time the family followed the Brahmanical religion. Similarly, the Belāva copper plate of Bhojavarmaṇ has disclosed that the Varman dynasty succeeded the Chaṇḍra dynasty in East Bengal. The Silimpur inscription alludes to a settlement of the Brāhmaṇas in a village in Varendra and thus throws interesting light on the contemporary social history. Some of his inscriptions were published by Basak when Rakhaldas Bandopadhayay’s Bāṅgālīr Itihāsa, volume I had already been published.

Radhagovinda Basak’s *The History of Northern-Eastern India* (1934) is an attempt to write a political history of North Eastern India from the foundation of the Gupta Empire to the rise of Pāla dynasty in Bengal (circa AD 320 – AD 760). With the publication of the book it was welcomed by the academic world as a major contribution in the field on account of the wealth of fresh data collected from the
epigraphic records found in different parts of North Bengal, such as Dāmodarpur, Dhanāidaha and Bāigrama. Most of these land grants belonging to the Imperial Gupta family were edited by Basak himself. Some hitherto unknown facts, which the epigraphic records have furnished, have been presented by Basak in his work:

1. The entire province of Puṣṇdravardhan was included in the Gupta Empire;
2. Budhagupta ruled for a long period and held his sway not only over western part of India but also over a large part of North Eastern India;
3. The Imperial Gupta dynasty continued to rule at least up to the first quarter of the sixth century AD, through a succession of three or four more rulers after Skandagupta;
4. The district officer (Vizayapati) under the provincial governor himself appointed by the Gupta monarch was assisted in the district administration by an advisory board consisting of the Nāgaraśeṣhīpī (president of the town guild of bankers), the Sārthavāha (representative of the merchant class), the Kulika (representative of the artisan class) and the Prathama Kāyastha (chief scribe, the head of government officials).

Besides, in Basak’s work we may find the treatment of the history of the Śailodbhava kings of Orissa and that of early Lichchavi rulers of Nepal. Theories seeking to identify king Susthitavarman of the Later Gupta dynasty mentioned in the Apsadas inscription with his namesake of Kāmarūpa and king Devavarman of Vaṅga-Samatatā with Devagupta of the Later Gupta dynasty deserve mention in this connection. Again, Basak for the first time has written a connected history of Vaṅga-Samatatā from the earliest time to about the middle of the eighth century AD. He has also attempted to make a dispassionate assessment of the career of the Guṇḍa King Saśānka in the light of the facts gathered from the Buddhist text Āryamañjuśī mālakaṁpa.

In the concluding part of the work, Basak has touched upon the growing renovation of Brahmanism under the patronage of the Guptas, royal patronage to all kinds of fine arts in the Gupta period, the progress of science under the Gupta rule, the
Gupta provincial system and the land system under the Imperial Guptas. According to him, after the downfall of the Guptas Northern India suffered from social and religious disorder, when the orthodox Brahmanic culture and cults received a setback, probably due to the spread of the Mahāyāna Buddhism. However, “all the special economic, social, political, and religious features that marked the Gupta period were preserved with slight modifications here and there, by the kings and the people of the next two centuries (that is after the downfall of the Gupta Empire) in all the North Eastern provinces”.

The composition of the Indian village community with its firm faith in the Brahmanical rites and rituals, that we find in the Gupta period, continues in Bengal to the present day according to Basak.

R.G. Basak’s contribution to the history of ancient Bengal includes his editing of Sandhyākara Nandi’s Rāmcharita. He collaborated with Rameshchandra Majumdar and Pandit Nanigopal Bandopadhayay in publishing a critical edition along with the original text and its English translation in 1939. The Rāmcharita was published with a Bengali rendering together with the original text in 1953. It was published by the Asiatic Society in 1972 with commentaries on the verses and English translation of the entire text. The Rāmcharita was first edited by Haraprasad Sastri and published by the Asiatic Society in 1910. Sastri only provided commentaries on thirty-five verses from the first and the second chapter of the Rāmcharita. But in 1939, Basak, Majumdar and Bandopadhayay provided Sanskrit commentary on the remaining part of the text along with English translation of the entire text. Basak’s edition of the text, enriched by perceptive and informative ‘Introduction’ has facilitated the task of collecting historical and cultural materials from it. The Rāmcharita throws light on the history of the Pālas from the time of Mahipāla II to that of Madanapāla.

In the new edition of the Rāmcharita brought out jointly by Basak and Majumdar certain suggestion and interpretations have been offered, of which the more important ones are given below:

1. The incomplete commentary is not by Sandhyākara Nandi himself, the author of the text;
2. Brihadvaṭu, taken as an adjective by the late Haraprasad Sastri, is to be regarded as the name of a village near the city of Puṇḍravardhana;

3. The treaty concluded by Vigrahapāla with the Chedi King Karna of Dhāhala is given the technical name Kapālasandhi, the terms of which required payment of a large sum of money to the victor by the conquered enemy;

4. Rāmapāla was not Vigrahapāla’s son by his queen Yauvanāśrī, as his maternal uncle was Mahāṇa;

5. Mahāmāṇḍalika Kānharadeva and Suvarṇadeva were the two sons of Mathana or Mahāṇa, and Mahāpratihāra Sivarāja was his brother’s son;

6. The Manahali copper plate of Madanapāla contains a verse which bears a veiled allusion to the relations between Rāmapāla and Divya, meaning that “Rāmapāla though provoked and shaken (in mind) by the excessive disturbances caused by the subjects of Divya, remained patient,” from which the inference is to be drawn that “...Divya not content with what he had already achieved by killing Mahipāla carried on campaigns against Rāmapāla and was largely successful in his operations (Intro., xxiv);

7. Aṅga was conquered from Jātavarmāṇ before the launching of the expedition against the Kaivartta chief Bhima and was ruled by Mahāṇa;

8. The statement in verse III, 24, which refers to the Pāla kingdom as preventing the ‘accession of strength or power to Madhyadeśa’ applies to the achievement connected with the defeat inflicted by Bhimayāsas on Kānyakubja;

9. Bhima, who after his defeat was imprisoned by Rāmapāla, was put in charge of his son Vītpāla by whom he was leniently treated, but as the prisoner was found carrying on intrigues with Hari, his elder brother’s son (arka-bhū). he was ultimately put to a cruel death;

10. Rāmapāla conquered Kāmarūpa with the help of an ally, whose name was not Māyana, as suggested by Haraprasad Sastri;

11. The Varman king of Eastern India, who came into contact with Rāmapāla, was either Bhojavarmāṇ of the Belava inscription or Harivarman of the Bhuvanesvari Praśasti;

12. Verse IV, 12, of the text appears to hint at Gopāla III’s ‘premature and unnatural death’ while encountering either an elephant or a crocodile (the verse to be
translated as follows: Even his, that is, Kumārapāla’s son, named Gopāla met with
his death as the result of his efforts to exterminate enemies. The death of this ill-
disciplined person, who was the killer of the chief of the elephant force, occurred
under the influence of time);
13. Chandra, an ally of Madanapāla, during a crisis confronting the latter’s kingdom
(IV, 23), is not to be identified with the Gāhadavāla king of that name, but to be
regarded as the son of Suvarṇadeva and grandson of Mahānā;
14. Madanapāla destroyed a ruler named Govardhana;
15. A pitched battle took place on the banks of the river Kalindi in Madanapāla’s
reign. The two editors have also taken pains to expose the real character of the
revolt of Divya, which was not a popular movement of unrest as suggested by
several scholars.

DINESHCHANDRA SEN: BṛHAT VAÑGA

We have already considered Dineshchandra Sen’s contribution in the form of
Bṛgabhāṣa O Sāhitya that has a position of its own in the historiography of Bengal.
In addition, it would be reasonable to discuss his another contribution entitled Bṛhat
Vaṅga published in 1935. The book written in Bengali appeared in two parts and
accommodated the history of Bengal from the earliest times to the battle of Plassey.
An attempt has been made to present a comprehensive history of Bengal, an effort has
been made to give an account—political, social, religious and literary, as also an
account of plastic art and pictorial art, of ‘Bṛhat Vaṅga’, that is, ‘Greater Bengal’,
which is made to correspond to the concept of Pañcha Gauḍa. In fact, the account
contained in the book is that of North Eastern India excluding Orissa. At the end of
the work there are Appendices giving short historical description of some individual
kingdoms and tracts of Eastern India, such as Tippera, Prāgjyotisā (Assam),
Coochbehar, Kāchār, Sylhet, Medinipur, Vana-Vishnupur, Bhulua, Sundarvan etc. In
his lengthy Introduction of the first part the author furnishes an explanation of the
objective and methodology of the entire work. In the second part, there are two
exhaustive indices, the first one containing the names and words, and the second is
that of illustrations.
As to the title Bṛhad Vañgā. Dineshchandra tells us in his Introduction that he has borrowed the nomenclature from the expression Bṛhad Vañgā occurring in the text of Gwalior Prāsasti as published by Hirananda Sastri in the Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India for 1903-04. But, in fact, the reading of Hirananda Sastri was later on rectified as Bṛhad Vaṁśān. Besides, Dineshchandra’s survey of Bṛhad Vañgā in the sense of the whole of North Eastern India is limited within the Gupta period only; the rest of the work practically deals with Bengal in particular. Since the publication of Rakhaldas’s Bāṅgalā Itihasa, hitherto the latest book on the subject, a lot of fresh materials for the construction of the history of Bengal came to light. Dineshchandra might have incorporated into his book those materials to fill up the gaps in the history of Bengal, particularly in the early and early-medieval periods. On the other hand, the author has given more attention to make an experiment of how far the myths, traditions, legends, folklores, chronicles, popular sayings and the like prevalent in Bengal could be of use to throw light on the cultural history of Bengal. But, those materials were not tested and verified on scientific lines before making their use for constructing history.

Nalininath Dasgupta in his review of Bṛhad Vañgā has pointed out the mistakes and the loopholes in the account given by Dineshchandra, although, there is a little difference of opinion among the scholars regarding the high standard of treatment in respect of Bengali literature and art. In Dineshchandra’s Introduction we may find references to the important topics which the author has dealt with, such as similarity between Ceylonese and Bengali language (pp. 65-67), Jainism and Buddhism (pp. 128-152), Nābya Nyāya and Sāmī (pp. 353-371), Buddhist monasteries (pp.300-304), Tol of Navadvipa (pp.346-352), Bengal’s mathematics, muslin, silk (pp. 568-589), agricultural science, Saiva, Sākta, Saura and Vaiṣṇava religion (p.579), Tantra texts, Sahajiyā, paintings of Maskaris (pp.430, 666, 888-892), conch-trade (p.928), Kulinism (p.596) and fine arts. In addition he has also provided discussions on Dipaṅkar, Jaydev, Mahāprabhu Chaitanya and his followers. Thus, he has touched various aspects of the history of Bengali culture. In this connection his statement is quite significant:
There is no such subject which I have not touched upon. I have not excluded any historical legend or popular story, irrespective of their values: they have been recorded in a befitting manner and brought under consideration of readers. For, at the beginning of the reconstruction of the history of the country, even sources of trivial importance have some value: nothing is negligible. What is considered to be unimportant today might be important in the light of new discovery tomorrow.\textsuperscript{65}

The reviewer of the book has criticised thus:

Miserably lacking that sober restraint of emotion, and that spirit of judicious caution and analysis, which are the most essential qualities of a historian. he has hopelessly failed to attach to his book any scientific value.\textsuperscript{66}

Probably in anticipation of such criticism, Dineshchandra has not claimed any credit for the book at all. He has stated:

In this case, I have no claim to sharp intellect or talent. I only deserve the wage of a daily labourer. I shall be obliged if the book of mine is just considered to be a footstool for future historians.\textsuperscript{67}

**PRAMODE LAL PAUL: EARLY HISTORY OF BENGAL**

Pramode Lal Paul's contributions to the reconstruction of the history of ancient Bengal were published in the form of learned papers in different volumes of the *Indian Culture*, the *Indian Historical Quarterly* and other periodicals. His book entitled *Early History of Bengal*, volume I and II, were published in 1939 and 1940 respectively. In volume I, the author has given the outline of the political history from the earliest times to the Muslim conquest. The chapters in this volume are the following:
Chapter I: From the Earliest Times to the Gupta Period.
Chapter II: From the Fall of the Guptas to the Rise of the Pālas.
Chapter III & IV: The Pāla Dynasty.
Chapter V: Independent Dynasties in Vaṅga and Rādhā.
Chapter VI: The Sena Dynasty.
Chapter VII: Administrative System.

In the Appendices the author has discussed the Pāla chronology, Sena chronology, Lakṣmaṇasena Era and doubtful invasion of Bengal.

Within the small span of the book (158 pages), the author has sincerely attempted to carefully use the available materials. Rameshchandra Majumdar in his Foreword has stated:

It undoubtedly marks a distinct advance over the existing books on the subject.

The second volume of Early History of Bengal deals with cultural and social history. The following are the chapters:

Chapters VIII: Literature, Learned Men and Centres of Learning.
Chapter IX: Social Condition.
Chapter X & XI: Religious Condition.
Chapter XII: Art and Architecture.

The topics discussed in four Appendices are authorities, different gānis, coinage, the Gauḍas and Gauḍa.

Within a short span of 136 pages, the author has attempted to do justice to the cultural and social history of Bengal. The dearth of materials seems to have been keenly felt by the author and that explains why he was compelled to sketch an outline of either political history or socio-cultural history. There is no doubt about the fact
that Pramode Lal Paul is the first historian to make an attempt to write a comprehensive history of Bengal. Previously, works were produced on the political history of ancient Bengal, but none of the previous historians touched upon the administrative system, the society and culture. The foundation for such a history was being laid by the researchers in different fields of archaeology, anthropology, linguistics, literature and fine arts. But so long no historian came forward before Pramode Lal Paul to collect and collate those results of investigations upon the history of ancient Bengal. It is for this reason that Pramode Lal Paul’s *Early History of Bengal* has to be recognised as “a pioneer in social and cultural history of Bengal” 68. From this point of view, it is unreasonable for us to assume that the second volume of *Early History of Bengal* is more valuable than its first one. Because, he has very little to contribute to the political history except accommodating new materials discovered since the publication of *Bāṅgalā Itihāsa* of Rakhaladas Bandopadhyay.

**SUKUMAR SEN: BĀṅGŁĀ SĀHYTÝER ITIHĀSA**

Since the publication of Dineshchandra’s *Baṅgbhāṣa O Sāhitya* a new stream has been added to the historiography of Bengal. This work appeared in revised and enlarged forms in edition after edition and thus brought out the history of Bengali literature in a new light at each stage. Sukumar Sen’s *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihāsa* (*History* of Bengali Literature), volume I, was published in 1940 and replaced Dineshchandra’s work as a more dependable guide to the history of society and culture as reflected in the origin and development of Bengali literature. Whereas Dineshchandra’s literary emotionalism has outweighed the historian’s dispassionate objectivity in many places, in Sukumar Sen’s work an attempt to place the history of literature in accordance with the chronological order on the over-all pattern of general history is very clear.

In his *Upakramaṇīkā* (Introduction) to the first volume of *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihāsa*, Sukumar Sen has traced the evolution of Bengali language from the Eastern *Avahāṭṭa* derived from *Māgadhī Prākṛti*. In the second chapter, the author has shown to what extent Sanskrit language and literature flourished in Bengal before the origin of the Bengali language. In the third chapter, it has been shown how *Avahāṭṭa*
language was used by the poets to compose their religious and mystic songs. The fourth chapter is devoted to the discussion on *Charyāgīśi* that was composed in old Bengali language. According to Sukumar Sen, since the Turkish invasion in the beginning of the thirteenth century AD to about the middle of the fifteenth century AD the literary development of the Bengali language remained arrested, after which literary development was in progress under the patronage of the Iliyas Shahi dynasty.

The Bengali literature in the pre-Mohammedan period had its development in three phases, namely, Buddhist, Brahmanical and Secular. On the basis of this development, Sukumar Sen has made an analysis of the socio-cultural development during this period in the fifth chapter of the first volume of *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihaśa*. According to him, the Aryan culture in Eastern India had its own characteristic form. After the downfall of the Maurya Empire, the cultural dominance of Madhyadeśa gradually increased, and under the Gupta rule, almost the whole of India was conquered by Sanskrit Sastric injunctions. In Bengal also, since the time of the Guptas, Vedic Brahmanism began to establish its predominance. The Brāhmaṇas were brought from Madhyadeśa and were granted lands liberally for settlement. At the advent of the neo-Brāhmaṇas, the older Brāhmaṇas were transformed into *Varṇa Brāhmaṇas* or were mixed with the non-Brāhmaṇa castes. The Brāhmaṇas entitled to enjoy and administer the *agrahāras* gradually developed their separate *gānīs* and were, in no time, occupied social leadership. They also were employed in royal service and taking shelter in the royal court spread the rites, rituals and religious beliefs in accordance with the *Śāstras* among the people belonging to the upper stratum of the society. The stories contained in the Epic and Purāṇas were made popular by the Brāhmaṇas from the royal court. The rites and rituals and worship of divinities prevalent among the common people were entirely social in character. The new Brāhmaṇas gave patronage to Viṣṇu, Śiva and Chaṇḍi as family deities. The worship of village deities was accompanied by the performance of dance and songs. The theme of those songs was the glorification of the gods and goddesses. Such songs were known as *Ākṣhyāyikā Gīti*. Therefore, from the point of view of literature, three trends were discernible:
1. The songs that used to be sung among the group of spiritual devotees (Charyāgūṭi) and poems made for counselling (dohā chaḍā);
2. The Puranic stories composed by the educated poets of royal court (the stories are found in the poetry, drama and stray poems), songs originating from darbār or the court;
3. Ākṣhyāyikā Kāvya (Pañchālikā) that was based upon the glorification of gods and goddesses and was often sung by the common people.

According to Sukumar Sen ⁷¹, there was no religious sectarianism in polity, society, village or group (goḍhā). There was hardly any division among the Hindus and Buddhists, or among the Jainas, Saivas, Vaiṣṇavas. However, on the eve of Turkish invasion there were four main religious faiths prevalent in Bengal:

1. Worship of indigenous ancient traditional village gods and goddesses (those included Vedic and Puranic deities and also others);
2. A distinguished local form of Mahāyāna form of Buddhism;
3. The religion of the Yogis(it had connection with Saivism);
4. Puranic, Brahmanism (in which Viṣṇu, Siva, and Sakti were recognized as main divinities.

Within two-three centuries after the Muslim occupation of Bengal those four types of religious faiths were merged with each other and out of them emerged two main trends which are found reflected in literature. Those two trends are: Paurāṇic (that is, new comer, or based upon newly brought Sāstras) and A-paurāṇic (ancient, indigenous and traditional). The differences between gods and goddesses were gradually abolished ⁷².

Therefore, as a result of Brahmanisation in Bengal during the Gupta period two strata in the society emerged: those who were new comers and recognized as cultured and those who were older and were recognized as indigenous. There was no restriction in respect of inter-marriage and inter-dinning in between these two classes.
But still, an unseen difference between the two in respect of aristocracy, wealth, education and culture continued to remain. The Brāhmaṇas from Madhyadeśa were not many, when they first settled in Bengal. But their number gradually increased for various reasons. The new comer Brāhmaṇas and their followers used to stick to Sanskrit, whereas old Brāhmaṇas as well as non-Brāhmaṇas took to Prākrit as their language and were hardly faithful to a definite religious faith. Many of them were followers of Jainism, Buddhism or Yogic way. The new comers were intellectuals, faithful to the Sāstric ideals, devoted to the sacrifices, seekers after truth and well disciplined. On the other hand, the indigenous traditional, ancient group were believers in fatalism, practised vows (brata) and were energetic in implementation of work-plan, lovers of imaginative thinking, very much interested in the pleasure derived from music and literature and quite faithful to spiritualism. The divinities worshipped by these two groups were also known by their characteristic features. For instance, Śiva, the god of the believers in the Sāstras, that is, the new comers, was the greatest yogī, lord of Śatī and husband of Umā, but as the god of the indigenous, ancient section taking pleasure in imagination, He was the most forgetful one addicted to different types of narcotics and engaged in affairs with women of the lower rank of the society. Again Kṛṣṇa, belonging to the first stratum, was the killer of Putanā, holder of Govardhana mount, killer of Kaṁsa and the central figure of the Mahābhārata, and as the god of the second stratum. He was lover of sporting with hundreds of milkmaids and as well as obstinate Gopāla. Further, goddess Chaṇḍī, worshipped by the first stratum was the killer of demons Chaṇḍa-Muṇḍa and Maḥiśāsura, but as the goddess of the second stratum, she was the protectress of the wild animals and quarrelsome consort of Śiva. No god or goddess like Īndra and Maṇasā, belonging to the second stratum, was ever promoted to the first stratum. The trends of culture represented by the two strata of the Bengali society underwent amalgamation at the shock of the Turkish invasion and that led to the flourish of Bengali literature.

The analysis as given above reflects a deep insight into the socio-cultural trends in Bengal in the light of an analytical study of Bengali literature from the origin.
of the Bengali language to its transformation into a mature form in the fourteenth century.

**BENOY CHANDRA SEN:**

**SOME HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF THE INSCRIPTIONS OF BENGAL**

Benoy Chandra Sen's *Some Historical Aspects of the Inscriptions of Bengal* was published in 1942. Although the author has laid emphasis on the epigraphic data, he has also taken into account the diverse materials gathered from various sources. Therefore, it would be rather an injustice to say, "the subject matter of the work is clear from the very title of the book". The author has divided the book into three different parts: Geography, Political or Dynastic History and Administration:

In his own words:

> The underlying unity in the treatment of the data, utilised in the work, is due to the fact that an intelligible account of the political transaction of the country from earliest times demands a precise determination of the constituent geographical factors, as well as the different part of the machinery of the government through which sovereign powers were exercised.

In part I is included the Geography of Bengal that includes the following chapters:

1. Bengal in the Ancient Indian Tradition.
2. The Geography of Bengal (from the 4th century BC to the 2nd century AD) from Greek and Latin Sources.
3. Classified Geographical data in respect of Eastern Bengal, including part of Southern Bengal, North Bengal and some unsolved Geographical Problems such as location of Vārakamaṇḍala in any subdivision of the Province of Bengal.

It may be mentioned in this connection that in the section on Bengal in Ancient Indian Tradition the author has examined some leading theories on Bengal
ethnology and the process of Aryanisation leading finally to the inclusion of Bengal in Aryandom. Besides, while giving an account of the geographical divisions he has tested the exact significance of different nomenclatures given to different divisions of Bengal, such as Rādhā, Vaṅga, Puṇḍra etc.

Part II of the book that deals with Political and Dynastic History includes the following eleven chapters:

1. Glimpses into the Political History of Bengal from the Earliest Times to the 3rd century AD.
3. Under the Imperial Guptas.
4. The So-called Later Guptas and some Local Rulers.
5. An Age of Frustration.
6. The Pāla Dynasty and the end of Mālsyanayāya.
7. Dharmapāla and the Epoch of Digvijaya.
8. Devpāla and a Renewed Attempt at Imperial Expansion.
10. The Pāla Dynasty after Mahipāla.
11. The Sena Rulers of Bengal.

From the above chapterisation it appears that the focus is on the political or the dynastic history of Bengal in order to indicate the changes in the political fortunes of the people living in the country. It has been pointed out by the author that the chapters on the political history, like those on the geography is not based exclusively on the materials furnished by the inscriptions of Bengal. Secondly, he has also informed his readers:

Bengal never stood isolated from India; its political happenings and developments were naturally interrelated to the general course of events outside its own frontiers. 76
In this connection, we are reminded of the same point of view upheld by Rakhaldaya Bandopadhyay in his Bangal Itihasa. It has rightly been pointed out by the reviewer of the book that Benoychandra has discussed the historical aspects of the inscriptions not of Bengal only as the modest title of the book may suggest.

Although Benoychandra has written the political history of Bengal from the earliest times (that is, sixth century BC) to the third century AD, he feels that "lack of reliable evidence must make the reconstruction of pre-Mauryan history not only incomplete but suspect and defective". He thinks that "practically the whole narrative down to the advent of the Imperial Guptas consists in a series of inferences and probabilities." In fact, the earliest epigraphic record is the Mahasthan fragmentary stone inscription generally assigned to third century BC on palaeographic grounds and after a long gap the Susuni rock inscription was discovered and assigned to the fourth century AD. It seems that this wide gap in the availability of the epigraphic data has made the author uncomfortable. Because, he seems to have belonged to the school of Rakhaldaya Banerjee and did not consider any source other than inscriptions dependable. Even regarding the Mahasthan inscription the author has a reservation. His expression "if it is a genuine one" is significant. This critical attitude to the available source has been commented upon by the reviewer thus:

The author is cautious to the point of forbidding his judgment to be moved through dearth of absolutely dependable data to seek succour from constructive imagination. This attitude is responsible for some unimaginative criticism of constructive theories put forward by others.

However, chapter II entitled On the Eve of Gupta Imperialism is very interesting as it indicates a transition and change in the political history of Bengal from the time of the Kušānas to that of the Guptas. From Chapter III onwards, the author has found little difficulty in acquiring data from the dependable source of inscriptions. The historical aspects of those inscriptions has been discussed with "ruthless thoroughness and put to maximum utilization". In chapter IV, the author has examined the political position of Bengal in the background of Later Gupta-Maukhari
struggle for supremacy in North India and ultimately attainment of an independent status of Eastern Bengal along with some parts of West Bengal under the rule of the kings known from the Faridpur copper plate grants. Chapter V deals with the political history of Bengal from the close of the sixth to the middle of the eight century AD. During this period Ṣaśāṅka rose to power as the ruler of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and also for sometime, made Gaucā the center of North Indian politics. Although the reign of Ṣaśāṅka was followed by a period of anarchy and chaos, the entire period dealt with in the chapter can hardly be called as the age of frustration. Because, with the rise of Ṣaśāṅka, as it has been shown by scholars later on, Bengal definitely moved to a position of pre-eminence that was never dreamt of before. We have hardly anything to comment on the remaining chapters dealing with the history of the Palas and the Senas. But it seems that little justice has been done to the Varmanas and the Chandras who ruled for a long time in East Bengal and whose history has not been separately dealt with, although they have been properly placed in the genealogical tables provided in the Introduction.

Perhaps the reviewer of the book is justified in making the following statement:

The bulk of the book is devoted to political chronometry, but its third and concluding part dealing with administration under the Pālas and the Senas will prove interesting and stimulating also to the uninitiated.

In the above statement there are two points, which deserve consideration. Firstly, the question may be reasonably raised whether the political or dynastic history of a country in an almost definite chronological framework should be considered as 'chronometry' only. Secondly, the reviewer has perhaps forgotten to mention that the concluding part of the book not only deals with the Pāla-Sena administration but also the administration of the pre-Pāla period. The reviewer should have explained why the part dealing with administration would prove interesting and stimulating. In this connection it should be pointed out that the theme of the two chapters in part III was also published in the form of learned papers in the pages of the Indian Culture. It shows that the author devoted his attention to the administration of Bengal for a pretty
long time. Because, the administrative history does show not only the nature of central, provincial and local administration, but also throws welcome light on the socio-economic and cultural condition of the people that used to be controlled, monitored and supervised by the state through its far flung bureaucracy. That is the reason why the chapters on the administration of Bengal have proved to be more interesting and stimulating in comparison with those of political history.

Batakrishna Ghosh, the reviewer of the book, has done justice to Benoychandra Sen when he has referred to his work as “a source book of history”. But Ghosh seems to have taken a false step when he has firmly opined that Benoychandra “could not afford to concede to Clio” 83. Prabodhchandra Sen seems to be more liberal when he has considered Benoychandra’s work not only as a source book but also as interpretative work, which facilitates the writing of continuous history 84. He thinks that this book has made the task easier for future historians by eradicating many complications. The question remains whether Prabodhchandra Sen has visualised a continuous history of Bengal meant for general readers and beginners. Because, what he has called an interpretative work appears to be essential for advanced students and researchers in the field of Bengal history. However, Prabodhchandra Sen is quite justified in making the following statement:

The time or opportunity to assess the actual value of this book or its proper utilisation is yet to come. 85

TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY OF BENGAL

The Dacca University took the initiative of launching a scheme for a history of Bengal in 1935 86. It was at first decided that The History should be divided into three volumes:

Volume 1: The Hindu Period
Volume 2: Pre-Mughal Period (1200-1576 AD)
Volume 3: **Mughal Period (1576-1757 AD)**

While Rameshchandra Majumdar was entrusted the task of the first volume, Jadunath Sarkar was requested to edit the remaining two volumes. The volumes were so designed that contributions on different aspects of the history of Bengal could be invited from the experts in the respective fields. So, this was to be a collective endeavour of many scholars, all of them being not necessarily professional historians. The result of this scheme was published under the editorship of Rameshchandra Majumdar bearing the title *History of Bengal*, volume 1, Hindu period in 1943. The volume is edited on the model of the *Cambridge Ancient History*, as it has been claimed by the editor himself. But the Cambridge Historians are known to have divided the Indian history into three periods, namely, ancient, medieval and modern. It is not quite clear whether the Hindu period stands for ancient period. Rather, the treatment of the subjects in the *History* seems to indicate that the editor has in his view the pre-Sultanate period. But it is expected from a volume like this that the reader should derive a clear idea of the ancient period of Bengal. But the fact remains that in this volume one finds ancient and early-medieval period juxtaposed together in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other.

**EDITOR'S NOTE: A REVIEW**

However, from the **Preface** as found in the beginning by the editor we are provided with some relevant data in respect of the characteristics of the *History*. Firstly, it has been said, "in view of the present state of our knowledge any exposition of the ancient Bengal must be regarded provisional". There is no doubt about the fact that new evidence in continually and rapidly accumulating, and therefore, any work done at a certain point of time should be regarded as merely a precursor of similar works to be written in future. The editor only claims that he has only laid the foundation on which more competent hands will build a suitable structure in future. Secondly, the topics like art and religion, social and economic conditions, law and administration had been so far studied with reference to ancient India as a whole. But a regional study of those subjects, within the limits of the territory of Bengal, had not yet been seriously taken
up by any competent scholar. Therefore, faults of both omission and commission
seem to have been almost inevitable. In this connection, we may observe that many
contemporary scholars were engaged in specialised branches of study like
anthropology, linguistics, art, religion, society, economy and administration. Some of
their works were quite well known and those studies had a definite bearing upon the
history and culture of Bengal. Therefore, it is difficult to subscribe to the view of theeditor that the non-political history of Bengal was an untrodden field till 1943.
Thirdly, it has been pointed out by the editor that in writing the history of Bengal theeditor has strictly confined himself to the data definitely applicable to the
geographical limits of Bengal. Any deviation from this rule has been duly noted.
The question may be raised whether it is possible to study the history of Bengal in
isolation without reference to the Indian background. It has been claimed that an
attempt has been made to make the treatment as detached and scientific as possible.
In case of dearth of materials, the editor has preferred to leave a void rather than fill
up the gap with imaginary hypotheses. On this ground many interesting and important
topics have either been left out or treated imperfectly. The detached and scientific
treatment of the history of Bengal that we find in the present volume has made it the
most dependable history of Bengal.

CHAPTERISATION

The chapterisation in the *History of Bengal* deserves our attention.

Chapter I: Physical and Historical Geography

It includes physical aspects, references to ancient tribes of Bengal in the Later Vedic
texts, Epics, *Dharmaśāstras*, Pāli texts and also in some ancient literary texts of the
historic period, and also the historical geography giving an account of ancient
janapadas of Bengal. Besides, there are administrative divisions and cities of ancient
Bengal.

Chapter II: The Legendary Period
It introduces us to the primitive people inhabiting Bengal and the process of Aryanisation in Bengal in which the legendary heroes, known from the Epics, played their significant role.

Chapter III: Early History from 326 BC to 320 AD
In this chapter an account has been given of the position of Bengal in the Classical Literature with special emphasis upon the ancient people of the Gangetic delta known as the Gangaridai. An outline of the history from the Maurya period to the beginning of the Gupta period follows.

Chapter IV: Rise of Gauḍa and Vaṅga
In this chapter, the origin, extent and duration of the Gupta rule in Bengal are considered. It is shown how the decline of the Gupta Imperialism led to the rise of independent kingdoms in Samatata or Vaṅga. This trend in the history of Bengal ultimately led to the rise of Śaśāṅka as an independent king of Gauḍa.

Chapter V: Political Disintegration after Śaśāṅka
In this chapter, we find discussion on the political chaos and anarchy in Gauḍa and Vaṅga between the middle of the seventh and the middle of the eighth century AD.

Chapter VI: The Pālas
The chapter contains an account of the Pālas from their origin to their downfall.

Chapter VII: Minor Independent Kingdoms During the Pāla Period
This chapter incorporates the history of the Chandras and Varmaṇs who ruled in East and Southern Bengal.

Chapter VIII: The Senas
It begins with the origin of the Sena kings and ends with Lakṣmaṇasena’s successors.

Chapter IX: Minor Ruling Dynasties during the Sena Period
This chapter includes an account of the Deva dynasty, the kingdoms of Paṭṭikerā and Pithi and the Minor Gupta dynasty.

Chapter X: Administration
It gives us an account of Pre-Gupta, Gupta and Pāla-Sena administration.

Chapter XI: Sanskrit Literature
The history of Sanskrit literature in Bengal is shown to have begun from the pre-Gupta period and continued till the Sena period.
Chapter XII: Rise of Vernacular Literature

In this chapter the origin of the Bengal language has been traced. The development of Bengali is traced in three phases; namely, Buddhist, Brahmanical and secular.

Chapter XIII: Religion

This chapter is divided into two sections; that is, section I- Development of Religions Ideas and section II- Iconography. Section I considers Brahmanical and Puranic religion, Jainism and Buddhism. Section II gives an iconographic, description of the Vaisnava, Saiva, Sākta and Saura images as well as Jaina and Buddhist images found in Bengal.

Chapter XIV: Architecture, Sculpture and Painting

The section on architecture includes stūpa architecture, monastic architecture, temple architecture and architectural members. The section on sculpture deals with the history of sculpture from the pre-Gupta period to the end of the Sena period with special emphasis on the evolution of style from AD 700 to AD 1200. Again, the section on painting includes early East Indian painting, composition and style, artistic conceptions and resemblance to West Indian specimens.

Chapter XV: Society

It begins with ethnological background and Aryanisation giving emphasis upon the position of the castes and sub-castes. The socio-religions rites, ceremonies and festivals and the daily life of the people are also discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the distinguishing feature of Bengali culture that developed in the background of separate geographical and political units and their linguistic affinities. Art and literature of Bengal as also its national festivals, it is said, distinguished Bengali culture from that of other provinces.

Chapter XVI: Economic Condition

With an introductory on rural and urban settlements, an attempt has been made in this chapter to give an account of land tenures, agriculture, measures of land, craft and industries, inland and foreign trade and medium of exchange.

Chapter XVII: Bengalis outside Bengal

The chapter is divided into two sections.

Section I: Activities of Bengalis outside India.

Section II: Activities of Bengalis in India outside Bengal.
In section I is considered the role of the Bengalis in overseas colonies and the missionary activities of the Bengalis in Tibet. Section II includes the activities of the Bengalis in the sphere of administration, religious and literary activities in India outside Bengal. Special attention has been drawn to the role of Gauḍa Karanā-Kāyasthas in different kingdoms of India like those of the Chāhamānas and the Kalachuris.

There are some Appendices appended with some chapters. Some controversial issues have been sorted out in those Appendices in order to make the original chapters free from controversies and complications. For instance, in Appendix I of chapter IV, we find a discussion on the controversy regarding the original home of the Guptas in Bengal and in Appendix II of the same chapter the controversy regarding Śaśānka’s betrayal with Rājayavardhan is discussed. Again, in Appendix I of chapter V the question of involvement of the Tibetan kings in North Indian politics in general and in the affairs of Bengal in particular is discussed. In Appendices II of the same chapter, it has been examined whether the lord of Magadha mentioned in the Prākrit Kāva Gauḍavaho was identical with the king of Gauḍa. In Appendix I of chapter VI, a list of Pāla inscriptions has been provided. Of course, the list is incomplete in the present state of our knowledge. This is quite evident from the epigraphic records mentioned in the Pāla-Sena Yuger Varisānucharita. In Appendix II of the same chapter, the controversy regarding the Pāla chronology is discussed, highlighting the difference of opinion between R.C. Majumdar and R.D. Benerjee. In Appendix III of the above chapter, an assessment of the value of Lāmā Tāranāth’s account of Bengal is made. In Appendix IV, the controversy regarding the relationship between Devapāla and his successor Vigrāhapāla is discussed. In Appendix V, the difference of opinion regarding the identity of king Rājyapāla of the Irdā copper plate with the well-known Pāla king of that name is discussed. In fact, the object of this discussion is to show that King Rājyapāla of the Irdā copper plate belonged to the Kāmboja family. Further, in Appendix I of chapter VIII, the controversies regarding the origin of the Lakṣmanasena Era and the Sena chronology in general are discussed. In this connection Rakhaldas’s view has been put to criticism. In Appendix II of the same chapter, the authenticity of the two texts of the Vallālacharita, one edited by
Haraprasad Sastri and the other by Harishchandra Kabiratna, is discussed. In Appendix III of the same chapter, the historical value of Minhajuddin's account in respect of the Turkish invasion of Bengal during the reign of Lakṣmaṇasena has been discussed. In Appendix III, the historical value of the traditional accounts of the later Sena kings of Bengal as found in the Rājāvāli, Tāranāth's account and the Vallālacharita is reexamined. In Appendix V, an attempt has been made to identify the capital of the Sena kings in the background of difference of opinion among scholars in this regard. In Appendices A, B, C and D of chapter V, the lists of officials are provided. Again, there are some Appendices of chapter XV that deals with society. In Appendix I, the historical value of the Kulajī texts, the historicity of king Ādiśūra and the controversy regarding Kulinism have been discussed. In Appendix II, the lists of gāmis of the Rādhīya and Vārendra Brāhmaṇas are provided from the Kulajī. In Appendix III, the funeral rites and ceremonies as observed by Brāhmaṇas belonging to the different branches of the Vedas is discussed, the starting point of the discussion emerging from Aniruddhabhaṭṭa's Pitṛdayitā and Hāralata where the method of cremation followed by the Sāma Vedic Brāhmaṇas is given.

**EXPECTATIONS FROM A COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY OF BENGAL**

There is no doubt that the Appendices of the chapters are instructive for future researchers and historians. As it has been claimed by the editor in his Preface, The History of Bengal, volume I should have laid the foundation of a suitable structure to be constructed by future historians. But an expectation from such a co-operative endeavour has been belied to a great extent, although the editor has attempted to silence the critics by his arguments in favour of “omissions and commissions”. It was Pramode Lal Paul who began his work with an account of ancient janapadas of Bengal in his introduction and the volume under discussion also begins with a threadbare discussion on the janapadas in ancient Bengal in addition to the geographical and physical aspects of the country. The physical geography is closely associated with the natural resources of a country, and geology leads us to the discussion on mineral wealth of the country concerned. Mere description of the river system does not probably put before us a true profile of a country. Even if it was not
possible in chapter I, the chapter on economic conditions (chapter XVI) should have included a discussion in the beginning on the natural resources and the mineral wealth, if any, which generally form the foundation of both agrarian and commercial economy.

Secondly, our expectation is again belied when we do not find any chapter on the pre and proto-history of Bengal. That might have provided us with a background in which the original inhabitants of Bengal began and developed their socio-economic and cultural life. The editor probably realized the necessity of including the Pre-historic age and that is why, it occurs in his History of Ancient Bengal (Calcutta: 1971; chapter II) published much later.

Thirdly, archaeology and anthropology are two recognised tools for reconstructing the early history of the country. But we do not find any separate chapter on the races and tribes of Bengal that might have provided us with a satisfactory reply to the question regarding the origin of the Bengalees. The territorial division (the janapadas) seems to have been inhabited by different tribes belonging to races more than one. But in connection with ancient janapadas of Bengal no attempt is known to have been explicitly made to explain the position of those janapadas in relation to the tribes like Pundras, Rādhās, Sūhmas, Vaṅgas etc. It is difficult to understand why without entering into this essential discussion the chapter on the janapadas is concluded with a detailed description of the administrative division, which could have been at the beginning of the chapter on administration.

Fourthly, in addition to archaeology and anthropology, linguistics or the science of language is very much necessary to identify the people of the country whose history has to be written. Both linguistically and anthropologically, the racial origin of a particular people is traced. Some indications on this line have been given in the first section of the chapter on the Rise of Vernacular Literature. Further, a sketchy outline of the origin of the Bengali language from the Indo-Aryan through the development of different forms of Prākṛt is also provided. But, it has not been shown clearly how a mixture of languages – Austric, Dravidian, Mongoloid and Indo-Aryan
was the necessary precondition for the formation of the Bengali language, although there is a presumption of a synthesis of the Pre-Aryan, Pre-Dravidian and Aryan cultures in the culture of the Bengali people. The words derived from the Austric and Dravidian languages are said to have been absorbed in the Bengali language. Those words, especially those belonging to the Austric language, stand for indicting the basic foundation of culture, both material and mental. Such an analysis was expected in a comprehensive history of Bengal.

**PROBLEM OF THE ORIGIN OF THE BENGALI PEOPLE**

We may recall that the problem regarding the origin of the Bengali people was being discussed from the time of Bankimchandra’s *Bangadarśan*. The historians and scholars belonging to other disciplines were engaged in solving the problem throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay, who is supposed to be the pioneer historian of Bengal, included in his *Bāṅgalīr Ițihāṣa* two chapters especially seeking a solution to the above problem. Those chapters were on the pre-historic age and on the aboriginal settlers of Bengal and the Aryan conquest. The work of Rakhaldas was both preceded and followed by researches in the field of anthropology and linguistics. But the solution to the problem of the origin of the Bengali people remained tentative for a long time. It is not unreasonable for us to expect from the joint endeavour made in the *History of Bengal*, Volume I, which is supposed to be the first dependable comprehensive history of ancient Bengal that the solution to the problem regarding the origin of the Bengali people would be provided. For a fuller discussion on this problem one has to wait for Niharranjan Roy’s *Bāṅgalīr Ițihāṣa, Ādiparva* published in 1949.

**QUESTION OF “BĀNGĀLĪR BĀHUĪBAL”**

As early as the second half of the nineteenth century the question of military strength of the Bengalees was raised. Because, in the earlier history of Bengal, written by foreigners, the myth of the conquest of Bengal by eighteen horsemen under the leadership of Bakhtiyar Khilji was almost established. Rakhaldas Bandhopadhay in
his Bāṅgālār Itihāsa very ably tackled with the problem in his chapter on the Muslim conquest and exploded the myth by reasonable arguments. The same attempt is found to have been repeated in the History of Bengal, volume I, in connection with an assessment of the historical value of Minhaj-ud-din’s account in the Tabuqat-i-Nasiri (Appendix III, chapter VIII). Similar discussion might also be found in the beginning of the History of Bengal, volume II, edited by Sir Jadunath Sarkar. Previously Dineshchandra Sen in his Bṛhat Vaṅga made an attempt in his own way to establish the fact that the Bengalees in the early period possessed enough physical strength and showed their military skill on different occasions.

PERIODISATION IN DACCA HISTORY OF BENGAL: A REVIEW

The Muslim conquest, according to the historians belonging to the Dacca History of Bengal, volume I, marks the end of the Hindu period and the beginning of the Muslim period. Although the title of the volume includes the nomenclature Hindu period, the editor in his Preface has preferred to make use of the expression ‘ancient Bengal’. We are, therefore, given to understand that period of ancient Bengal extended up to the middle of the thirteenth century, that is, the completion of the Muslim conquest of East Bengal and the end of the Sona rule. But the nature of history underwent remarkable changes much earlier than the Muslim conquest. It is admitted by all concerned that so long as Bengal was a province of the Gupta Empire, the history of Bengal was a part and parcel of the history of North India. But, with the end of the Gupta rule in Bengal, an attainment of independent status by Gaṅḍa and Vaṅga, a new trend was discernible in the history of Bengal without any scope of doubt. According to some, the distinct features of regional polity, society, economy and culture began to manifest in the post-Gupta period and attained maturity with the foundation of the Pāla dynasty and empire ⁹⁵. This landmark is not quite evident from the History of Bengal. There are some scholars who believe that the medieval period had its beginning from the eight century AD. Otherwise, Rakhaladas Bandopadhyay should not have given the title of his work on art and iconography as Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture containing the history of sculptural art from AD 700 to AD 1200. If that be so, it would have been more justified to deal with the non-political
history – the history of society, economy, religion and art – separately. The non-political history of the early period and that of the early-medieval period. The model of providing the non-political history in a chronological framework is found to be followed in the *Comprehensive History of Bihar*, volume I, Part I, and II, edited by B.P. Sinha. For instance, the political history of Magadha is followed by the non-political history of Magadha for the same period. Again, the political history of the Mauryan dynasty is followed by the non-political history of the Maurya period. The political history of North and South Bihar from 87 BC to AD 319 is followed by the account of the economic condition, religion and philosophy, art and architecture for the same area and for the same period.

Some of the contributions seem to be considerate in furnishing their account period wise, so that the readers may not suffer from any confusion. For instance, in the chapter on administration there are sections on pre-Gupta, post-Gupta, pre-Pāla, Pāla and Sena period. In the chapter on Sanskrit literature there are sections on pre-Gupta, Gupta, Pāla and Sena periods. In the chapter on architecture, sculpture and painting, architecture is not divided into different periods, but the history of sculpture has been systematically recorded in terms of pre-Gupta, Gupta, post-Gupta and Pāla-Sena period. So far as religion is concerned, it is very difficult for a reader to understand the history of religion period wise. It would be unreasonable to assume that the religious condition in Bengal remained the same in the Gupta and pre-Gupta period. The chapters on society and economic conditions have done little justice to the socio-economic changes that occurred in Bengal in different periods. For instance, it is quite evident that from second century BC to the fourth century AD the mercantile class consisting of moneylenders, traders and artisans continued to dominate in the socio-economic life of the people. From the fifth to the eighth century AD dependence on industry and trade gradually decreased and there was transition to an economy based upon agriculture. From the eighth to the thirteenth century AD, the dependence on agrarian economy was deepened and the feudal system was consolidated. In conformity with these changes the state also brought changes in its socio-economic policy in respect of extending patronage to the one or the other class of the society. In spite of the existence of the ruling class including the bureaucracy
and the intellectual class comprising the Brāhmaṇas and the Buddhist or Jaina monks or Āchāryas continuing their existence throughout the history of Bengal. The social changes were brought about from time to time by those who were the producers of the wealth of the country. However, no such attempt has been made to set up a viewpoint regarding the socio-economic changes that had a direct bearing upon the life of the people. Again, no discussion has been made about the relation of the castes and subcastes known from the Smṛīs and the Purāṇas with the economic classes of the society. A traditional account of the society and the economic condition as provided in the History of Bengal, volume I, hardly satisfies those who are genuine enquirers of the social and economic history. Of course, the account of the socio-religious rites, ceremonies and festivals and also the daily life of the people is interesting.

**COULDN'T BENGALI PEOPLE FORM A NATION**

In the chapter on society the scholar concerned is quite justified to show the distinctive character of the society and the culture of the Bengali people. He thinks that there were some elements in Bengali culture like their art, literature, language, alphabet, religious beliefs, food and dress habits, peculiar laws of inheritance etc. which might stamp the Bengalees as a separate entity among the Indian people. But the author’s conclusion appears to be tentative:

To sum up, so far as available evidence goes, we can not say that there was a united Bengali nation by the end of the twelfth century AD, but everything indicates that such a nation was in the making. 97

In fact, the author himself has admitted that there was hardly enough social solidarity or cultural homogeneity to foster a feeling of national unity in ancient Bengal. Social solidarity was rendered difficult by the evolution of the elaborate caste-system. Again cultural homogeneity could not develop due to the cultural differences between such peoples as the Gaudas and the Vaiṅgas. There was no common designation for the country or the people as a whole, although the Bengalees tasted the political unity under the rule of the Pālas. The political unity under the Pālas, as it has been claimed
by the author, was not beyond question. Because, the Pālas could not maintain their authority in Vaṅga-Samataṭā due to the rise of the Varmanṣ and the Chandras one after another to political power. Again, the author’s arguments that the main bulk of the people formed a homogenous ethnic group is not supported by the available evidences which rather indicate that the Bengalees were a mixed people. Therefore, the process of nation-making in Bengal is not supported by the available evidence. However, if it is said that the Bengalees were distinguished from other peoples of India by virtue of some social and cultural characteristics, there should no objection.

**SUMMING UP**

Expectation might remain unfulfilled and there might remain some gaps in the accounts given in respect of different sub-regions like Gauḍa and Vaṅga. The reader has not been taken along the course of history, showing him changes from period to period. But still it is considered as the first comprehensive political and cultural history of Bengal produced by the joint endeavour of a group of specialists. But fortunately Rameshchandra Majumdar himself felt the necessity of bringing out a new edition of the volume. But no attempt was made by the publisher concerned in that regard. Almost three decades after when Rameshchandra found a reprint of the History of Bengal, volume I, he was surprised to find that:

> Though many parts of the book have become obsolete and many facts and views stated therein have proved to be quite wrong or required a great deal of modification, the new book was literally reprint of the old one.

However, in order to make his past endeavors at least partially fruitful Rameshchandra wrote an up-to-date history of ancient Bengal (History of Ancient Bengal, Calcutta: 1971) following the scheme of the History of Bengal, volume I. But at his advanced age he could not make an effort to work on it along with the help of other scholars a co-operative work of the same type. The distinguishing feature of Rameshchandra’s individual work, written with the help of the previous edited work, incorporates the newly discovered archaeological materials and epigraphic data. But
we are deprived of the opportunity to witness the production of the work in a new form with the renewed co-operative effort of the contemporary scholars. Niharranjan Roy who has considered the volume as “very comprehensive” has observed as follows:

There is no doubt that this work (Dacca History of Bengal, volume I) brought credit to Bengal and to the Bengali intellect; yet it seem to be that there was still a need for a complete history of ancient Bengalis...

In fact, it appears that Niharranjan made use of that material that was already known. The known material was no doubt available from the Dacca History of Bengal, volume I. Prabodhchandra Sen seems to be justified when he has said that no statement has been made in the above volume without the support of enough evidences and therefore the work was path breaking for future critics, researchers and historians. There is no doubt that the volume under discussion has given more emphasis on social and cultural history than on political history and thus paved the way towards writing of a more complete history of ancient Bengalee people.

**HISTORY OF THE BENGALI PEOPLE FOR THE BENGALI PEOPLE**

In the nineteenth century, there was a trend of writing the history of Bengal in Bengali with the manifest objective of making the Bengali people conscious of their own history. In case of Bengali historians, this rule was followed of course with few exceptions till the time of the publication of Rakhaldas Bandopadhayay’s Bāṅgalē Ithāśa (1915). From the second decade of the twentieth century, some works were written in English having direct or indirect bearing upon the history of ancient Bengal. But after the publication of the Dacca History of Bengal, volume I, the trend of writing the history of the Bengali people for the Bengalees was revived.

**SUKUMAR SEN : PRĀCHĪN BĀṅGLĀ O BĀṅGĀLĪ**
Sukumar Sen, whose Bāṅglā Sāhityer Ithāśa (History of the Bengali Literature), volume I, had been published in 1940, made an attempt to write the history of the
Bengali people entitled *Prāchīn Bāṅglā O Bāṅgālī* (Ancient Bengal and Bengalis). The small book containing fifty-six pages was published in 1943. That Sukumar Sen was attracted to the history of ancient Bengal in the light of his studies in early vernacular literature is quite apparent from his history of Bengali literature. This has been discussed above. In fact, Sukumar Sen has always placed the history of literature on the overall pattern of general history. However, the author of *Prāchīn Bāṅglā O Bāṅgālī* informs us in his brief introduction:

Attempt has been made in this book to an account of the political, social and family life of Bengal from the fifth to the twelfth century. Owing to the lack of adequate materials, this account is not complete in all respect. Historical truth, however, has not been distorted by imagination or irrelevant and superficial completeness, nor have materials been manipulated.

Let us now consider in brief the contents of *Prāchīn Bāṅglā O Bāṅgālī*. In section I, the author has traced the beginning of the history of Bengal from the time of Aryanisation, although the date of Aryan expansion in Bengal is uncertain. Of course, in this connection mention has been made of the Mahāsthān fragmentary inscription which might indicate Aryan settlement in North Bengal as early as the third century BC. After tracing the beginning of history, the author has undertaken the discussion on the divisions of ancient land of Bengal in four provinces, namely, Varendā, Sūhma (or Rādhā), Vāṅga and Kāmarūpa (South East and North Bengal).

In section II, the author has thrown light on Gupta administrative system in order to show the people’s participation in it. Next, he has considered the names and surnames held by the people from the ninth to the twelfth century AD.

In section III, the author’s intention has been to trace the history of the Pāla kingdom. He has shown how Gopāla’s accession brought an end to anarchy and chaos. Dharmapāla’s rise to the position of overlord of Uttara-pātha should he considered, according to the author, as indicating the dominance for the first time of a Bengali king in the political affairs of Āryāvarta. He has traced a number of great
warriors among the Pāla kings such as Mahipāla I and Rāmapāla. On the basis of an anecdote contained in a late text, Sekhṣubhodayā (assigned towards the sixteenth century AD), it is shown how Vijayasena succeeded to the political authority of Rāmapāla. In section IV, the author has shown the ascendancy of the Brāhmaṇas in the time of Pāla, Varma, Chandra, and Sena rule in the affairs of the state. In this connection, mention has been made of Darbhapāni, Kedāramiśra, Guravamiśra, Bhāṭṭa Bhavadeva and also those who adorned the court of Lakṣmaṇasena such as Umāpatidhara, Goverdhana Āchārya, Jayadeva, Sarana, Dhoyi etc. It is pointed out that all the courtiers of Lakṣmaṇasena were not Brāhmaṇas and some of them like Dhoyi belonged to the lower caste.

In section V, the author has dealt with different religious sects, amity between different sects, place of pride claimed by the Rādhīya Brāhmaṇas, cultivation of the Buddhist scriptures, Buddhist influence on Brahmanism, Buddhist Bhakti cult, Nathism – Sahajiyā cult and the Charyāgūti. He has shown that the Saivite Nathism and Buddhist Sahajiyā cult were influenced by Tantricism since eighth century AD. Incidentally, he has quoted an anecdote from Sekhṣubhodayā to show the way of life of the Yogiś belonging to the Nātha sect. Light has been thrown on the occupation of the lower castes with the support of the evidences deduced from the Charyāgūtis.

In section VI, the author has discussed folk-religions and worship of divinities, identification of Dharmathākur and image worship. The author has brought to our notice the evidences deduced from the Saduktikarnāmāta (AD 1207) to show the prevalence of folk beliefs and practices in rural Bengal. According to him, Dharmathākur does not represent the remnants of Buddhism in Bengal as suggested by Haraprasad Sastri. Dharmathākur was originally the presiding divinity of the ‘Dom’ caste and was later on worshipped by Kaivarttas, Bāgdīs and other lower castes. Like Dharmathākur, other folk deities of importance were Pandāsur and Manasā in addition to different forms of Chaṇḍī. In connection with religious festivals, mention has been made of dance and music. It has been underlined that in ancient
Bengal no religious festival including Durga worship could be held without dance and song. From a verse of Dhoysi it has been deduced that the Devadasis played a significant role in the worship of divinities at the temples.

In section VII, the author has discussed the progress in the cultivation of poetry and advancement in different branches of learning. The poetry of Bengal was characterized by ‘Gaudī Riti’. The Bengalees were advanced in some braches of learning such as grammar, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system and Buddhist Mādhyamika system of philosophy, Dharmasāstras or Sūtras and Ayurveda. That the philosophy of Vedānta was not appreciated in Bengal is evident from the second act of the drama Prabodhachandrodaya assigned to the eleventh-twelfth century AD.

In section VIII, author has discussed the military strategy and campaigns. In this connection he has brought to our notice the evidence of Sarvānanda’s Tikāsarvasva in which there are references to different forms of horse-race. The military campaign with a full-fledged army consisting of infantry, cavalry, elephant corps and chariot was known as Sarbhapallāpa.

In section IX, the author has discussed the performance of dance and song and especially the role of Natīs in the performance of dance. It is shown in the light of the Saduktikkarṇamāta and Sekhśubhodayā that dance, drama and music used to be practised even among the upper class of the society. Padmāvati, wife of Jayadeva, was a great dancer. In those days, dance and music used to be performed in a procession that was known as Yātrā. Earlier, those performances were associated with the puppet show. It was known as Pāṇchālī (derived from Pāṇchālikā). The prevalence of Pāṇchālīs is also known from the Bhaddharmapurāṇa. In Rūparām’s Dharmamātigal there is a description of tāṇḍava, that is, dance of a female dancer. Reference is given to different forms of musical instruments. The chorus song is said to have been known as Bābehā. Gambling was not unknown. Because, it was associated with ṛddī.
In section X, the author has discussed the food habit of the Bengalees. In this connection, attention has been drawn to a relevant verse of the Prākṛt Paiṅgaḷa, probably of the thirteenth-fourteenth century AD, relating a traditional favourite food of the common Bengalees.

Section XI deals with the dresses and ornaments used by the women-folk, the life led by poor families and the model of rich and happy families.

It appears from the account of Sukumar Sen that he has made no distinction between early and medieval Bengali texts while tracing the life of the people of ancient Bengal. He has been more dependent on tradition that can hardly be put into the confines of chronological framework. It that case, Sukumar Sen might have also profitably used couplets and short pomes ascribed to Dāk and the proverbial sayings of Khāṇā, a woman mathematician and astronomer, in addition to the Bṛāḍākathās or the songs in verses which used to be chanted by the woman folk at the time of performing some bratas or vows in different seasons. However, Sukumar Sen attempted to incorporate diverse topics within a small space of his book. It can hardly be said that he has done justice to all the topics introduced by him. His attempt to throw flashes of light on the daily life of the people, especially folk beliefs and practices in rural Bengal, is no doubt, commendable. But we are disappointed to find that there is hardly any attempt at making an analysis or interpretation of the available materials. The book is a collection of selected facts. It suffers from lack of historical continuity and totality. Probodhchandra Sen is of opinion that Sukumar Sen's voluminous history of Bengali literature and the brief history of the Bengali people have amply contributed to the task of constructing Niharranjan Roy's Bāṅgalōr Itihāsa. Sir Jadunath Sarkar's observation made in his Foreword to Niharranjan Roy's Bāṅgalōr Itihāsa deserves to be quoted in this connection:

... an earlier intimation of Bengali social and cultural history emerged from the History of Bengal, volume I (in English) published by the University of Dacca and edited by Rameshchandra Majumdar, as well as from the very brief Ancient Bengal and the Bengalis by Sukumar Sen. There is no questioning
the scholarship of these two works, but they are based on different principles and are comparatively incomplete.\textsuperscript{127}

The comparison has obviously been made with Niharranjan's history of the Bengalee people.

\textbf{RAMESHCHANDRA MAJUMDAR : BĀŅGĀDEŚER ITIHĀSA}

At the time of publishing the \textit{Dacca History of Bengal}, volume I, its editor had a plan to publish a Bengali translation of the above volume. But the plan could not be ultimately executed due to Rameshchandra's retirement from the University of Dacca\textsuperscript{128}. Later, he made a single-handed attempt to write the political, economic and social history of Bengal along with an account of religion, art and other aspects of the life of the Bengali people in Bengali language for the benefit of those who are not conversant with English but can understand Bengali language only\textsuperscript{129}. The book was written in a brief span following the model of \textit{Dacca History of Bengal}, volume I. and utilising the materials from it. The book \textit{Bāṅgādeśer Itihāsa}, published in 1946, was intended for ordinary readers. Therefore, the controversies, footnotes and references were not incorporated in this book. It was actually intended to be a short, easy-reading and complete history book on Bengal in the Bengali language. In this book we find a political, social and cultural history of Bengal in the pre-Sultanate period in simple language in chronological order. In the sixth edition of the book, however, the archaeological discoveries in Birbhum and Burdwan districts, the epigraphic discoveries in East Pakistan and the result of excavations at Rājbāḍīdāṅgā in Baharampur leading to the exact location of Kanṭasuvanḍa have been incorporated\textsuperscript{130}.

As the model of this work has been taken from the \textit{Dacca History of Bengal}, volume I, that has been discussed above, it is not necessary to analyse further the chapters of the Bengali work. But from historiographical point of view, the concluding chapter (Chapter XXII: Bāṅgālā Itihāsa O Bāṅgālī Jāti [History of Bengal and the Bengali People]) seems to be interesting. The chapter begins with a pessimistic note that the time for constructing a genuine history of Bengal has not yet
come and it is uncertain whether at all the time will ever come. The materials for the present history of Bengal are collected from foreign accounts, epigraphic records, coins and other remnants of the past. According to Majumdar, it is not true history of Bengal but it is only the skeleton of history. The same note is found to be recorded in Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay's Introduction to Bāṅgalī Itihāsa. But it is not expected by the historian that in future further discoveries of epigraphic records, coins, monuments and contemporary historical texts like the Rāmācharīta will substantially help the historian to add blood and flesh to the skeleton and give a final shape to the history of Bengal. It is, however, said again in an optimistic note that whatever materials have so far been collected are valuable. Because, those materials throw at least a ray of light on the political, social, economic and religious history of the Bengalees. Within a century, the knowledge about the history of Bengal has made a little progress. The extent of progress may be judged if we compare the present history of Bengal with Mrityunjay Vidyalankar's Rājābali written in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Therefore, it can hardly be said that sustained research for such a long time yielded no positive result.

Rameshchandra Majumdar has measured the extent of knowledge acquired so far in respect of the history of Bengal and the Bengali people. Firstly, the achievements of Vijayasirin, Saśānka and Dharmapāla leave no scope of doubt that in the past the Bengalees were not coward but possessed enough of physical strength and military skill. Secondly, the Bengalees also possessed mental and spiritual talent. Bengal was the last resort of Buddhism for four centuries. Buddhism was spread by the Bengali missionaries in Tibet on the one hand and in South East Asia (Suvarṇapādp) on the other. Thirdly, Bengal acquired commercial prosperity. Maritime trade with the countries abroad used to be carried on from the port of Tāmrālipi. The muslin of Bengal had worldwide fame. Fourthly, the Bengalees' contribution to Sanskrit language and literature was not insignificant. The Gauḍīrī as a characteristic style of Sanskrit poetry was recognised by all aestheticians of India. Jayadeva, Vallālasena, Halāyudha, Bhaṭṭa Bhavadeva, Sarvānanda, Chandragomin, Gauḍapāda, Śrīdharabhaṭṭa, Chakrapāṇi Datta, Jimutavāhana, Abhinanda, Sandhyākara Nandī, Dhoyi, Govardhanāchārya and Umāpatidhara had their
contributions in the field of literature as well as in different branches of learning. The contributions of the Siddhācāryas were no less significant. Last but not the least, the Bengalee acquired an unique position in the field of art and architecture. At the time when in other parts of India the artists had lost the creative imagination and struck to mechanistic reproduction of the specimens of art, Bengali artists maintained their creativity and continued to make experiments for combining Sastric injunctions with aesthetic beauty and joy. Both in sculpture and painting, the art and architecture of Bengal had its influences felt in East and South East Asian countries.

By acquiring such knowledge, as has been gathered so far, the Bengalees might take pride in their culture with justification. Besides, there are some characteristic of Bengali society and culture, which are considered distinct from a culture of other parts of India. In ancient Bengal, there was political unity under the Pāla-Sena rule, but there was hardly any unity in historical geography between different janapadas like Gauḍa and Vaṅga. But, there were some bonds of union among the people of Bengal like the use of Bengali language and script, belief in Tantricism, devotion to mother-goddess (Śakti) and common food and dress habits. It was after the advent of the Muslims, significantly enough that the people of the Gauḍa and Vaṅga came to be known by one common name, Gauḍiya or Bengalees.

NIHARRANJAN ROY: BĀNGĀLĪR ITIHIĀSA, ĀDIPARVA

Rameshchandra Majumdar's Bāngālīśer Itihiāsa, Part I, was followed by Niharranjan Roy's Bāngālīr Itihiāsa, Ādiparva, within a short period. The foundation of Roy's work was laid when Niharranjan was invited by the Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat, a decade before the publication of his work, to deliver Adharchandra Memorial Lectures 133. Niharranjan read in three sessions, presided over by Sir Jadunath Sarkar, a paper called 'An Outline of the History of the Bengali People'. Sir Jadunath suggested that the 'Outline' be given a complete form 134. It appears, therefore, that when the Dacca History of Bengal, volume I, was in the process of being published, Niharranjan had begun to think on a new line of research and re-interpretation of the available...
materials to throw light not on the history of Bengal but on the history of the Bengali people.

In fact, Bāṅgalir Itiḥāsa is a landmark in the historiography of ancient Bengal. In the opinion of Sir Jadunath Sarkar:

For years to come this authoritative work will be compelling reading. a beacon for future historians. ¹³⁵

Although Niharranjan has not claimed that he unearthed any new inscription or discovered any new material and that the facts and sources utilised by him were generally known in academic circles, there is least scope of doubt that he has introduced a new concept of cause and effect in the history of Bengal and its people. It provides for an integrated approach to history. It is a history from the bottom without adherence to any pre-formulated dogma. For these reasons, Niharranjan's Bāṅgalir Itiḥāsa is a pioneering work in Indian scholarship. There is no doubt that Niharranjan was inspired by the nationalist sentiment to write the history of the Bengali people in Bengali. In his 'Preface' he has candidly expressed his feelings thus:

In the passion of early youth and in the fervour of nationalist endeavour I was drawn to travel throughout Bengal... Again, in later youth I roamed throughout Bengal and India on one pretext and another, and I still do. The more I see, the more my love increases. I have written this book inspired by that love and wanting to give to it the deeper foundation of knowledge. ¹³⁶

Niharranjan has recalled that Bankimchandra, who was acclaimed as the high priest of nationalism in nineteenth century Bengal, said with some concern:

We need a history of Bengal. Otherwise, Bengalees will, sooner or later, no longer have an identity. ¹³⁷
What Bankimchandra wanted was not the history of the kings and kingdoms, but rather a history of Bengal that would tell us about the forms of government and procedure of administration; about the keeping of peace; about soldiers (their might, salary and character); about the different strata of government officials; about those who administered justice; about the king’s revenues; the income of his intermediaries and the earning of his subjects; about the crime, trial and punishment of the people; about public works, health and hygiene; about the strength and following of religions; about the nature of society and the citizenship; about social responsibility and respect for religion; about specialisation in arts, crafts and trade; about exports and imports and the way in which trade was conducted with foreign countries.138

In spite of Bankimchandra’s clarification of the nature of the history that should be written, the first scientific history of Bengal, published in 1912, was Ramaprasad Chanda’s Gaudarājamālā that was followed by Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay’s Bāṅgalār Itihāsa (1915). But these two works, which have been accepted in academic circles as pioneering works on the history of early Bengal, are confined to the political history only. Therefore, Bankimchandra’s dream was yet to be fulfilled. The publication of the Dacca History of Bengal, volume I, covering political, social, economic, religious, literary and art history of Bengal seems to have been at the first sight the fulfillment of the expectations that had been nurtured in the minds of those nationalists who loved Bengal so dearly. It was, no doubt, the first comprehensive history of Bengal in English. But Niharranjan felt the need for a complete history of Bengal. Rameshchandra’s work can hardly be regarded as the history of the Bengali people for the reasons mentioned below:

1. There is no underlying thesis, any recognition and explanation of causal connections, for which little is learnt about the actual way of life led by the Bengali people in the past.
2. The common people of Bengal outside the caste system living beyond the fold of Brahmanical, Puranic and Buddhist religions, those who constituted the poorest among the land cultivators, landless or near landless cultivators and performers of public works are not noticed in Majumdar’s work. No light has been thrown upon
the folk beliefs and practices, the daily life of the rural people, the distinctions and connections between the village and the town and the economic foundation of the general way of life.

3. The chapters in the *Dacca History of Bengal*, volume I, are detached from one another having no unifying thread. As a result, the relationship between the various aspects of the society, on the one hand, and the polity, economy, literature, religion and art is ill defined. Again, no explanation has been given of the relationship between the state on the one hand and the economic condition, religion, art etc. on the other.

Long ago, Akshaykumar Maitreya wrote in his ‘Preface’ to Ramaprasad Chanda’s *Gaudarājāmāla* that the essence of the history of the Bengali people is the story of the Bengali common man. But still, the ideal of constructing history from below was not brought into reality. Niharranjan’s search for the reasons behind is quite justified in making an observation that the historians of India in general and of Bengal in particular were influenced by the methods and standards of contemporary European, especially British, historical interpretation. Upto the second quarter of the twentieth century the kings and their regimes were central in European historiography. No sociological awareness enlightened the standards and methods of contemporary European historical interpretation. But from the latter half of the nineteenth century one finds the emergence of research in Austria and Germany into the nature of society based on the system of production and distribution of wealth. In the early part of the twentieth century, the trend towards providing scientific explanation of the history of society gradually came to be established in England too. But in India, the historians were slow to accept this method and standard of historical interpretation.

The new historiographical trend of Europe, as hinted at by Niharranjan Roy, is to be found in the works of D.D.Kosambi. The works of D.D.Kosambi were published a little after the middle of the twentieth century. His footsteps were followed in ancient Indian historiography by R.S.Sharma, Romila Thapar and others in the second half of the twentieth century. Therefore, it may reasonably be held that
the sociological method of interpreting history was first introduced by Niharranjan Roy in his magnum opus.

Indian historians were quite conversant with the trends in European historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But they were not in a position to adopt the methodology due to the paucity of suitable materials at their disposal. They had to depend more and more on the epigraphic records, literary texts and foreign accounts. The epigraphic records were mostly composed by the poets and the scholars of the royal court for praise of the king and his family. Some of the inscriptions recorded donations of land and some were engraved on temples and statues. Again, the literary texts including Smṛti and Vṛtta literatures were composed by scholars and priests of the royal court. The writers of foreign accounts having bearing upon the history and geography of India were unable to overcome racial interests. Those who composed manuscripts found in Tibet and Nepal belonged to some religious sects and therefore were unable to overcome sectarian interests. It is recognised by Niharranjan that the materials discovered so far provide very little information about the social history. Further, the original sources of information were not at all impartial, because they originate from the royal court, the nobility or the religious orders. Again, the Smṛtis and the Sūtras and the treatises on economic and political administration might, to some extent, serve the purpose of constructing the social history of ancient India. But so far as Bengal is concerned such sources even are not available before the eleventh or twelfth century AD. Therefore, in spite of their familiarity with the sociological methods of interpreting history as adopted in some parts of Europe, the historians of Bengal could not be drawn towards the project of constructing an authentic history of the Bengali people.

**SOURCES OF SOCIAL HISTORY**

In spite of the limitation of the available sources referred to above. Niharranjan. the historian of the society, had to depend on ancient inscriptions and religious and literary works which are recognised as the authentic sources of the history of the Bengali people. Of course, there is a risk in using of the evidence of the inscriptions
as proof for the general condition of Bengal or of the entire ancient period. Because at a certain point of time there were variations of a custom in different parts of Bengal.

However, Niharranjan has a conviction that real story of the life of the common people is contained in the songs, stories, proverbs, ballads and folk tales, which circulated amongst the people for a long time through oral tradition and afterwards were given a literary form. He has referred to the Charyāgī and the adages of Dāk and Khanā, the Śūnyapurāṇa, Gopīchāndar Ī, Sekhāsubhodayā, Ādya Gambhirā, Murṣidyā Ī and the ancient folk-tales. The exact dates of the sources are not exactly known, but the tradition recorded in them is no doubt useful for social history.

Besides, a great deal of specialist work had been done in various fields which paved the way for the historian. G.H. Ghurye wrote on caste; B.S. Guha, H.C. Chakladar, M.N. Bose and P.C. Mahalanobis wrote on physical anthropology; Sunitikumar Chatterjee wrote on linguistics; Stella Kramrisch on art; S. Radhakrishnan on philosophy; Nalinaksha Datta and Sashibhusan Dasgupta on religion. A great deal of the substance of future history had been thus researched and articulated. Again, variety of eminent scholars offered a chapter or two in their particular field for the Dacca History of Bengal, volume I. Those chapters also proved useful for constructing Bāṅgalī Itihāsa. Academic friendship with Nirmalkumar Bose, an eminent cultural anthropologist, seems to have been of valuable help to Niharranjan Roy.

METHODOLOGY

Niharranjan believed that a genuine history of the ordinary people is reflected in the history of the social structure. According to him, the ancient Bengali social order must comprise such issues as the material foundations, various classes and castes and their status in the society and the state, their rights and responsibilities, the relation of the caste and class with the government, the relation between government and society and the relation to both of culture and its various forms and characteristics.
Niharranjan’s contention is that following sociological methods historical materials could be very carefully analysed, and from them it would not be possible to construct a basic framework.

It is unlikely that Niharranjan was influenced by D.D.Kosambi whose important works were published well after Bāṅgāḷī Itiḥāsa. However, Niharranjan would agree with Kosambi’s notion of ‘history from the bottom’:

To maintain that history has always been made by such backward, ignorant common people, and that they, nor the high priest, glittering autocrat, warlord, financier, or demagogue, must shape it better in the future, seems presumptuous formalism. Nevertheless, it is true. The proper study of history in a class society means analysis of the differences between the interest of the classes on top and of the rest of the people. 146

It has been pointed out by John W. Hood that Niharranjan’s syncretic methodology was anticipated by Nirmalkumar Bose as early as 1929 147. In his Cultural Anthropology he cites Wissler (Man and Culture) in determining the nature of cultural anthropology. Culture, according to him, comprises speech, material traits, art, methodology, knowledge, religion, family and social systems, property, government and war. The fundamental aims of Bose’s monumental work The Structure of Hindu Society (Hindu Samāj Gaśān, Calcutta, 1949) was to bring a diversity of inquiry centering round culture, as referred to above, under one umbrella. Bose has also described culture in traditional terms, asserting dharma as the cultural umbrella embracing artha, kāma and mokṣa which stand for different aspect of Indian culture. Niharranjan has subscribed to similar approach for its application to Indian historiography 148.

Prabodhchandra Sen has raised a question about the usefulness of the term Ādiparva, that is, ancient period, when Niharranjan has repeatedly used more specific dynastic terms such as Gupta period and Pāla period 149. Although Niharranjan has disliked the dynastically determined approach to history, he allows for a degree of
He has conceived of the Gupta period as the Classical period and of post-Gupta Bengal in two broad phases: the Pāla-Chandra and the Sena-Vaṃśa. According to him, the kings of the Pāla-Chandra period were Bengali and Buddhist, while those of the Sena-Vaṃśa period were non-Bengali and Brahmanical. The social climate of the Pāla period is reflected in the Buddhist attitude of tolerance and harmony, while that of the Sena period reveals the rigidity of Brahmanical stratification and disjunction. While the legacy of the Pālas consisted of an enhanced sense of the Bengalees' own ethnic and cultural integrity, the legacy of the Senas has been capitulation to the Muslim invader.

Niharranjan is committed to the sociological method, as he himself has informed us. The implication is that he intends to bring the society in the centre of history and examine its relationship with other institutions, political, economic, religious etc. revolving round it. Prabodhchandra Sen has remarked that although the author of Bāṅgalī Itihāsa devoted himself to the task of constructing ‘people’s history of ancient Bengal’, the author has turned away from true neutrality due to his inclination towards modern Marxist theory. There might be difference of opinion with Prabodhchandra Sen on this point. Although Niharranjan attached much importance to the material foundations of the society, he has not confined his study within the Marxist theory of economic interpretation of history. Rather, it would be more judicious to take into account Niharranjan’s approach to the folk-element in the Bengali culture. It is likely that he was conversant with the views of Benoykumar Sarkar as propounded in his Positive Background of Hindu Sociology (1914) and also Folk Elements in the Hindu Culture (1917). Sarkar was of opinion:

The foundation of popular and material Bengali culture is vast, wide and full of variety. Nothing will be left in Bengali culture if this popular side is dropped.

Benoykumar Sarkar himself was influenced by the views of Marett about the science of folklore. The methodology of this science is exposed by Benoykumar Sarkar when he has said that one should first try to understand the fairs and festivals, forms of
entertainment, dances and songs in one's own locality or district and then proceed to understand the essential meaning of the age-old rites, rituals and institutions of the country. This view finds an echo in Niharranjan's Introductory chapter.

ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENTS OF BANGALIR ITIHASA

In the opening chapter of his history of the Bengali people (Itihâser Yukti) Niharranjan has argued for the need to write a social history of the Bengali people as distinct from the political history of Bengal. He has also presented an overview of the various chapters of his work indicating the obvious connection between them. Before doing so, he has of course explained the nature of his sources.

The second chapter (Itihâser Gorâr Kathâ) seeks to trace the origin of the Bengalees. In this connection he has examined archaeology, anthropology and linguistics. While pre- and proto-history establishes the antiquity of the Bengali people, anthropology and linguistics combine together to suggest how the Austrics, the Dravidians, the Mongoloids and the Indo-Aryans were synthesised in the mixed Bengali population. Again, the science of culture is analysed to show to what extent Bengali culture has borrowed from the Aryan, pre-Aryan and pre-Dravidian sources. The Austric element seems to have formed the foundation of the Bengali people and culture.

The geographical background is provided in Chapter III (Deś Parichay). For an understanding of the history of the Bengalees an awareness of the role played by mountain ranges and oceans, vast and intricate river system and changes in the course of the rivers through the ages is essential. In this connection, the ancient janapadas and political divisions of Bengal have been discussed. The social pattern of Bengal is suggested to have been influenced by this river system, its forests and grasslands, climatic changes, crop-patterns and a consequent relocation of human settlements.

The third issue that has been taken up in the next chapter (Dhanasambal) concerns ancient Bengal's sources of wealth, the means of production. the items that
were produced and the three basic means of production, namely, agriculture, crafts and trade and commerce. The land system is closely associated with agriculture. The lives of the country's countless peasants depend on land.

In Chapter V (Bhūmivinyaś), the land system in ancient Bengal has been separately discussed. There is a great deal of epigraphic evidence for the subject. Almost all the epigraphic records found in Bengal contain account of land transaction, that is, sale, purchase and donation of land, land measurement, standard of classification and assessment, the wide and diverse range of taxes and imposts accruing from land proprietorship and occupancy. Lands are found to have been donated liberally to the religious institutions, both Buddhist, Jaina and Brahmanical, and also to individual Brāhmaṇas.

Chapter VI (Varṇavinyaś) takes into account the development of the caste-system in Bengal. Because, in regard to social patterns of Bengal, the historical arguments and categorical definition of its castes and sub-castes is of prime importance. One notes the absence of Kṣatriya and Vaiśya castes and the prominence of hybrid castes in Bengal. The author has shown the growing supremacy of the Brāhmaṇas in the society.

In Chapter VII (Śrēṇivinyaś) the author has dealt with the connection between class and caste. Along with the historical caste structure ancient Bengali society was characterised by economic inequality. There were three broad classes in accordance with the three basic means of production of wealth. Within each of these classes there were numerous sub-divisions reflecting various disparities in production and distribution. Of course, not all classes were economically productive. We have, for example, the ascetic and scholastic communities and the class of government officials.

Chapter VIII (Grām O Nagarvinyaś) provides an account of towns and villages. The vast masses of classes and castes lived in either villages or towns. In this chapter the author has sought to explain the distinction between the villages and towns, their
respective features, their locations, the centres of education and religion and the nature of centres of trade. The author has discussed the various reasons for the growth of towns, but points out that in all cases, the prominence and prosperity of a town depended on its relative importance as a place of commerce. While the towns were the changing institutions governed by the vicissitudes of trade and commerce, the village based on the land-produce had an enduring quality.

Chapter IX (*Rāṣṭraviniyās*) concerns with such issues as the nature of kings and instrumentalities of the government in ancient Bengal, different standards of government at various times, an awareness of the royal officials, government income and expenditure and methods of raising revenue, the relationship between government, the classes and the castes and the villages and towns, role of government in the generation and distribution of wealth, and the connection between government and the culture of the society.

Chapter X (*Rājabhīta*), the author has given an account of the dynastic history of Bengal. In fact, the dynastic history and the administrative structure of Bengal were quite well known before the publication of *Bāṅgalīr Itihāsa*. In substance, the author has nothing new to offer. However, the significance of the two chapters on *Rāṣṭraviniyās* and *Rājabhīta* is that the known material has been retold in social, economic and cultural context wherein lie the causes of the emergence of regimes and the vicissitudes of the dynastic round. In these two chapters, the history has the common man and his society, its livelihood and its cultural expression as the indispensable backdrop.

Chapter XI (*Dainandin Jīvan*) contains the descriptive account of everyday life in ancient Bengal. It provides some interesting illustrations of the antiquity of many of the trappings of ordinary life towards the end of the ancient period as well as the survival of many of them into the modern period. The sources are mainly literature and sculpture. At times, the account seems somewhat disjointed because of the discrete scantiness of the materials. The author has attempted to bring a balance between accurate reporting and creative reconstruction.
The next chapter (*Dharmakarma: Dhyāndhāranā*) offers a detailed account of the religious thought and practice of the ancient period. Sufficient evidence has been put forward to show that the folk tradition has been stronger than the Aryan Brahmanism in the evolution of the religion of Bengal. The significance of the role of Buddhism in the religious life has been given its due. It was not Vedic Brahmanism but the Puranic Brahmanism based on the cult of *bhakti* that prospered in Bengal. The decline of Buddhism is explained by the dialectic of synthesis. The emergence of Tantricism had a great appeal to both Buddhism and Brahmanism, and in course of time the former was absorbed into the latter. However, the legacy of Buddhism remained in the cult of the Nāthas, the Bāuls and the Sahājiya sects. An acquaintance with the mind and the culture of the Bengalees is revealed in the various sacraments, creeds, festivals, especially, the thirteen proverbial festivals in a year, rituals and ceremonies, the numerous deities and multifarious symbols.

In the Chapter XIII (*Bhāsā-Sāhitya: Gāthān Vigāthān: Sikṣā-Dīkṣā*) Niharranjan has assembled extensive list of scholars, Āchāryas, Dharmaśāstra-writers, poets and their works as well as the monasteries associated with the names of some illustrious luminaries of the period concerned. But the problem is that in many cases, we have references to names only without an actual trace of the works attributed to them. Manuscripts have been found in some cases, but those are often retranslation from the Tibetan and many of the manuscripts are of doubtful authenticity. The author has referred to the works attributed to different scholars and poets. But contents of those works are not always clearly known.

However, in discussing the contributions of the Bengalees to Sanskrit literature, the author has quite justifiably referred to the Gauḍi-rūi, that was recognized throughout Northern India. The Gauḍi-rūi appears to have been connected with the Gauḍatāntra or the political system that had been established in Bengal. There is least doubt about the fact that the Bengalees are known by their vernacular and until the rise and growth of their vernacular, the Bengalees could hardly claim a distinctive cultural status in Northern India. The author has traced the general development of the
eastern language branch from its Pre-Aryan roots through Sanskrit. Sauraseni *apabhramśa* and Māgadhī *apabhramśa* to old Bengali, the specimen of which is the Buddhist collection known as the *Charyāgīti*. Sanskrit remained the language of the upper classes, but the *Charyāgīti* offers the evidence of the strength of the common peoples' language as well as the literary potential reflecting their life style.

Niharranjan has upheld the literary value of the anthologies like *Kavīndra Vachana Samuchchaya*, the *Prākṛta Patīgala* and the *Saduktikarpāṇyāntu* and their faithful representation of the common people of Bengal. However, Niharranjan is critical about the development of literature in the Sena court that represented the symptom of decadence in shallowness, although mixed with sweetness.

It has been underlined by the author that the intellectual life was monopolised by those who possessed much wealth. Given an excess of wealth the so-called intellectual class enjoyed leisure and opportunity of high thinking, study and cultivation of different forms of art. But it has to be remembered that the culture of ancient Bengal had its roots in the folk-tradition that had been handed down from generation to generation. Of course, contemporary social order fashioned the character of culture according to its needs. Therefore, there remains a vast scope of the origin and development of the Bengali culture from the age-old beliefs and practices of the common people.

The development of the mind of the society has been traced not only in literature, learning and science, in religious and secular education, but also in the fine arts. In chapter XIV (*Silpakalā*), therefore, the history of ancient Bengal concerns itself with music and fine arts. The detailed account of the *Rāgas* and the Rhythm in ancient music is based on three major sources, namely, the *Charyāgīti*, the *Rāgataraṅginī* and the *Gīṅgovinda* of Jayadeva, all of them dated from the tenth to the twelfth century AD. But the question of origin and development of music remains unsolved. So far as visual arts are concerned, the author has depended upon the specimens of sculpture and architecture discovered so far in Bengal. Very little primary evidence of painting has survived. In spite of the paucity of material the
author has discussed different forms of architectural styles as shown by Bhadra and Sikhara types as well as mixed type of temples, in addition to the stūpas and the monasteries which have been discovered in Bengal in small number. The Paharpur, of course, remains as a towering specimen of Bengal architecture. In case of sculptures the author has intended to show the enriching effects on Bengali culture of Bengal’s involvement in the prosperous external trade of the Gupta era. The transformation from the classical to the medieval art in Bengal began in the seventh century AD. This transformation has been set in the background of wider, more complex political, economic and religious forces. Closely connected with the religious practices were the visual and performing arts. In his discussion on the sculptures of medieval Bengal, that is, of the Pāla-Sena period, the author has combined the chronological approach with a firm belief in the stylistic evolution. He has faithfully followed the footsteps of Stella Kramrisch. In his judgement, the art form during the medieval period proceeds in a wavering line, sometimes favouring a sensuous form and sometimes an abstract form, both tendencies working within the strict rigours of canonical tradition.

The final chapter (Itihāser Itijit) seeks to find out a perspective by identifying a number of landmarks to explain the directions that the history of Bengal has taken. The author has drawn up in it something of a moral ledger, the strength and weaknesses of the Bengali mind and character, for he thinks that those were the fundamental determinants of the course of history of the Bengali people. The author’s summing up may be reproduced thus:

History is not merely facts. Behind all facts is the unquestionable and ever active law of cause and effect. The task of the historian is to understand this law, to comprehend the nature of the aims and achievements of men and women in particular times and places, and to perceive what swims beneath the surface of the vast and flowing stream of civilisation. In my own mind I have tried to form an overall impression of the form and nature of the early history of the Bengali people, and in the final chapter I have endeavoured to bring these various speculations together into an integral whole.
In fact, the inferences drawn by Niharranjan from his study of the history of the Bengali people are no doubt of speculative nature, although those speculations can hardly be called unreasonable. If those inferences have a bearing on a moral lesson that might guide us in future, those are to be considered as valuable from the point of view of genuine history. Prabodhchandra Sen has drawn a distinction between chronicle and history. While chronicle (Itibṛta) is just a narration of successive events, history (Itihāsa) highlights some lessons relating to society or politics. Following the argument of Sen, it may be held that like a true historian, Niharranjan has drawn the lessons from the past.

Firstly, according to the author, the tribal consciousness has continued up to the end of the ancient period in Bengal. Linked with the tribal tradition and consciousness is a local or regional tradition and consciousness. There are two main reasons behind this tribal identity and regional consciousness. One is the method of production of wealth and the other is the administrative system. Secondly, the various communities have not become civilised at a time, but, by stages, they have advanced to a certain level of civilisation and culture, and hence there has been no extension of one level of civilisation or culture throughout Bengal. Thirdly, in ancient Bengal, caste and clan consciousness has been stronger than class-consciousness. Moreover, caste and livelihood are integrally linked with class. Fourthly, Bengali life has been predominantly village-based and Bengali civilisation and culture have been essentially rural. The daily life of the Bengalees, their thinking and their creativity, have centered round the village. Fifthly, from approximately the fifth or sixth century BC to about the first century AD, the chief means of production of wealth have been agriculture, small individual and joint cottage-crafts and some trade and commerce. From the middle of the first century AD, there has been an expansion of trade and commerce, which became the chief means of production of wealth, but from the beginning of the eighth century AD to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there has been a growing dependence on agriculture that has given to the ancient Bengali life and society a self-sufficient, age-less existence. Sixthly, as in social, religious and cultural life, so too in political life Bengal always has maintained an interaction with the rest of India and has played a significant role in the greater Indian political arena.
Seventhly, the Aryan religious, cultural and social structures never have been able to reach great depths of Bengali society and culture. It is interesting to note that something of the tradition of the matriarchal society and its family ties is conveyed by the patterns and prescripts of the rights of inheritance in the jurisprudence of Bengal.

Eighthly, an emotion and sensibility of the Bengalees may be traced in their reverence and love for humanity. This is evident from their infinite fondness from physical and sensuous delights, their close involvement in the everyday life and in family ties and their cultivated aesthetic sensibility. The Bengalees have nurtured fondness for short lyric poems instead of epics or dramas. Those lyrics reflect the creativity of the Bengali mind.

Niharranjan has shown some weaknesses in the society of Bengal for which Bengal had to suffer subjection to the foreign rule towards the end of the twelfth century AD. From the twelfth century AD Bengal preserved for next two centuries the legacy of a social system divided hierarchically by caste and economic class with countless sections. Society was by nature indisciplined, social degeneration having perverted the entire substance and essence of life. The economy was entirely dependent on land and agriculture. Society was totally perverted by the Brahmanical outlook. It placed great store on fatalism and astrology. Tantricism or Occultism was another major weakness in the social fabric. Further, the lower agrarian classes of society were held in poor esteem, and naturally they in turn had no trust or genuine respect for the social and political leaders, nor had they any awareness or responsibility.

In spite of the weaknesses mentioned above, the author thinks that the people of Bengal have been enriched by the legacy from the past. Because, within the mysterious and occult communities like the Nathas and the Sahajiyās there lie concealed a social strength, as there is virtually no caste or class distinction among them, and the lofty ideas of equality and humanity are held high. The second legacy is the land bound agrarian society characterised by an unchanging, self-sufficient, village-centred social set-up. Due to this the cultural tradition of Bengal has flowed unrestrained till modern times and the ordinary people have the power and faith to
pass their daily lives irrespective of the rise and fall of political regimes or dynasties. The third legacy is the gradually increasing attraction of the Bengali people to the Sakti cult. The fourth legacy is the continuing development of the Bengali language, by which the mind of the common man has gradually tasted the spirit of liberation. The author thinks that as long as there is a vitality in the body of the society, society is able thereby to resist whatever blows might be struck from within or without. But when the social body becomes crippled down from within by various political and economic handicaps caused by caste and class interests, the decay of the society sets in and the society lacks in strength and courage to resist any blow from outside.

AN ASSESSMENT

It can hardly be claimed that Niharranjan Roy is the first historian to write on the people’s history of Bengal without giving any preference to political history. Rajakrishna Mukhopadhyay’s Prathama Šiksā Bāṅgalīr Itiḥāsa was looked upon as ‘complete in all respects’ by Bankimchandra. It was said about the work:

This is not only a list of kings and wars, this is a true social history.¹⁵⁷

Again, Dineshchandra Sen’s Bṛhat Vaṅga, Pramode Lal Paul’s Early History of Bengal, volume II, Sukumar Sen’s Prāchīn Bāṅglā O Bāṅgālī and Rameshchandra Majumdar’s Dacca History of Bengal, volume I, paved the way towards the construction of Niharranjan Roy’s Bāṅgālīr Itiḥāsa:Ādīparva. Further, Nirmalkumar Bose’s works on Cultural Anthropology (Calcutta: 1929) and The Structure of Hindu Society (1949); and Benoykumar Sarkar’s works like Positive Background of Hindu Sociology (1914), Folk Elements in Hindu Culture (1917) and Benoy Sarkarēr Baifhake, volume I, (1942) seem to have furnished the author of Bāṅgālīr Itiḥāsa with a strong foundation for constructing the history of Bengal keeping the common people in the central place.

Bāṅgālīr Itiḥāsa contains fifteen chapters, the contents of which have been noticed above in an outline. Apparently, there are varied aspects of the Bengali life
analysed in this book. But still, the chapters in the book seem to have been interlinked with each other by a number of recurring themes, such as the age-old ethnic distinctiveness of the Bengalees, the Brāhmaṇa ascendancy and the regressing from an urban based culture to a predominantly rural one. The recurrence of the themes in different chapters appears to have given to the readers an impression of repetitions. But such repetitions were unavoidable in the framework planned by the author. It may be held that continuity and systematic character in a historical account are desirable. Those desired elements are wanting in the notable work on the history of society and culture of Bengal. In this connection, readers' attention may be drawn to the fact that the historian is guided by the evidences and proofs at his disposal and the arguments based on them. The recurring themes referred to above should be considered as the main argument of Niharranjan Roy's thesis.

Some scholars have pointed out that the absence of proper evidence at the appropriate place in the forms of footnotes or references might deprive this great work of its value to the researchers and future historians. Niharranjan Roy has said thus:

*I can say this much that I have not consciously distorted any evidence or used such a source or evidence, which has been proved unequivocally as false or unacceptable.*

Even after having accepted the statement one might argue that without citation of evidences at appropriate places, the assertions made by the historian concerned can hardly be verified.

In this connection arises the question whether a substantial element of subjectivity and conjecture permeates Niharranjan's *Bāṅgālī Itihāsa*. Much of it seems to be based on limited, sometimes piecemeal evidence. Many of Niharranjan's sources are not of the kind traditionally regarded as respectable in the writing of history. These allegations are ruled out when we find the historian himself stating in the Introductory chapter:
I have endeavoured these various speculations together into an integral whole.  

The author himself is quite conscious of the fact that he is engaged in a work for which there is dearth of materials. But it is difficult for him to remain satisfied with the reply to a Rankean question: 'what happened in history'. He should also make an attempt to suggest what might happen in the light of circumstantial evidences. Speculation is a sort of reasonable assumption, which is sometimes called creative construction. In fact, a historian recreates the past in his own mind, re-enacts it and re-lives in it, and then reproduces it. In fact, history is what historian makes it. Not all history may be gleaned from 'authentic', written documents. The oral tradition is of no less importance in the people's history than the sources considered respectable by the historians at large.

From the above the question may arise whether it is imperative on the part of a historian to write dispassionate history. It has been said by Akshaykumar Maitreya:

Historian's principal duty is to reveal the truth like a just judge. It does not seem, however, that we have grasped this principle... Even now, racial or communal bias have kept inclined or disinclined to many historical conclusions beforehand.

Prabodhchandra Sen is quite justified when he says:

The past history of a country will not come out in its true form if seen from the point of view of a particular ideology... and it will become somewhat distorted in the attempt to fit it in the framework of that ideology.

Niharranjan Roy, the author of Bāṅgalī Itihāsa has never suppressed his nationalist ideology and his pride in the distinctiveness of Bengali people's culture that even defied Aryanism. It shows that empiricism can not be always considered the religion of a historian. He has the right to be subjective in spite of his faithfulness to the available sources of information. Because, the influence of personal education.
atmosphere of the country and the spirit of the age definitely attract an influence to the mind of the historian. Historian himself makes this statement:

Famine, political upheaval, partition, frontier hostility and violence, personal degeneration, poverty — these are the enemies confronting Bengal today. bring extreme misery to the ignorant and frustrated Bengali people.\textsuperscript{166}

This misery and agony has oppressed the mind of the author himself as he himself has admitted. He has written his \textit{Bāṅgālī Itiḥāsā} with the purpose of giving a degree of hope to the lives of the people, to offer some directions for the future, to arouse love and reverence for an intimate understanding of them. Therefore, the historian is not only influenced by his environment but also writes his \textit{Bāṅgālī Itiḥāsā} with an objective. Because, the task of a historian is not only to know and understand the society, but also to bring about the changes in it. Niharranjan has never discarded empiricism. But beyond that he has given an upperhand to his feeling of love for his own country. He has said:

\begin{displayquote}
My Bengal and its people are not to be found in the pages of the ancient manuscripts; rather, they are inscribed on my heart. To me the ancient past is as alive and real as the immediate past. I have tried to represent in this book that real and living past and not some corpse.\textsuperscript{167}
\end{displayquote}

**POPULAR TREND IN HISTORICAL WRITING IN BENGAL: A REVIEW**

From the end of the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, the historical researches in Bengal were undertaken by some research organisations like the Asiatic Society (1784), the \textit{Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat} (1894), the Calculcuta Historical Society (1907), the Varendra Research Society (1910), the Indian Research Institute (1934) etc. Each research organisation had its own research journals like \textit{Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal}, \textit{Vaṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā}, \textit{Bengal:Past and Present}, \textit{Aitihāsik Chitra}, \textit{Indian Culture} etc. In addition, mention may also be made of some periodicals in Bengali like \textit{Baṅgadarśan}, \textit{Bhāratī}. 
Individual efforts continued for carrying on researches, especially in the history of Bengal. Results of their researches began to be published in Bengali, as they believed that the history of Bengal should be written in Bengali to enlighten the Bengali people. As a result, the historical researches went a long way in developing Bengali language and literature. But later, this trend discontinued and some of the historians began to publish their researches in *Monographs* written in English, although some intellectuals attempted to translate into Bengali the histories written by Stewart and Marshman. Towards the middle of the twentieth century, the trend of writing the history of Bengal in Bengali was revived, the most glaring example of which was Nihar Ranjan Roy’s *Bāṅgalā Itihās, Ādiparva*.

However, it was felt that there should be some living research organisation to encourage the historical researches. The Asiatic Society did not confine its programme to the researches in the history of Bengal only. The *Vaṅgīyā Sāhitya Parisat*’s main objective was to encourage the development of the Bengali language and literature. The history of Bengali culture came to be associated with Bengali language and literature. The Calcutta Historical Society had its programme of continuing historical researches. But those researches were not confined to history and culture of Bengal, although their journal was named as *Bengal: Past and Present*. The Varendra Research Society, in spite of their intention to bring out in print the history of Gauḍa on a grand scale. But due to unavoidable reasons the scheme did not ultimately materialise. Besides, the scholars attached with the Society were more or less concerned with a history and culture of Northern Bengal that was supposed to have been the centre of origin of some landmarks in the history of Bengal. Indian Research Institute could not confine itself to the researches in the history of Bengal only, although the journal *Indian Culture* often published valuable research articles on different aspects of Bengal history. Besides, some of the research organisations
mentioned above maintained their precarious existence due to financial difficulties and could not effectively carry on their programmes till recent times. It was in this background that at the initiative of Sir Jadunath Sarkar and Rameshchandra Majumdar Vaṅgiya Itihāsa Pariṣat was founded in 1950. Three aims of the Pariṣat were brought to the notice of all concerned:¹⁶⁸

1. Investigations of historical facts with reverence and perseverance rising above private prejudice, racial bias and emotional impulse;
2. Scrutinisation of historical facts in the light of impartial and dispassionate approach;
3. Establishment of the tested and proven facts in the heart of the people through the medium of vernacular.

The main programme of the Pariṣat was to arouse historical consciousness at all levels of the society. The programme was to be operated through the publication of historical books and essays in the Bengali language and by holding discussions on historical problems. Further, the Pariṣat intended to implement the programme by encouraging historical research and undertaking publication of successful researches in the vernacular.

The aims and programmes of the Vaṅgiya Itihāsa Pariṣat indicate that it has been felt by the organisers that the people of Bengal in general lack historical consciousness and, therefore, have in themselves little self-confidence which is very much essential for successful living. This is a recognition of the fact that even after the publication of research monographs and articles from the end of the eighteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century, the Bengali people in general did not yet acquire a true sense of history. The only reason behind this was that the results of researches on the history and culture of Bengal were not published in the vernacular language. Besides, the monographs or books published so far may be classified into two sections: I. exposition of the source of history and complicated and II. controversial discussion on the problems arising out of the interpretation of the data furnished by different sources. In fact, there is dire scarcity of the popular roots in construction of
the history and culture of Bengal. Of course, in the second half of the nineteenth century a series of books on the history of Bengal were published to cater to the needs of the school children. Those books might have popularised the history of Bengal to some extent. Keeping in view the needs of the common people, Sir Jadunath Sarkar requested Niharranjan Roy to publish an abridged version of his *Bāṅgālī Itihāsa*, so that the people in general might be benefitted. To speak the truth, the abridged version of the above book abridged by Jyotshna Sinha Roy has not proved to be quite suitable for the general public. On the other hand, Subhas Mukhopadhyay’s popular version of the same book is no doubt popular but it misses many significant aspects of the society and culture of the Bengali people.

It has been said quite reasonably:

> The races which are fortunate, attain self-introspection through history and keep their creative faculties ever animated by deriving impetus from various sources.

It seems that still the Bengalees are deprived of this good fortune. It was, however, expected that *Vaṅgīya Itihāsa Pariṣat* would undertake the task of spreading popular education through the publication of popular books on the history of Bengal containing the essential facts without depriving the people from the historical truth.
References


5. Supra. Ch. II,


8. Ibid., p. 303.


10. Ibid., p. 319.

11. Ibid., p. 319.


14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Supra. Ch. III,


24. Ibid., pp. iii ff.
54. *Indian Historical Quarterly*, vol. VI, p. 642.
57. *Journal of Indian History* (Golden Jubilee Number) 1982, p. 270.
64. *Ibid.*., p. 830.


82. ‘Administration in Pre-Pāla Bengal’, *Indian Culture*, vol. VI, No. 1-4, July 1939 – April 1940; ‘Administration under the Pālas and the Senas’, *Indian Culture*, vol. vii, No. 2, October-December 1940 and vol. vii, No. 3, January – March 1941.


94. *DHB*, p. xiii.
97. DHB, p. 622.
102. Supro Ch. IV, Section 'Sukumar Sen : Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itiḥāsa'
104. Ibid., pp. 1-3.
105. Ibid., pp. 3-7.
106. Ibid., pp. 8-13.
107. Ibid., p. 8.
108. Ibid., p. 9.
111. Ibid., pp. 24-38.
112. Ibid., p. 35.
113. Ibid., pp. 38-43.
114. Ibid., p. 39.
115. Ibid., p. 41.
116. Ibid., pp. 44-45.
117. Ibid., p. 45.
118. Ibid., p. 45.
119. Ibid., pp. 46-50.
120. Ibid., pp. 46 ff.
121. Ibid., p. 50.
122. Ibid., p. 50.
123. Ibid., pp. 51-52.
127. *HBP*, p. x.
137. *HBP*, p. 2
138. *HBP*, p. 2
139. *HBP*, p. 5
146. D.D. Kassambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, p. xii.
166. *HBP*, p. xv.
171. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay ‘Bāṅgālār Itihāsa’, *Baṅgadarśan*. Māgh 1281 BS.