Chapter – VI

LOCAL HISTORY IN BARDDHAMAN: A GENRE APART?

6.1 INTRODUCTION: In this chapter we would scan the school of local history in one particular district of modern West Bengal i.e. Barddhaman. Now why did we choose this particular district? This district occupies a distinctly important place in the history and geography of modern West Bengal. But, for long, it did not receive adequate attention from mainstream historians. Secondly, before 1950, only a few full-length works on local history were written in Barddhaman. But, a large number of articles and essays regarding various socio-cultural themes about Barddhaman were written by antiquarians. But they did not extend their efforts to compose full-fledged books. This is a historical puzzle which needs to be solved. The uniqueness of nano-history in Barddhaman will be brought out in this chapter. Thirdly, Barddhaman town is the birth place of this researcher. So, the present researcher has a personal, even emotional interest in the history of Barddhaman. But that fact in no way has coloured his inquiry.

Now we may try to discern why Barddhaman occupies so distinct a seat in the geo-politics of Bengal. Museologist Dr. Sailen Samanta made the simple statement, ‘Barddhaman is West Bengal’. The claim is rather startling, but he proceeds to provide ample reasons for it. He pointed out that Barddhaman occupies a central position in the map of contemporary West Bengal. Dr. Sukumar Sen, the legendary philologist, claimed similarly, ‘Barddhaman stands for entire West Bengal. Owing to its prominence the whole terrain south of Bhagirath was once known as ‘province of Barddhaman’. In terms of geology, also it has two types of soil. The Western part of the district consists of rough, red rocky soil. This is ideal for industrialization and here the Durgapur-Asansol industrial belt is situated. The Eastern part is made of extremely fertile alluvium, and the agricultural productivity of the section is legendary. This is supplied by Damodar and Bhagirathi-Hughly. Besides, this district is the seat of one of the earliest pre-historic

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608 Quoted in Ibid, Vol III, p. 25.Translation mine, original Bengali text, ‘Barddhaman mane Paschimbanga ....... Barddhamaner naam anusare edsher (Bhagirathir dakshine) naam hoye chilo Barddhaman bhukti’
cultures of Bengal. In the basin of the river Ajoy and Kunur, a chalcolitic habitation grew up in the second millennium. Evidence of this has been discovered in Bhirbanupur and the well-known ‘Pandu-Rajar dhibi’. Pedants like Ramaranjan Mukherjee have similarly celebrated the remarkable position of Barddhaman in the life of Bengal.

6.2 THE HISTORICAL SETTING: Now we may spare a few words in defining the physical entity of Barddhaman. This is the name of a town, a sub-division and a district. Here we are mostly concerned with the last. The geographical boundaries of Barddhaman have not remained fixed over the years. From the fifth century C.E. the history of Barddhaman can be traced with some certainty. Then the unit called Barddhaman bhukti embraced much of Western Bengal. Later, from the Irda inscription of Nayapala, we come to know that Dandabhukti or Medinipur was a part of Barddhaman. Other sources indicate that along with Howrah and Hugly, Barddhaman formed the division of Southern or Dakshin Rarh, in the twelfth century.

In the Mughal era, today’s Barddhaman roughly corresponded with Sarkar Sarifabad. According to the Ain-i-Akbari, this Sarkar was sub-divided into twenty six mahals (Barddhaman being one of them) and its revenue was 2,448,750 dams. It supplied 5000 infantry and 200 cavalry. Abul-Fazl said that in Sarifabad, beautiful species of cattle, white in colour and of fine build was found. They could carry up to 15 maunds of weight. The district was also famous for its Barbary goats and fighting cocks.609 Later Nawab Murshid Quli Khan partitioned Bengal into thirteen Chaklas, Barddhaman being one of them. This contained 61 parganas and was made up of entire Sarifabad and parts of Selimabad, Mandaran and Satgaon sarkars. In the eighteenth century, Maharaja Kirtichand extended the boundaries of Barddhaman by acquiring a number of small zamindaries like Chandrakona, Baligari, Chetua, Bhursut (belonging to the family of the poet Bharatchandra), Barada and Manoharshahi. He won a victory against the Raja of Bishnupur and captured part of his kingdom. His son Chitrasen continued the success story against the chiefs of Bishnupur, Birbhum and Panchakot. He also annexed

Mandalghat and Arsa. In the British period after considerable boundary fluctuations, the Barddhaman district was reformed with six sub-divisions in 1872. This unit stretching over 7000 square kilometer, bordered by Murshidabad, Birbhum and the Santhal Parganas in the north, Nadia in the east, Hugly, Bankura and Purulia in the south, and Dhnabad in the west, more or less continues as Barddhaman till today.

Here, while still discussing the identity of Barddhaman, we may just drop in a line or two about the origin of the place name. The popular view is that the area got its name from Vardhamana Mahavira, the famous Jaina Tirthankara, who visited Barddhaman in the sixth century B.C. But many serious historians refuse to credit Barddhaman with such antiquity and provide other explanations. According to some, the word Barddhaman is derived from autochthonous Austric expression, Bododmon. The Greek geographer Ptolemy had mentioned a place called Brodman in Rarh. During this time, the area was certainly not under Aryan linguistic influence. Besides, there is still a village called Barowan on the banks of Balluka, a tributary of Damodar. Some again, hold that the expression Barddhaman stands for expansion. As this area formed the shifting boundary of the Aryan expansion in Eastern India, it was called so. Another version holds that in Sanskrit, Vardhamana also means ‘prosperous’. The legendary fertility of the alluvial plains around the Barddhaman town supplied by rivers Ajay, Damodar and Bhagirathi, gave the name to this place.

Whenever we think about Barddhaman, automatically we reflect about the Barddhaman Raj. The zamindari family, popularly known as the Barddhaman Rajas, which remained in power till 1954, did much to shape the socio-cultural identity of the terrain, especially of the Barddhaman town. Even today, the palaces, the tanks, the archaic market complex around the temple of the patron Goddess Sarbamangala, and the abandoned stables lend distinction to the old Barddhaman town. At night, when one rides the typical rickshaw and passes through the serpentine lanes of the habitation, listening to

612 Details can be found in Hansanarayan Bhattacharya, *Bardhishnu Barddhaman* (Firma KLM, Kolkata, 1998), pp. 75-85.
the tinklings of the jewellery shops illuminated by lamps and watching the vigorous transactions in the century-old markets, it seems that the ‘illusion of a little kingdom as of old’, where the Raja was ‘everyone’s mother and father’ still persists. Owing to their financial resources, massive estate and pre-colonial heritage, the Barddhaman Rajas could build a picturesque domain, which for its inhabitants, assumed a character autonomous from the rest of British Bengal. So here we may just offer a short sketch of the history of Barddhaman royalty.\textsuperscript{613}

This family was founded by one Sangam Rai, a Kapur Khatri from Lahore. He settled in Barddhaman in the late sixteenth century. He was involved in money-lending and grain-dealing. His son Abu Rai was the first to emerge as a landed elite by gaining the title of \textit{Chaudhuri} in 1657. His son, Babu Rai gained the zamindari of a few parganas including Barddhaman proper. The lineage of Sangam Rai really gained in prominence during the reign of Raja Kirtichand (1702-40) and his successor Raja Chitrasen (1740-44). Their military exploits have been already discussed and it is enough to say that under them the petty zamindari assumed the state of a considerable principality. Kaliprasanna Banerjee remarked that Jagatram’s aptly named son, Kirtichandra i.e. the ‘moon of achievement’, became known throughout Bengal for his success. His vast estate almost resembled an autonomous kingdom.\textsuperscript{614} The exalted status of the Raj family was recognized, even by the Mughal Emperor, who conferred the honourable title of \textit{Maharaja-adhiraj} (King of Kings) on Raja Trilokchand along with a high \textit{mansab} (rank) of 5000 zat and 3000 sawar. McLane in his noted work on Barddhaman\textsuperscript{615} linked the shooting up of the Raj family into prominence, to a general rise of the Khatris in the Mughal successor states. They were skilled as accountants and bankers and so were appointed as \textit{vakils, diwans} and \textit{peshkars} by governors of Bengal, Awadh and Hyderabad and other minor Mughal nobles. In Bengal too, in the first half of the eighteenth century, Khatris like Omichand and Manikchand rose into prominence in the Nawabi court. The transition from Mughal to British rule was not easy for Barddhaman. There was a series of skirmishes between the Raja and the East India Company, which was trying to gain

\textsuperscript{613} Yajneshwar Chaudhuri, \textit{Barddhaman: Itihas O Samskriti}, (Pustak Bipani, Kolkata, 1995), Vol – II, Here detailed history of the Barddhaman Raj family can be found.

\textsuperscript{614} Ibid, p.158.

\textsuperscript{615} J.R. McLane, \textit{Land & Local Kingship in Eighteenth Century Bengal}, (Columbia, 1993)
influence over Barddhaman, between 1755 and 1760. The semi-independent power of the Barddhaman Raj was curtailed substantially by the British. The estate might have broken up under excessive revenue demands of the British, like Natore and Nadia. But it survived owing to the mechanisms of a series of able administrators, who introduced a number of ingenious reforms such as the *pattani* or ‘perpetual lease’ system. So, in the twentieth century, the Barddhaman Raj was not only intact, but it sprawled over several districts. The Rajas also owned extensive property outside Bengal. Besides, the Rajas consolidated their position by timely cooperation with the British. Forgetting the initial hostility the Barddhaman rulers actively aided the colonial govt. during the Santhal rebellion of 1855 and the Revolt of 1857. The British duly reciprocated by nominating the Rajas for various honours.

From the mid-nineteenth century, modern institutions and innovations like railways started appearing in Barddhaman. The results of the first brush of modernity was, however disastrous for Barddhaman. Faulty planning while laying the railway tracks led to serious disturbance of the natural drainage system of Western Bengal. This resulted in the out-break of the infamous ‘Burdwan fever’, a ‘particularly malignant form of malaria’. Its effect was so devastating that the population of Barddhaman, once the sanitorium of Eastern India, was reduced by 30% within 1869 and 1872. Significantly, many minor local historians of the district, about whom we would discuss later in the chapter, did not treat the Malaria issue with much importance. Possibly describing malaria was not very crucial to their scheme of things. They were more interested in proclaiming the glory of or bringing out the distinction of their own tracts. Modern urban institutions like the municipality ultimately made significant marks on the social set-up of the Barddhaman Raj. In Barddhaman, the social elite comprised of the traditional

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616 In this system, the Rajas leased blocks of land to *pattanidars* or intermedieries for a specific period in return of an assured sum. The *pattanidars* had to pay the said amount in monthly instalments to the Raj. If they failed, they were deprived of the land. This ensured a steady flow of money to the Raj treasury and enabled the Rajas to pay their revenues regularly to the Government.


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Punjabi Khatri landed gentry and the Bengali educated professionals such as lawyers and merchants. The Bengali element was a creation of the colonial educational and administrative institutions. They were the most vigorous in working the new municipal system which made it possible for the non-aristocratic citizens to participate in administration. But there was no real tension between the new municipal commissioner and the Maharajas’ court. The former made no serious attempt to challenge the privileged position of the latter. The Rajas were also willing to accept reforms and programmes that could be accommodated within the framework of the empire. But they were much less charitable to the mushrooming national movement.

Bijoy Chand Mahatab, who ruled the zamindari for almost the whole period of the rise and development of the nationalist movement, deliberately discouraged its flourishing in Barddhaman. Bijoy Chand made it clear that he regarded British rule in India as sacred and the spread of the ideas of ‘equality, liberty and fraternity’ in this land as inappropriate.\(^{619}\) He also tried to keep the students away from anti-colonial politics. It must be admitted that the ‘Burdwan District Congress’ established in 1921, proved to be inefficient and failed to take effective steps against the Maharaja. It did not aid the people during the flood of 1935 and could not intervene in the Damodar Canal Satyagraha in the same year. This failure led to serious embarrassment for the Congress in 1936 elections. It was only in 1940, that the Congress could capture the District Board. Even then, it was not the Congress, but the Raja who played a leading role in maintaining communal harmony; besides, the Congress could not organize any effective campaign against the Rajas till independence.\(^{620}\)

However, it would not be correct to paint the Rajas as tyrannical obscurantists. It is true that they often did not take effective steps to check the evils of the pattani system, which resulted in the oppression of common peasantry, or tried to improve the conditions of the rural areas uniformly. But in their own way, they did contribute to the culture of Bengal. Unfortunately, their measures did not attain as much publicity throughout Bengal as those of the Renaissance figures of Calcutta and zamindars and pundits of Nadia. Raja

\(^{619}\) Ibid p.259
\(^{620}\) Ibid, p. 262
Mahatabchand was a supporter of the social reforms of Debendranath Tagore and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. He translated into Bengali and printed at his own cost such classics as *Harivamsa, Ramayan, Chahar Darbesh, Sikandarnama, Mashnabi Ala* and above all the *Mahabharata*. It is said that there was a friendly competition between the Raja and Kaliprasanna Sinha regarding whose Bengali Mahabharata would come out first and be the best.\textsuperscript{621} The editor of the famous ‘Critical Edition’ of the Mahabharata, Dr. V.S. Sukathankar, lavished praise on the Barddhaman edition in the preface to his work.\textsuperscript{622} Before that Raja Tejchand did much to spread English-style education in his estate. He laid the foundation of the Raj College which was later developed by Raja Aftab Chand. The eighth *Bengal Literary Conference*, where Sir Jadunath Sarkar delivered the famous address on the methodology of local history, was held in Barddhaman with the cordial patronage of Raja Bijoy Chand. Along with these the Rajas also performed various welfare measures like founding temples and digging tanks. The 109 Shiva temples, Krishna *Sayar* and Shyam *Sayar* bear testimony to their initiatives.

We would talk about the court literature of the Barddhaman Raj later.

Here we may note the impression Barddhaman created on the mind of outside observers. Detailed descriptions of Barddhaman by pre-colonial non-Bengali authors have not come down to us in great quantity. We have already mentioned Abul-Fazl’s opinion about Barddhaman. About the indigenous authors’ standpoint, we don’t have much evidence, except a few fragments in the Mangal Kavyas. The most vivid portrayal of pre-British Barddhaman came from the pen of Bharatchandra.\textsuperscript{623} However, European administrators and antiquarians did preserve detailed depictions of the town and the district. Here we may just provide a few examples. W.B. Oldham in *Some Historical and Ethnical Aspects of the Burdwan District* tried to reconstruct the history of ancient Barddhaman on the basis of the accounts of the Greek geographers and travellers. According him the Barddhaman town was the centre of the legendary Gangarides. He also held that the traditional principality of Anga embraced parts of Barddhaman. He also

\textsuperscript{621} Rakhaladas Mukherjee *Barddhaman Rajyamsanucharita* (Indu Publications, Barddhaman2003, originally published in 1915), p.139
\textsuperscript{622} V.S. Sukathankar ed. *The Mahabharata* (Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, Poona, 1933), Introduction.
made the significant statement that it is difficult to determine the territorial aspect of the Barddhaman as the district boundaries have been changed a number of times after 1760. Oldham provided numerous useful data on the ethno-phy of Barddhaman, noting the predominance of the Sadgops and the Ugrakhatriyas.\textsuperscript{624} W.W. Hunter in his \textit{Statistical Account} documented the medieval and modern history of Barddhaman.\textsuperscript{625}

K.A. L. Hill in his \textit{Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Burdwan} tried to give a comprehensive geographical / historical account of Barddhaman. The information is distributed under such heads as: 1) Area, 2) River system and Drainage, 3) Communications, 4) Climate and Health, 5) Population, 6) Town, 7) Religion, 8) Castes, 9) Occupation, 10) Jurisdiction, 11) History before the Permanent Settlement, etc. Systems of land tenure, and the rights of the zamindar and the peasants are discussed in great detail. A short history of Barddhaman, which he calls ‘a fairly compact block’ of territory is provided, especially from the angle of revenue administration.\textsuperscript{626} Among the Indian officials, shortly after independence, Ashok Mitra ICS, wrote the \textit{District Handbook, Burdwan}, based on the data gathered during the Census of 1951.\textsuperscript{627} This book remains out of our purview technically as it was written after 1950, but we can make a brief observation about it. This, like the works of Oldham and Hill, provides an informative overview about the whole district. In a pithy history of the area, Mitra mentioned the view of the Greek geographers that Barddhaman was the power centre of the Gangarides. Most interesting is his account of the ‘Barddhaman fever’, based largely on the narrative of Dr. C. J. Jackson. This is a typically local phenomenon and its inclusion as a topic, adds a country flavour to the book. Among non-official observers Bholanath Chandra in his \textit{Travels of a Hindoo}\textsuperscript{628} and Durgacharan Ray in his \textit{Debaganer Martye Agaman} painted lively pictures of the elite life of Barddhaman town. In Ray’s work the royal palaces and gardens are described. More vivid are anecdotes regarding the debauchery of the \textit{babus} of Barddhaman, one of whom lost all

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{624} W.B Oldham, \textit{Some Historical and Ethnical Aspects of the Burdwan District}, (Calcutta, 1891 & 1894).
\bibitem{625} W.W. Hunter, \textit{Statistical Account of Bengal}, Vol IV, (London 1876)
\bibitem{626} K.A.L. Hill \textit{Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operation in the District of Burdwan}, (Calcutta, 1927-34)
\bibitem{627} Ashoke Mitra, \textit{District Census Hand Book, Burdwan} (Calcutta, 1953).
\bibitem{628} Bholanath Chandra \textit{Travels of a Hindoo} (Trubner & Co, London 1869)
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his property on a public woman. Even the noise of the wheels of the babus’ pheton cars was conveyed by the author to his readers in his pen portrayal.  

6.3 THE LITERARY TRADITION: In this section, we would focus on the cultural and history-writing tradition of Barddhaman. Regarding the cultivation of literary-cultural tradition, the district can be sub-divided into four sections. First, East Barddhaman including Katwa and Kalna, located on the banks of Bhagirathi. This is the place of genesis of Vaishnava literature penned by the likes of Narahari Sarkar, Brindavan Das, Krishnadas Kaviraj, Gyan Das etc. Some major Vaishnava centres such as Srikhanda, Jhamatpur and Kulingram are situated here. Secondly, South Barddhaman embraced the fertile land situated on the southern bank of Damodar. Here many of the important Mangal Kavyas were composed. Mukundaram Chakravarti, the premier author of Chandimangal, was a resident of this area (Damunya village) and he painted an indelible picture of the poverty-stricken insecure rural life of the middle ages. Most of the legendary or semi-historical characters of the Mangal-Kavyas are from Barddhaman. Ichai Ghosh or Iswar Ghosh, the chief of Dhekur was a historical figure of the Pala era. Sibsankar Ghosh in his Gopbhumer Swarup, Aitihya o Samskriti had discussed the history of Iswar Ghosh in detail. He held that the Mangal Kavyas do reflect some genuine historical tradition. Following Benoy Ghosh, he concluded that Iswar Ghosh of the copper-plate inscriptions like that of Ramganj and the chief character of Dharma-mangal are same. He most probably came into prominence during the closing years of the reign of Mahipala - I, when a period of confusion ensued with the invasion of the Cholas and the Kalachuris. Under him, possibly a number of petty chieftains of Barddhaman united to form a principality independent of the Palas. This made him a patriotic hero of the locality. He himself was a patron of the indigenous Tantric form of rituals. His strong hold was Dhekur fort, situated on the southern bank of the river Ajoy.

The chief characters of Manasa Mangal were Chand Saudagar (father of Lakhindar) and Behula. The metropolis of Chand, Champaknagar and paternal house of


630 Sibsankar Ghosh, Gopbhumer Swarup, Aitihya o Samskriti, (Prabha Prakshan, Kolkata, 2005) p.114
Behula, Ujani were both situated in Barddhaman.\textsuperscript{631} In places like Mangalkot, even in the twentieth century, traditions survived celebrating the exploits of Chand Saodagar. Benoy Ghose located the habitat of Dhanapati Saodagar in this area, too, at Ujaninagar. Dhanapati was a major character of the Chandimangal. Ghose stressed the commercial importance of the area during the middle ages, and for him it was not surprising that major merchant-heroes should reside here.\textsuperscript{632} The banks of Damodar are also the birth places of many fairy-tales, which were later collected by Lal Behari Dey. It has been rightly remarked that, this collection called \textit{The Folk-Tales of Bengal} is more precious than any amount of wealth for a patriotic Bengali. It later served as an inspiration for antiquarians like Dakshina Ranjan Mitra Mazumdar. Thirdly, western Barddhaman: Rugged terrain where the Durgapur-Asansol industrial belt is located. This is a place of mixed and composite population. Here traditional forms of Bengali song and stage entertainments such as \textit{jatra, palagan, kabigaan} etc. flourished. Among the composers of \textit{Kabigaan} and \textit{panchalis}, the name of Dasrathi Ray is the most prominent.\textsuperscript{633} He modified the ancient forms of \textit{panchali} to some extent. His main significance lies in the fact that his songs reflected the varied emotions of the common peasant folk. Like a typical Bengali folk-devotee, he depicted gods such as Shiva and Durga in an earthy, human fashion. His compositions are examples of how the achievements of urban personalities like Vidyasagar were appreciated in the countryside.\textsuperscript{634} For its realistic content and attractive tunes, the rhymes of Dasrathi Ray did not lose their appeal even in the twentieth century. After Dasrathi Ray, the most famous \textit{kabi} or composer was Nilkantha. His main contribution was writing \textit{jatras} which were dominated by songs. One noted example was \textit{Kaliadaman} pala. Closely allied to \textit{jatrapala} was another form of country entertainment, called \textit{Panchalis}. Among them, the most well-known is the \textit{Panchali} of \textit{Satya Narayan}. One of the earliest composers of this, Dwija Giridhar was a resident of Barddhaman. This tract is also the home of the Bauls, a sect of simple, syncretic devotees. Till the later part of the twentieth century, the Bauls of Western Barddhaman

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\textsuperscript{631} Residents of some areas in Eastern Bengal and even of Champa District in Bihar however claim that their homelands were the native places of Chand the merchant and his relatives.
\textsuperscript{633} Later in the chapter we have dealt with Dasrathi Ray in some detail
\textsuperscript{634} He wrote: ‘Amadigoke dite Nagar / Elen guner sagar Vidyasagar / Bidhoba par korte tari / Gun dhorechen Gunanidhi’(Here sarcastic comments regarding Vidyasagar’s attempts to introduce widow remarriage are passed).
preserved their original distinction to a great extent. Nitai Khsyapa (Nitai the Mad) and Jadubindu were two major bauls of the area. Fourthly, North Barddhaman: This comprises of the area south of the river Ajoy. This again is the fertile breeding ground of folk-tales and compositions of other sects similar to Bauls like Sains, Darbeshs etc. The religious leaning of these groups are remarkably secular and syncretic.

Coming to the religious structure of Barddhaman society, Benoy Ghose remarked that the upper strata of the Barddhaman society is influenced by Vaishnavism, while at a more rural popular level Shakta and Shaiva opinions along with the worship of Dharmathakur prevail. Barddhaman along with Birbhum is the dominant area of Shakti-worship in Bengal.635 The shrines of the Muslim pirs and ghazis also command reverence from both Hindus and Muslims. Mangalkot is one of the chief centers of localized Islam. Even in the Barddhaman town, numerous dilapidated minor shrines and tombs of Muslim saints can be seen. Some popular, though rustic rhymes can be heard even now in Barddhaman, emphasizing its Muslim character before the Rajas took over e.g. ‘Flies, Mosquitoes and Muslims, make up Barddhaman’.636 Barddhaman has a rich heritage of composing devotional songs. The compositions of Kamalakanta Bhattacharya, Nazrul Islam, Nabai Moira, Matilal Ray and Raghunath Ray justify this claim. From the late medieval age to the end of the nineteenth century, there was a steady development of the genre of devotional and folk music, often with the patronage of the landed elite. Veteran nationalist and Congress worker, Balai Debsharma in his Barddhamaner Itihas, said that in this district a particularly syncretic religious culture prevailed. Local deities, Tantrism and popular forms of Buddhism dominated the local psyche.

Now, we may turn towards the study of historiographical tradition in Barddhaman.637 The district did produce some noted macro-historians. Mention should be made of Kaliprasanna Banerjee, a resident of Katwa, who wrote the history of medieval Bengal. He produced two outstanding disciples, Rakhaladas Banerjee and Radhakumud Mukherjee. The latter himself was an inhabitant of Amodpur in Barddhaman. His brother

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635 Benoy Ghosh ‘Paschimbanger Samskriti’ Vol 1, op.cit, p. 106
636 Bengali text ‘Masa Machhi Musalman, tin niye Barddhaman’
637 See Baridbaran Ghosh, ‘Barddhaman Jelar Sahityacharcha’, in Paschimbanga Journal, Barddhaman special number, (Govt. of West Bengal, Kolkata, 1997) p. 31
Radhakamal Mukherjee was also a well-known historian. Durgadas Lahiri of Chak Brahmanagaria attempted a universal history! Sukumar Sen, though not formally a historian had contributed crucially to Indian history, mythology and culture. More recently, Niranjan Kaviraj and his more reputed son Narahari Kaviraj contributed prolifically to history and social sciences. Panchanan Mandal, who taught at Visvabharati, wrote a large number of essays and monographs on the antiquity of Barddhaman and adjoining areas. The famous scholar of Islamic history, A. B. M. Habibullah was a native of Barddhaman. His works still are some of significance for the contemporary students. Abdul Gani, besides composing poetry, wrote a few historical works. The contributions of scholars such as Abdus Samad, Hansanarayan Bhattacharya and Yajneswar Chaudhuri were not made during our period of study, so they would not be considered here. There are hosts of other minor but certainly dedicated pedants, whose names could not be mentioned here.

A special caveat can here be made for historical literature which was written with the patronage of the Barddhaman raj court.\textsuperscript{638} The bulk of these were \textit{prasastis} or royal eulogies.\textsuperscript{639} Noted of them were: \textit{Maharajadhirajacharitam}, a poetic biography of Raja Mahatabchand in Sanskrit by Madhusudan Bhattacharya Tarkapanchanan (1876). This was translated by Aghornath Tatvanidhi into Bengali. Here we get a short introduction to the lives of the Barddhaman Rajas and Mahatabchand’s chief courtiers. Another eulogy of Mahatabchand, this time in Bengali, was \textit{Mahatabcharita} by Gosaindas De Sarkar (1876 & 1877). Another Sanskrit work \textit{Ramashatakang}, compared Mahatabchand with the epic hero Ramachandra. Apart from state-sponsored \textit{prasastis}, other types of literature also included mention of Barddhaman Raj family. Oldest among such texts was \textit{Jaydeb Charitri} by Banamali Das. \textit{Jaal Pratapchand} by Sanjibchandra Chatterjee (brother of Bankimchandra) was a novel devoted exclusively to the Barddhaman Raj family controversy about prince Pratapchand.\textsuperscript{640} Another novel about the early history of the royal family was \textit{Chandraprava} by Taraknath Biswas. Two works on Pratapchand written in traditional non-western style were \textit{Pratapchandra Lilarasprasanga Sangit} (The

\textsuperscript{638} For details Abdus Samad, \textit{Barddhaman Raj savasrita Sahitya} (Mullick Brothers, Kolkata 1991).
\textsuperscript{639} We would not consider these works in detail in this thesis. So, full publication references are not provided here.
\textsuperscript{640} Sanjibchandra Chatterjee, \textit{Jaal Pratapchand} (Radhanath Banerjee, Calcutta, 1883)
song of the adventures of Pratapchandra) and an unnamed ballad written by Kartikchandra Siddhanta. The first one is a poetic composition written in Sanskritized Bengali by a disciple of Pratapchand who turned a hermit later. Here Pratap is seen as a divine incarnation. Its anti-British sentiment is remarkable. The second volume has been recovered only partially. A piece of more local, folk literature regarding Raja Kirtichand has been discovered. This is a ballad composed by an anonymous rural poet. A similar lay has been discovered by Mohd Ayub Hussain. In 1860-61 Jagannath Prasad Basu Mullick, the agent of the Barddhaman Rajas in Calcutta attempted a full-scale history of the Raj family named Barddhaman Bhupali. In Sanskrit, Bhupal stands for ‘lord of the land’ or ‘king’. As it is a book about the Rajas it is so named. However the most famous work on the Raj lineage was Rakhaldas Mukherjee’s Barddhaman Rajvamsanucharita. The element of loyalism is evident in the utsgara or dedication section where flattering praise is bestowed upon the Rajas. The main strength of the work is the massive amount of original documents used. With this background in mind, we would enter into a discussion regarding the local histories about Barddhaman.

6.4 THE TEXTS: Bankimchandra had once said, ‘Barddhaman, the jewel of Rarh, has no history’. This statement cannot be accepted at its face-value. There were actually a number of works composed on various portions of Barddhaman. The book which tried to provide an overview of the entire district was Barddhamaner Purakatha by Nagendranath Basu. Basu here tried to determine the antiquity of Barddhaman by citing ancient authorities such as Markendyea Purana and Barahamihira’s Brihat Samhita. He noted that Barddhaman occupies a special place in the heritage of many religious groups. Jains held that Mahavira himself visited Barddhaman. Out of the 51 Saktta Pithas, 9 were situated in Barddhaman and adjacent Birbhum, along with a number of minor (upa) pithas. Saivas rated Baidyanath and Bakreshwar as their holy places. According to Basu, the place got its name from Barddhaman Mahavira. After this, Basu gave descriptions about the noted places of Barddhaman such as Katwa, Daihat,

641 Rakhaldas Mukherjee, Barddhaman Rajvamsanucharita (Indu Publications, Barddhaman2003, originally published in 1915).
643 This monograph was written on the occasion of the Bangiya Sahitya Sammelan held at Barddhaman in 1321 B.E(1914). Published from Kolkata.
Ketugram, Attahas, Devagram etc. On the occasion of the same literary gathering, Rakhalraj Ray wrote his *Barddhaman Bibaran* (1914) where he listed the notable families of Barddhaman district such as the Raj family, the Shiyar-Shol raj house, Sinha-Roys of Chakdighi, Nandis of Baidyapur, Sinhas of Devipur, Miyans of Kusumgram etc. Rakhaldas Banerjee also composed an incisive essay called *Ujani and Mangalkot* which would be dealt with in its appropriate place.

Another publication, presenting a similar bird’s eye view of the district was *Barddhamaner Itihas* by Balai Debsharma. This was produced on the occasion of a similarly important gathering, the national-level conference of the Indian National Congress. The book falls slightly beyond the time period under consideration, the year of publication being 1958. However this work is based on research which started before 1950. So we would spare a few lines about it. This is because here a cultural survey of the whole district and ‘greater Barddhaman’ is attempted. Besides, the book was written just after independence. The nationalist sentiment was still very much in the air. So it would be interesting to study how such feelings had influenced the minds of the intellectuals of a district, written histories of whom are rather rare. The author Balai Debsharma was a veteran freedom-fighter and Congressman, during the pre-independence days. He edited *Shakti* and *Arya* magazines and wrote a number of patriotic works. In this book, the nationalist sentiment is very much in evidence at both nano and macro levels. About Barddhaman he said in the preface: ‘The history of Barddhaman is actually the tale of the evolution of the society and culture of the entire Rarh-Bengal’.

Balai Debsharma, rather interestingly, claimed that patriotic spirit was present in greater Barddhaman from the most ancient times. According to him, the *Gangararhi* soldiers successfully opposed Alexander at Gaurangapur on the banks of Ajay during his invasion of India. Ishwari Ghosh defied the authority of the central power at Gauda and set up an independent principality at Sen Pahari. Primitive national unity was evident at the united effort of all Rarh to repulse the Bargis. He also held that modern nationalist spirit was evident even before the Swadeshi days. Just after the Partition of Bengal,

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644 Balai Debsharma *Barddhamaner Itihas* (Author, Barddhaman, 1958)
645 ‘Barddhamaner Itihas prakrit pakshe Rarh-Banger sabhyata, samaj o sahityer itibritta’. Translation mine.
646 *Ibid* p. 51
Swadeshi meetings were held at various villages. Thus we see that, according to Debsharma, Barddhaman was a ‘micro-nation’ with its own distinct sentiment which had a long history. The point that each locality had an identity of its own was further stressed in his defence of local history writing. He said that members of every different terrain are endowed with separate qualities by nature. These qualities guide their spiritual and material activities and shape their destinies. This he supports on the basis of Bhagavad Gita where ‘one’s innate quality’ is stressed.\textsuperscript{647} However, Debsharma was aware of the danger of promoting the self-consciousness of minor local units. So he made an attempt to connect Barddhaman with the greater Indian civilization. He claimed that Durgapur in Barddhaman was the seat of an ancient civilization which was as glorious for Indian heritage as Harappa or Mohen-jo-daro. Before him, in 1956, Satyakinkar Mukherjee produced a slim volume on Barddhaman, titled \textit{Barddhamaner Itihas}.\textsuperscript{648} This focused mainly on the Raj family. Sadly, no other major volume was composed on the district before the 1990s.

It would be wrong though, to suppose that the tradition of chronicling never took off in Barddhaman. It is true that surveys of the entire district are rather rare. But many segments of Barddhaman have their own historians. Among these the past of Katwa is particularly well-documented.\textsuperscript{649} The name of Katwa features in medieval literary works like Kasiram Das’s \textit{Mahabharata}, Kabikank an Mukundaram’s \textit{Chandi}, Bipradas’s \textit{Manasa Bijoy}, \textit{Manasamangal} and Manohar Das’s \textit{Anuragballi}. In the descriptions of early English officials, the name Katwa cropped up intermittently. In modern Bengali, the first attempt on Katwa’s history was made by Prafulla Chandra Banerjee. He wrote an essay about the geography and society of Katwa in \textit{Janmabhumi} magazine (Sravan 1301 BE). He was quickly followed by Rasiklal Ghosh, who authored \textit{Katongar Itibritta} in the same magazine in the same year.\textsuperscript{650} Here much information about the history of Katwa, especially during the ancient age, is available. A short introduction to the important sites and local personages of Katwa is also given. Many later authors on Katwa extensively

\textsuperscript{647} \textit{Ibid} preface ‘Ek ekta desher adhidebata, tahar antar atma, tahar anbasthita manab ke ek bishes prakriti dan koriachen. Sei antapakriti tahader bhab-bhabana, karmasadhana, achar-anusthanke niyantrito koria thake. Gita ihakey swadharma boliache’

\textsuperscript{648} Satyakinkar Mukherjee, \textit{Barddhamaner Itihas} (Author, Barddhaman, 1956.)

\textsuperscript{649} See the preface of Nibaranchandra Chatterjee \textit{Katwar Ithias}, for further details.

\textsuperscript{650} Rasiklal Ghosh ‘Katongar Itibritta’, \textit{Janmabhumi} (Kolkata,Ashwin 1301 BE)
used materials found in his article. Other scholars who contributed on Katwa include Maulavi Abdul Wali, Harihar Seth, Sadananda Thakur, Ajit Sen, Benoy Ghose and Mohd. Ayub Hossain. Local historians of other regions like Nikhilnath Ray and Akshay kumar Maitreya also mentioned Katwa in their works. The professions which the commentators on Katwa pursued indicate the varied background from which local historians came. Prafulla Banerjee was a postmaster, Sadananda Thakur a religious devotee and Ajit Sen a bureaucrat. However the most important volume on the subdivision was *Katwar Itihas* by Nibaranchandra Chatterjee.\(^{651}\) This book was divided into six chapters or *prastabs*. First the origin of the name Katwa and its early history are dealt with. A description of the *Bargi* raid is given. He said that prosperous citizens of Katwa used to build underground chambers in their houses to hide valuables during the calamity. The significance of Katwa in the victorious campaign of the British against Siraj in 1757 is pointed out. Katwa’s relevance as a Vaishnava place of pilgrimage is also stressed. Many anecdotes about Vaishnava sites like Indrani and Dainhat and holy persons are recorded.

Lastly, a short narrative about Agrwadwip is attempted underlining its basic connection with Katwa’s cultural heritage. Chatterjee made some important observations about the significance of local history, in the nationalist context. At the beginning of his work he said: ‘Today one can dimly discern the first signs of a national awakening. People are gradually shedding their pessimistic attitude and exerting themselves vigorously. They are also coming out of their fascination of anything foreign and paying careful attention to the indigenous heritage.’\(^{652}\) In the introduction to the chapter on Agrwadwip, he commented on issues which a local historian should always keep in mind. He opined that while documenting the history of any ancient habitation first we must appreciate its geographical setting. The origin of its name also must be determined. The story of Agrwadwip was told along with that of Katwa, as both of them were part of a

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\(^{651}\) Nibaranchandra Chatterjee *Katwar Itihas*. The book was published from Katwa. The first few pages of the original manuscript have been lost. So nothing could be known about the date of publication. Possibly it was published around 1918.

common Vaishnava heritage. Owing to this discerning outlook, the effort of Chatterjee remains the best on the sub-divisions of Barddhaman.

After this, we can concentrate on books dealing with other regions of Barddhaman. *Agardangar Chaudhury Vamsa* (The Chaudhurys of Agardanga) by Kalipada Chaudhury is a family history but it contains valuable data and observations regarding the entire area. Thus, the author has displayed a really fine sense of history. One, rather off beat production is *Shibakhya kinkar Kavya* (The Poem about a Servant of Goddess Shibakhya). This is a long historical poem based on local legends of Gopbhum in Barddhaman. It is the story of Raja Sudarshan Sinha of Gaur who looted the temple of goddess Kali for treasures and drove away its devout priest Shibram Swami. Later the Swami, with the help of the goddess took due revenge on the tyrant. This is not strictly a work of history, but historical figures from medieval Barddhaman appear in the book such as Mahendra Ray, the Raja of Amar Garh, Kanaram, Narayan Chatterjee and saint Kamalakanta. Sibsankar Ghosh in his *Gopbhumer Swarup, Aitihya o Samskriti* has tried to place this work in its historical context. According to him, the Gop Raja Mahendra Ray had established the temple of goddess Durga at Amar Garh. There she was known as *Shibakhya* as below her idol there was a small statue of a jackal or *shiba*. There are several legends current about the goddess in this area. Debendranath Chatterjee, a country poet of the area compiled some of them to project the greatness of the goddess and her devotee, Raja Mahendra. Later Benoy Ghosh had also commented upon Raja Mahendra and his kingdom. From this poem some historical data can be gathered especially about Mahendra and his lineage.

Another work, dealing with an important figure of Barddhaman was *Uddharan Dutta Thakur* by Dinanath Dhar. This book deals with the life of a local Vaishnava preacher. His seat was at Saptagram in Hughly. But he was influenced by and in turn...
influenced the Barddhaman Vaishnavas. Also, at times Saptagram came within the purview of Barddhaman district. So this book may be treated as a part of the historiographical heritage of Barddhaman.\textsuperscript{658} Thakur’s disciples were mostly Suvarna baniks. This book is basically a caste-history and its aim is to build up the cultural heritage of the Suvarna baniks. Here a number of legends found their places like how Ballalsena socially downgraded this trading caste and how Uddharan rejected the sacred thread after coming into contact with Vaishnavism. He was a direct associate of Nityanand, a companion of Sri Chaitanya. However the author had a sense of history in his own way. He gathered formidable evidence to reject the claims of the \textit{Gandhabaniks} (merchant of spices) on Uddharan. He took considerable pains to determine the exact year of birth of Uddharan and the proper meaning of his name. Texts like \textit{Chaitanya Bhagavat} and \textit{Bhakti-ratnakar} were consulted by him. Some popular plays were produced on historical characters residing in Barddhaman, especially Noor Jahan, who spent her early life here.

6.5 THE ESSAYS: After this we find no major text on Barddhaman. But that does not mean there are no further evidences about the historiographical \textit{gharana} of Barddhaman. There are a number of essays produced on various aspects of the life of Barddhaman district, on which virtually no light has been shed. Here we would discuss some of them. However, we have largely excluded pieces concerning the Barddhaman Raj as they are more or less flatly written and repetitive. A typical example of this type is ‘Barddhaman Rajvamsa’ by Aswini Sen.\textsuperscript{659} This is full of loyalist praise for the Raj family like, ‘Among the zamindars of Bengal proper, in wealth and property the Barddhaman Rajas are the foremost’.\textsuperscript{660} Another such attempt is ‘Bardddhamaner Katha’ by Purnachandra Bhattacharya.\textsuperscript{661} This is a scrappy essay written for a children’s magazine. The author is absolutely loyal to the Barddhaman Raj and its master the British-Indian Government. His sentiments can be discerned from statements such as the one that Maharaja of Barddhaman is the richest person in Bengal. Every thing is so

\textsuperscript{658} Dinanath Dhar \textit{Uddharan Dutta Thakur} (Oriental Book Press, Kolkata 1924)
\textsuperscript{659} Aswini Sen, ‘Barddhaman Rajvamsa’, \textit{Aitihasik Chitra} (Kolkata Jaistha 1316 B.E) pp.62-70
\textsuperscript{660} \textit{Ibid} p. 62 . Khas Banglar zamindar srenir madhye dhan o bhusampattite Barddhaman rajbangshoi sarbhasrestha boli khyati lav koriache’. Translation mine.
\textsuperscript{661} Purnachandra Bhattacharya, ‘Bardddhamaner Katha’, \textit{Santosh} (Mymensingh Jaistha 1322 BE) pp.41-42
wonderful about him. Possibly, the author wanted to foster loyalist sentiment among the young generation. That is why he is all praise for the British Raj and the then Governor-General, Lord Hardinge.

There are some articles on the district as a whole. One such effort is ‘Barddhaman’ by Shaurindra Kumar Ghosh. This is a compact essay sub-divided into sections such as the Raj family, geography, famous places, fairs, festivals, industrial places and famous personages. Legends about the origin of the place-names are given. When Behula, the heroine of Manasa Mangal, was passing along a river (which later was called Behula) with the dead body of her husband Lakhindar, the people of a neighbouring village asked her ‘Ke jay’ (who goes?). From this the village came to be known as Ke jay. This later in corrupted tongue became ‘Kejja’. Thus this village got its name. The birth places of famous local personages are also determined. He gives an interesting theory regarding the genesis of the name ‘Rarh’. He said that once the area comprising of Medinipur and Barddhaman was known as Ganga rashtra (the country of the Ganges). Often it was called simply Rashtra. The word Rarh was derived from Rashtra. Another such effort was ‘Barddhaman-parichiti’ by Sudhir Raha. This gives an introduction to the geography, anthropology, economy and handicrafts of Barddhaman. But no definite historical narrative is given. The essay is noteworthy because it shows that the author had a clear sense of local level patriotism. He said: ‘I am a resident of Barddhaman. So I feel that it is my duty to acquaint the residents of other districts with the life in Barddhaman. When we think about this place contrasting things like sweets [sitabhog / mihidana] and malaria fever come to our mind. At the same time, we should take into cognizance the literary supremacy of Barddhaman. Some local phenomena are portrayed ably here such as the deadly effect of the hyacinths which invaded the fields and ponds of the villages along with the flood waters of Damodar.

662 Ibid p.41.
663 Shaurindra Kumar Ghosh ‘Barddhaman’, Masik Basumati (Kolkata, Asvin 1375 BE) pp. 38-40. This essay was published much after the period under consideration in this thesis. Still we have included it is a good example of its kind.
665 Ibid p. 117.’Ami Barddhamanbasi, sei hisabe nije jelar bishoy sambandhe annaya jelai parichay koria deoa kartabya bolia mone koritechi………. Barddhamaner katha mone hoiley, e jelar sitabhog o mihidana eidui khabar o tatsange Barddhamaner malariar kotha smaran hoi jai……..Barddhamanke Banga sahityer janak bolileo, konorupey atyukti kora hoibe na.’ Translation mine.
There are some other essays which try to push the history of Barddhaman into the most ancient times and glorify micro-regional figures. One such example is ‘Adisurer Aitihasikata’⁶⁶⁶ (The historicity of Adisura) by Nagendradeb Bhattacharya. This is a work of conservative Brahmanical outlook. The writer tried to prove the historicity of Adisura as he was the very fountainhead of Brahmanical culture of Bengal. The point of interest for us is his claim that Mutra village of Barddhaman was the original habitat of Adisura. He held that the original name of the village Sourn originated from Sura. He tried to marshal archaeological evidence in his favour, like the coins and images unearthed in the ruins of Mutra. Besides he provides some information that reflects the remarkable cultural synthesis of this area. The zamindars of Samudragarh, who were converted to Islam in the middle ages, used to have a Hindu and a Muslim name simultaneously like Kesablal Thakur – Iaser Khan.⁶⁶⁷ Another similar essay is ‘Paschim banger Pratapaditya’ by Nagendranath Ghose.⁶⁶⁸ This is the portrait of a typical local hero. Accidentally he was a namesake of the famous member of the Baro bhuyians. He was the zamindar of the Kanksa village of Barddhaman. He imprisoned a faqir who had committed some genuine crime. So the provincial Muslim authorities (in the essay it is written Delhir Badshah, which is most unlikely) sent a force against him. Pratap could repell them at first owing to a jiyatkunda or ‘lake of life’ in his fort. Later, when the Muslims came to know of his secret, they despoiled the lake by throwing beef into it. Thus it lost the regenerative power. After this Pratap was defeated and fled to Udaygarh.⁶⁶⁹ Thus we see the familiar themes of Jiyat Kunda and conquest achieved through a faqir re-appearing in this local case.

There are several other essays about locally important lineages and historical figures. An effort in this direction is Jyanendranath Kumar’s ‘Chakdighir Sinharay vamsa’ (The Sinha Ray family of Chakdighi).⁶⁷⁰ This was a noted old landed family of the district. Here a short history of the line and a genealogy is provided. It is a written in

⁶⁶⁶ Nagendradeb Bhattacharya ‘Adisurer Aitihasikata’ Tattvabodhini Patrika,(Kolkata, Baisakh 1335 BE) pp.17-20
⁶⁶⁷ Ibid p.19
⁶⁶⁸ Nagendranath Ghose ‘Paschim banger Pratapaditya’ Sadgop Patrika (Kolkata, Aghrayan 1336 BE) pp. 162-164
⁶⁶⁹ Ibid p.163
⁶⁷⁰ Jyanendranath Kumar ‘Chakdighir Sinharay vamsa’ Prajapati,( Kolkata, kartik 1329 BE), pp. 17-20
an old-fashioned way with loyalist sentiments. He went out of the way to prove the affinity of the Sinha Ray zamindars with the British. Another essay is ‘Gopbhumer aatjan Sadgop Raja’ (eight Sadgop kings of Gopbhum) by Trailokyanath Pal. This deals with the major Sadgop families of the Gopbhum sub-region. According to Sibsankar Ghosh, who had done exhaustive research on the subject, the land between Ajay and Damodar rivers, stretching from Katwa in the east to the Barakar rivulet in the west, was known as Gophum in early medieval times. This was so named because a pastoral people called *Gops* used to reside there. Yajneshwar Chaudhuri said that Ausgram and Kanksa formed Gopbhum. It constituted a part of the numerous *bhum* principalities found in the rugged, hilly, jungle terrain of the Bengal – Jharkhand – Orissa border. During medieval times, it was also known as *Goalabhum*. In 1744, Raja Chitrasen of Barddhaman conquered Gopbhum, but its cultural distinction remained for quite some time. The article is possibly a part of an attempt towards the formation of a concrete Sadgop identity. This is clear from the quotation below which tells the story of writing of *Sadgop-Kulin Samhita*, a social encyclopedia of the caste. He said that Mokshada Prasad Raychaudhuri visited the homes of every Sadgop of good family in every possible village and collected huge amount of family tales, ballads, oral testimonies, legends and written genealogies. He then subjected them to careful scrutiny and compiled only the true data in *Sadgop-Kulin samhita*. So we can consider it to be a unimpeachable evidence. Thus we see that the author was supporting the preparation of a social compendium that would clearly demarcate the identity of the Sadgops. That such sentiment was prevalent among other members of his caste is proved by another article in the same magazine by Rangalal Ghose. He said that, if we failed to develop a sense of history amongst our people, they would never advance in the path of progress. So like literature, history is also very

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671 Trailokyanath Pal ‘Gopbhumer aatjan Sadgop Raja’ *Sadgop Patrika*, (Kolkata, Magh 1335 BE, Kolkata) pp.181-89
672 Sibsankar Ghosh, ‘Gopbhum’,op. cit, p. 25
673 Yajneshwar Chaudhuri, ‘Barddhaman : Itihas O Samskriti’ vol I, op.cit, p.143
important for a community. History helps to preserve the distinction of a culture. Like the Sadgops, the Suvarnabaniks too strove for projecting their own glorious past.

A part of this attempt was ‘Rarh deshe Suvarna-baniker basati bistar’, (The settlement of the Suvarnabaniks in Rarh) by Shibchandra Seal Debshresthi. Here the legend of the migration of sixteen Vaishya communities to Bengal from Ayodhya during the reign of King Vikramkesari of Ujjain has been depicted. Curiously, the author identifies the Ujjain of the legends with Ujani-Mangalkot of Barddhaman district. He said that among those major sixteen Vaishya heads was Srikarna Barik the chief of the Suvarna-baniks. The author depended on traditional sources like Kulapanjika by Gobardhan Misra. One more article dealing with the same legend is ‘Raja Vikramkesari o Ujani’ by Sannyasicharan Chandra. Here the author tries to prove the historicity of Vikramkesari and Mangalkavya characters such as Dhanapati Saodagar, Srimanta Saodagar and Khullana, who were contemporaries. He used traditional materials such as Mukundaram’s Chandr Gobardhan Misra’s Karjanar Kulaji and Bamdev Misra’s Kulaji. Gobardhan composed his work in 1414 Saka Era (1492 C.E.) and Bamdev in 1375 S.E or 1453 C.E. These two were especially significant as they were written to socially unite the Suvarna-baniks in the face of Muslim onslaught. However, the narrator did not blindly follow them and showed a fine sense of history while analyzing the sources. He compared various dates and came to the conclusion that Vikramkesari was a local king of Ujani in Barddhaman between 1119 and 1135, i.e. a contemporary of Vallal Sena. This kingdom fell to the Muslims around 1300. He beautifully described the comparison and contrast between mainstream history and popular memory. He said: ‘His name is barely known to the historians there is no evidence about him in the hands of the archaeologists...... But the unlettered peasants of Ujani and Mangalkot preserve the name of king Vikram even today’

675 Rangalal Ghosh, Sadgop patrika (Kolkata, Magh 1335 BE p.217)
676 Shibchandra Seal Debshresthi ‘Rarh deshe Suvarna-baniker basati bistar’, Baishya Sakti, (Kolkata, Asadh 1336 BE) pp.469-470
677 Sannyasicharan Chandra ‘Raja Vikramkesari o Ujani’, Baishya Shakti, (Kolkata, Falgun 1335 BE), pp. 276-82
Further efforts to consolidate one’s caste-identity are seen in ‘Champainagare Chand Saodagarer Mela’ (The wake of Chand the merchant in Champainagar) by Rakhalchandra Nath. The author was a zealous demagogue of Gandha banik revival. He claimed Chand Saodagar to be a Gandha banik and his achievements to be a glory of their community. Here he has narrated his experience during his visit to the fair held in the memory of Chand. From this essay, we come to know about the historical memory of the Gandha baniks of Barddhaman. They identified many ruins and geographical features like hillocks with things associated with Chand and his family members such as Behula, and Sanaka. Other traditions about the Gandhabaniks’ defence of their Raneshwar and Baneshwar Shiva lingas against Kalapahar are also mentioned. He said that in the village of Qasba, there was a pond called Raktapukur or ‘pond of blood’. This was supposed to have been created by the blood of Gandha banik defenders against Kalapahar. A nostalgic feeling is evident in the remarks like: ‘My mind was filled with an inexpressible thrill. I thought: Was this the Shiva idol, established by Chand himself?’ Another essay based on local legends and information is ‘Chand Saodagarer Kirti’. Here the author, Abadhut Bishnu Paraj, identifies Qasba village as Champainagar of Chand Saodagar. He claimed some ruins and natural objects like trees as remains of those days. Here also some anecdotes from traditional memory are given. Sub-caste jingoism is evident in remarks like, ‘It is a binding duty for every Gandhabanik to visit this holy site and to renovate the temples and shrines there’.

Another essay about Ujani and neighbouring Mangalkot is ‘Ujani o Mangalkot’. In contrast to the earlier essays this is written by an established historian like Rakhaldas Banerjee along with Manindramohan Bose and Haridas Palit. Here we see a rare combination of local legends, idiosyncrasies and archaeological proofs. Their main intention was to discover local historical facts. The authors stressed upon the religious

679 Rakhalchandra Nath ‘Champainagare Chand Saodagarer Mela’, Gandhabanik, (Kolkata, Baisakh 1334 BE), pp. 130-35
681 Abadhut Bishnu Paraj ‘Chand Saodagarer Kirti’, Gandhabanik, (Kolkata, Jaistha 1332 BE), pp. 204-205
682 Ibid op.cit ‘Pratyek Gandhabaniker ei pabitra swajati pratishtha tirthasthan darshan kora o dhwansshabshesh mandiririd samskar kora ekanta kartabya.’ Translation mine.
683 Rakhaldas Banerjee, Manindramohan Bose Haridas Palit, ‘Ujani o Mangalkot’ Sahitya Parishat Patrika (Kolkata 1320 BE), pp. 161-68
Syncretism prevalent in the area and mentioned both Hindu and Muslim legends. There are similar travelogues as well which preserve much local anecdotes and traditions. One of them is ‘Amader Palli-Bhraman’ (Our Village Excursion) by Harihar Seth, who was a well-known antiquarian. This is basically a description of Kalna. This was the original habitat of the Barddhaman Rajas, so they had a soft-corner for it. The essay is largely a flat narrative, but it contains some interesting information which throws light on local customs and peculiarities. We provide a few examples here. There was a temple called Bener Mandir, which had no idol in it. This was because of some factional trouble between the priests. Then, there was an organization called Dharmasal in Kalna run by the trading community. They collected a cess from the local businessmen and used the money (Rs. 4000 in that particular year) for developmental activities. This stood in glaring contrast with the attitude of their more wealthy Calcutta counterparts. Seth also wrote in a tongue-in-cheek fashion about the dilapidated condition of the Srikrishnachandra temple. This was supposed to receive royal favours, but its facilities were highly unsatisfactory. The mentality of the local historian is expressed in the last section. He said that he was satisfied with what he saw here, though the past grandeur was often absent. He repeatedly regretted that we mindlessly rush to distant tourist spots like Delhi and Agra, spending unnecessary money and remain ignorant about such beautiful places nearby.

There are a few more essays which describe such little villages with their peculiar heritage. One such effort is ‘Grammya- Itihas’ (Rural history) by Srishchandra Ghosh. This is concerned with the hamlet of Subaldah. Here a few old Hindu idols were recovered from a pond. At the same time a Muslim tomb complex called the ‘mausoleum of 18 pirs’ was situated there. The author was interested in the history of this place after getting these contrasting pieces of information. He gathered village legends which claimed that the Bagdi chief of the settlement was attacked by these warrior-monks under Baghdad Shah. The former resisted them for a while with the help of his jiyat kunda or ‘lake of life’. But as usual, the Muslims later despoiled it. Bereft of his magical

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684 Harihar Seth ‘Amader Palli-Bhraman’. Prabartak, (Kolkata, Sravan 1336 BE), pp.327-28
685 Ibid p.338
protection, the chieftain perished in the struggle with the invading holy warriors. At that stage, the idols worshipped by the local Hindus, were thrown into the pond to save them from defilement in the hands of the Muslims. Thus we encounter here our familiar theme of ground-level Muslim expansion. The essay is crucial from another point of view. It narrates how the original name of the village was completely changed over the years. At first, it was called Subalgarh. Garh in Bengali stands for fort. The pronunciation of the word Garh is closely similar to Gerhe, which means a pond. Some people, owing to their corrupt tongue, used to pronounce the name as Subalgerhe. In Bengali, another word meaning pond is Dah. So down the years, people started calling the village Subaldah, as dah and gerhe mean the same thing. This later became the name of the village. Thus, a habitat which was once christened ‘The fort named after Subal’, owing to mispronunciation, later came to be known as ‘The pond named after Subal’. A scholar, who is not acquainted with the tongues of the tract, may be totally confused while conducting research on the origin of the place names. Here one is reminded of Hoskins’s illustration of how ‘Ashton’ might be derived from ‘Eastern’ and thereby had nothing to do with ash.

A similar example is the essay called ‘Kalidaser Janmasthan’ by Bhudeb Mukherjee Jyotirbhushan. This is a typical example of micro-level patriotism. The author makes a strenuous attempt to prove Kalidasa to be an inhabitant of Kaliya Morgram near Amodpur. So, rather curiously he tries to locate all the places associated with Kalidasa in Burdwan. Ujjain of legendary Vikramaditya for the author is actually Ujani of this district. The Saraswati-Kunda where the poet received his wisdom is equated with a pond at Belut village in Birbhum. For him Rangpur in Barddhaman was founded by Vikramaditya in memory of his faithful servant Ranganath. Now what was the logic behind his strange conclusion? According to the narrator, in and around Barddhaman district there was a vigorous tradition about Kalidasa being born in that area. There must be some grain of truth in this belief, as it was highly unlikely that the illiterate common peasants of these villages would have heard the name and fame of Kalidasa and concocted a story about him. Besides, the peasants of other areas of Bengal are unaware

687 Bhudeb Mukherjee Jyotirbhushan ‘Kalidaser Janmasthan’, Upasana, (Kolkata Magh 1327), pp. 480-484
of the great literary figure. So, it seems that Kalidasa did have a particular connection with this tract. The narrator quoted Satishchandra Vidyabhushan and Manmathanath Bhattacharya in his support. Bhattacharya, after studying the literary style of Kalidasa, came to the conclusion that Kalidasa was a Bengali. However Dineshchandra Sen strongly countered these views and said this Kalidasa was just a local poet whom the rural folk confused with the great Sanskrit writer. The essay ends with the usual lament of a local historian. A similar effort is ‘Patuner Mela’ (The Wake of Patun) by Bibhutibhushan Mitra. Here Mitra tries to establish that the legendary sage Patanjali had his ashram (hermitage) in the Patun village of Kalna. Like a typical local antiquarian the author depended on hearsay current in the tract and some ruins of dubious value, rather than any solid historical evidence. For example, there was a deserted area very near the village where a hermitage might have existed. A very old Shiva idol called Patanjalishwar was found there. Also some old images and remnants of a temple were discovered in the area. All these added up to the conclusion that there was an ashram during the Puranic times. The objections of the formal practitioners of history were dismissed with this remark: ‘There is hardly any tangible material to construct ancient Indian history except traditions and legends. It is said that the historians do not accept any fact without genuine evidence. But for us it is simply not necessary to answer such requirements.’ A similar example is ‘Senvamser prachin Rajdhani’ by Hrishikesh Vedanta Shastri. Here the author tries to identify the early capital of the Sena dynasty, Nidrabol, with Nidol village of Barddhaman. The usual gamut of complicated literary-archaeological logic is there.

An article of slightly different variety is ‘Shabda Tatva’ (‘The Theory of Words’) by Chandrabhushan Sharma Mandal. Here actually a list of words of non-Bengali origin current in Barddhaman is provided such as Achi or trustee (Arabic), Abwab or cess (Arabic) and Anaj or grain (Hindustani). This attempt throws necessary light on the

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688 Bibhutibhushan Mitra ‘Patuner Mela’ Sri Gauranga, (Kolkata, Falgun Chaitra, 1325 BE), pp.58-63
689 Ibid p. 61, ‘Aitihye o shabde pramanidi byatito Bharater atit ithas sambandhe praman prai duspraya….Keho keho bolen aitihasikgan pratakashya praman byatito kono bishoy swikor koren na ……..e sakal apati khandan amader anabashyak.’ Translation mine.
690 Hrishikesh Vedanta Shastri ‘Senvamser prachin Rajdhani’, Bharatvarsha, (Kolkata,Sravan 1354 BE), p. 111
691 Chandrabhushan Sharma Mandal ‘Shabda Tatva’ Sahitya Sambad, (Howrah, Bhadra 1320 BE), p. 88
linguistic evolution of the district. Another essay reflecting the linguistic tradition of the area is ‘Chara-Barddhaman-Devagram hoite samgrihita’ (Rhymes collected from Devagram of Barddhaman) by Kunjalal Ray\textsuperscript{692} Here we find a collection of folk-rhymes collected from Barddhaman and Hughly. It is interesting to note that different versions of the same rhymes are found in the two closely neighbouring districts.

There is another group of articles which is concerned with religious traditions, holy men and indigenous literary figures of the district. An essay of this genre is ‘Barddhamane Banglar manishi sangam’ by Ajit Bhattacharya\textsuperscript{693} This deals with the prominent literary figures of Barddhaman in the British era. The narrator included those outsider pedants too, who spent a substantial time in Barddhaman e.g. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Madhusudan Dutta. The eighth Bengal Literary Conference is described in some detail. This is basically a collection of anecdotes and statistics about these scholars.Remarkably the author is quite critical about the British rule and states that even in the early years of the colonial rule Barddhaman’s natural environment was pretty healthy. It was only the ill-planned ventures of the British that led to the collapse of the natural balance and spread of diseases like malaria.\textsuperscript{694} Similar sentiments are echoed by the unnamed author of ‘Palli-samskar’.\textsuperscript{695} This is actually a eulogy of Durgadas Lahiri, who did much for his village, ‘Ramchandrapur Chak brahman Garia’. The writer makes an emotional contrast between the village-life of his day and the by gone era. In those days the villages always wore a festive look. The Durgapuja was celebrated with zest by everybody. Nowadays, not a trace of such activities remains.\textsuperscript{696} At the same time he did not spare the district board run by the Indians. He blamed them for the woes of contemporary rural life. He said that villages were converted into wastelands.\textsuperscript{697} The district boards are sleeping beauties. The members are vigorous only when they have to

\textsuperscript{692} Kunjalal Ray ‘Chara-Barddhaman-Devagram hoite samgrihita’ Sahitya Parishat Patrika, (Kolkata, 1303 BE),pp. 56-61
\textsuperscript{693} Ajit Bhattacharya ‘Barddhamane Banglar manishi sangam’ Bharatvarsha (Kolkata Falgun 1370 BE), pp. 287-92. This essay was published much after the period under consideration in this thesis. Still we have included it is a good example of its kind.
\textsuperscript{694} Ibid p. 287
\textsuperscript{695} Anon, ‘Palli-samskar’ Sahitya Sambad, (Howrah, Bhadra 1333 BE), pp. 209-11.
\textsuperscript{696} Ibid p. 211
\textsuperscript{697} Ibid p. 211,'District Board toh Kumbhakarna. Vote samgraher samay district boarder memberder sara paoa jai. Kintoo tarpar aar ucchabaccho dekha jai na' Translation mine.
ask for votes. After that, they disappear as usual. Another essay which supported the pre-colonial social order of the district and deplored the present condition was ‘Barddhaman Jelar Gramya sashanpranali’ by Ramaprasad Chatterjee.\textsuperscript{698} He was all praise for the traditional \textit{Panchayat} system. Chatterjee even defended the monopolization of effective powers by the upper castes as he thought that they were naturally fit to rule. In fact, this system made the upper sections more responsible towards the lower strata. For him, class distinction was divinely ordained. He held that Nature itself had made this selection, or God himself had ordained this. Throughout the world this rule of the privileged sections prevails.\textsuperscript{699} The author was also aware of the challenges faced by the traditional system in the British era. He rued that the law courts were the fashion of the day. None accepts the decisions of the village assemblies easily. Guided by new ideas, people are rejecting summarily ancient institutions. This does not augur well for the revival of the Hindus.\textsuperscript{700}

The rise of Brahmoism and the preaching of Christian missionaries had significantly influenced Hindu Bengali outlook towards their culture and history. Efforts of these groups in Kolkata have received the attention of the scholars. But there are a few essays which described the effect of the Brahmos and missionaries on the comparatively obscure Barddhaman society. One such document is ‘Barddhaman O Kalna Brahmosamaj’ by Chintamoni Chatterjee.\textsuperscript{701} This depicted the wretched condition of the Brahmo movement in Barddhaman in the early twentieth century. There were two ‘Brahmo samaj’s in the district, one in Barddhaman town itself and another at Kalna. Both were suffering from lack of funds and patronage after Mahatab Chand. Debendranath Tagore, himself visited the Kalna samaj more than once. The leading Brahmos of the area were Chandrasekhar Basu, Ambikacharan Sarkar, Bihariilal Banerjee and Kaliprasanna Vidyardatna. An unsung but remarkable figure was Dinanath, who was blind, but remained devoted to the Brahmo samaj. The Christian missionaries fared somewhat better than their Brahmo counterparts. At least, this much is evident from the

\textsuperscript{698} Ramaprasad Chatterjee  ‘Barddhaman Jelar Gramya sashanpranali’ \textit{Grihastha},(Kolkata, Agraahayan 1323), pp.105-9
\textsuperscript{700}\textit{Ibid},
\textsuperscript{701} Chintamoni Chatterjee  ‘Barddhaman O Kalna Brahmasamaj’ \textit{Tattvabodhini Patrika}, (Kolkata, Chaitra 1337 BE), pp.286-89.
article, *Barddhaman jelay Christian Missionarider abadan* by Lalit Hazra. The first group of missionaries who came to Barddhaman was the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) in 1816. The author of this thesis still remembers boys of CMS school going to their institution in white shirts and green trousers. The schools in the district were opened by Captain Stewart. In the missionary schools students were not categorised on the basis of caste or religion. This was something novel for the conservative Barddhaman society. The CMS issued printed text-books, another unprecedented step. This disturbed the old copiers of hand-written texts who campaigned against the move. The flutter which the early missionaries caused is shown by the fact that an angry parent, disturbed by his son’s leanings towards the missionary school, left him among jackals at night. Even the progressive Brahmos opposed the Christian activities. The initial missionary enterprise received a great setback from the Barddhaman fever. Thus, in this article, we come to know about the multi faceted impact the Christian missionary activities had on a small-town society. A list of missionary educational and medical institutions is given at the end.

The Brahmos and Christians, however, had no decisive religious influences in Barddhaman. That role was played by Vaishnava and Sakta saint-poets. So now we may consider some articles about such personages. One such essay is ‘Rarher-Sahitya Sadhak’ by Prasanto Kumar Ganguly. This is about the Vaishnava poets of the Barddhaman region, like Ramananada Basu. Two significant Vaishnava sites are also described. He banked mainly on traditional sources. The essay is interesting on several counts. Firstly, here it is stated while dealing with the history of religion and culture one must not attach too much emphasis on exactness of time and space. More flexible local memory is of some importance. Second, here we can see an attempt to establish the cultural distinction of Barddhaman and Rarh. The literature produced in Rarh is an essential part of Bengali culture. Rarh culture attained its fulfillment after receiving contributions from all major creeds, Tanric, Buddhism, Saktaiism and Vaishnavism. The culture of Rarh

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702 Lalit Hazra ‘Barddhaman jelay Christian Missionarider abadan’ *Prabasi*, (Kolkata, Bhadra 1337 BE), pp.519-22
703 Prasanto Kumar Ganguly ‘Rarher-Sahitya Sadhak’ *Bharatvarsha*, (Kolkata, Sravan 1361 BE), pp.260-61. This essay was published some time after the period under consideration in this thesis. Still we have included it is a good example of its kind.
vastly influenced the tradition of Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Nepal and Tibet. The author claimed that Rarh was synonymous with Barddhaman district. Thus in this essay we visualize an effort to construct a cultural sphere centering Barddhaman. Another essay providing an overview of Vaishnava heritage is ‘Barddhaman jelar melar Bibaran’ (A description of fairs of Barddhaman district) by Bholanath Brahmachari Bhaktibinod. Here the major fairs where the Vaishnavas used to congregate are discussed. The writer depended on traditional sources like Nulo Panchananer Goshtikatha and Edu Mishrer Karika. However, he showed a healthy sense of history when he said that there was no solid evidence to back up most of the statements made in these works. They were mostly compilation of legends.

‘Barddhaman Jelar prachin Kabigan’ (The ancient poets of Barddhaman) by Sudhirchandra Raha provides a short introduction to the Vaishnava poets of the district. However, some modern figures such as Rangalal Banerjee, Lalbehari De and Satyen Dutta are also considered. The feature to be noted here is the presence of local jingoism. The author said that in his opinion literature of ancient Bengal could blossom only owing to the efforts of the poets and authors of Barddhaman.

One more essay recording a tradition, little recognized in mainstream Vaishnava discourse, is ‘Renetir Padkarta’ (the Poets of Reneti) by Kshetranath Banerjee. It records the evolution of a particular form of Kirtan sung by Gaudiya Vaishnavas called Renetir Pad or ‘The Couplets of Reneti’. Reneti was a corrupt form of the place name ‘Ranihati’, a once prosperous sub-divisional centre. In this essay detailed history of a minor town like Ranihati is provided along with that of its neighbouring villages. The masters of this type of verse were Bipradas Biswas and Bijoy Krishna Biswas. They were Sadgops by caste, and possibly owing to this they did not receive due recognition from Brahmins. Throughout the essay we hear sigh for an era which was gradually passing

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705 Op cit ‘Rarher sahitya Banglar samskriti sadhanar ek anabadya Abadan. Bartamane Rarh bolite bishesh bhabe Barddhaman jelakey bojhay’
706 Bholanath Brahmachari Bhaktibinod ‘Barddhaman jelar melar Bibaran’ Grihasta,(Kolkata, 1322BE)
707 Sudhirchandra Raha ‘Barddhaman Jelar prachin Kabigan’ Bangashri, (Kolkata, Agrahyaan 1348 BE), pp. 867-70
708 Ibid ‘Amar mone hoi, ekmatra prachin Bangla sahitya Barddhaman zillar sahitwik o kabigan dwarai unnato o samridha, sampanna hoiachilo.’
709 Kshetranath Banerjee ‘Renetir Padkarta’ Birbhumi, new version, (Birbhum, Asadh 1321 BE), pp.129-47
away, under the pressure of forces unleashed by colonialism. He said that one was just not considered to be a resident of Devipur, if he could not sing the couplets of Reniti, compositions of Dashu Ray and Loknath. The author lamented that to earn our bread, now we have to spend eleven out of twelve months in alien lands. Naturally our villages and their inhabitants are losing their characteristics. Thus the author depicted, how under the pressure of colonial economy, the rural habitations were losing their distinct life-style. The author is naturally afraid that if not properly preserved, this peculiar type of composition would be lost for ever. Another article like this is ‘Baghna parar Itikatha’ (The Tale of Baghnapara) by Balai Debsharma. This was once a major Vaishnava sripat or centre. Here the chief savant was Ramchandra Goswami. The article is a collection of stories about Goswami’s miraculous activities. It ends in a sad and nostalgic tone.

An essay reflecting the Sakta tradition of Barddhaman is ‘Sad hak Kamalakanta’ (Kamalakanta, the ascetic) by Kailashchandra Ghosh. This is concerned with the famous worshipper of Kali, who had his seat in Barddhaman and was briefly attached to the zamindari court. Here a number of local legends about the miraculous power of the saint are mentioned. These include how Kamalkanta wriggled himself out of the hands of a dacoit gang by singing devotional songs and how he procured a buffalo, necessary for the worship of goddess Kali at the dead of night. In this essay the author lamented the loss of much historical material necessary for the preservation of local heritage. He sadly said that around two hundred songs of Kamalakanta were still available. We can only guess how many more have been lost.

There are a few essays on the local, rural poets who celebrated both Vishnu and Sakti along with other deities in their compositions. They include ‘Sad hak Kabi Nabai Moira’ by Kamininath Ray, ‘Dasrathi Ray’ by Chandrasekhar Ray and the long

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710 Ibid p.142 ‘Bish panchish batsar purbe reniti pad, Dashu Ray O Loknather gaan gahite na parile tahake Devipurer adhibasi bola hoito na ……… Udaranner janya lalayita hoia amra batsarer gar egaro mas Gram pariyag koria bideshe bas koria thaki….se grambasi nai se gramo nai’.
711 Balai Debsharma ‘Baghna parar Itikatha’, Bharatvarsha, (Kolkata, Bhadra 1324 BE), pp.477-79
712 Kailashchandra Ghosh ‘Sad hak Kamalakanta’ Aryadarshan, (Kolkata, Bhadra 1288 BE), pp.222-231
713 Ibid p.227 For a typically local biography of Kamalakanta see Nirad Baran Sarkar, Rarh-Barddhamaner Sad hak Kabi Kamalakanta (Padma-Ganga, Kolkata 2003).
714 Kamininath Ray ‘Sad hak Kabi Nabai Moira’ Barddhaman, (Barddhaman,1321 BE),pp.195-99
debate on Nilkantha, embodied in quite a few essays. These pieces are not directly relevant to our study of historiography but they do contain data which illuminate the period concerned. The essay on Nobai Moira or Nabakishore Modok contains a valuable collection of his songs. The author also commented on the religious eclecticism of pre-colonial Bengal. There both the Shaktas and the Vaishnavas flourished in their own ways, though often in friendly rivalry. The script on Dasrathi, one of the most important figures of the Bengali rural culture, basically represents a conflict between two different cultural tastes prevailing in colonial Bengal. Dinesh Chandra Sen harshly criticized Dasrathi for his crudities and supposed obscenities. Sen was a product of the *renaissance* urban culture that became dominant from the early nineteenth century. The author of this essay, who countered Sen, defended the pre-colonial norms of literature and culture which was still visible in the rural areas. There the difference between *bhadralok* and *itarlok* was not really very pronounced. There an illiterate vagabond like Dasrathi could rise to the position of a poet and gain the respect of the Sanskritized intellectuals. The debate between Biman Majumdar and Saktipada Bhattacharya on Nilkantha reveals the problems of constructing the biography of a local cultural personality. Each author doubted the authenticity of the sources of the other. It was admitted that Nilkantha’s son Kamalakanta preserved very little information about his father. So, the quality of facts gathered had to be unsatisfactory.

We often tend to ignore the Muslim presence in Barddhaman, owing to the charisma of the devoutly Hindu Raj family. But the memorabilia of the Muslim impact are strewn across the district till this day. Now we would pay attention to the Islamic view of the history of Barddhaman. One essay on this subject is ‘Mangalkot sambandhe jatkinchit’ (tid-bits about Mangalkot) by Anwar-ul-majd-ul-Hussain. Mangalkot was an important centre of Islamic culture, and its intellectuals were revered throughout Bengal. The essay is actually a description of the life of Makhdum Hameed Daneshmand. The author had a secular outlook and a good sense of history. He lavished praise on Raja

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715 Chandrasekhar Ray ‘Dasrathi Ray’ *Sahitya*, (Kolkata Baisakh 1320 BE), pp.63-83
716 For the debate see i) Bimanbihari Majumdar ‘Nilkanther Swarachita Jiboni o Padavali’, *Bangabani* (Kolkata, Paus 1331 BE ) pp.593-600 and ii) S. Bhattacharya’s counter which was published in *Bangabani* (Kolkata, Kartik 1332 BE) pp.307-312.
717 Anwar-ul-majd-ul-Hussain ‘Mangalkot sambandhe jatkinchit’, *Bharatvarsha*, (Kolkata, Baisakh 1321 BE), pp.709-16
Vikramkeshari, an opponent of the Islamic onslaught and quoted respectfully from Chandimangala. He gave due importance to both archaeology and popular memory.\textsuperscript{718} However the composer of ‘Khwaja Anwar’, Abdul Latif, is more conscious of his Islamic identity\textsuperscript{719}. He wrote in a magazine that was determined to defend Islamic history from the criticism of the Bengali Hindu \textit{renaissance} intellectuals. Unsurprisingly Bankimchandra came under scathing criticism from the editors. They remarked sarcastically, ‘Bankim, i.e the crooked, walks crookedly along a crooked path’.\textsuperscript{720}

In this essay the author tried to prove the historicity of Khwaja Anwar, a local Muslim saint. He lamented the dilapidated condition of the local madrasas. More important is his interpretation of the report of the previously discussed Eighth \textit{Bengali Literary Conference}. According to him, there the pages showing contributions of the Muslims were deliberately censored. He said that the proceedings of the Eighth Bengal Literary Conference were deliberately tampered with for removing the portions proclaiming Muslim glory.\textsuperscript{721} Abdul Latif, the author of ‘Shah Etim’, however was not inspired by Muslim revivalism in a similar fashion\textsuperscript{722}. His essay was also a biographical sketch of a local pir. But, while describing Champainagar, the habitat of the saint, the narrator discussed both Hindu and Muslim lores. The Hindu legends were concerned with characters of \textit{Manasa Mangal}. The Muslim hearsays are connected with the life of Shah Etim. He was originally a follower of Rahim Khan Pathan, who rebelled against the Mughals along with Shova Singh. He originally lived in Mauza Qasba, a village in Barddhaman where the Pathans predominated. He later got this hamlet as a jagir from the Mughals. Shah Etim was originally a warrior who later turned into a holyman. A number of miraculous incidents of his life are mentioned here. Rather pleasantly, the author compares the event of Etim’s conversion into a saint with Ratnakar’s transformation into

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{718} \textit{Ibid} pp.709-711
\item \textsuperscript{719} Abdul Latif ‘Khwaja Anwar’, \textit{Al-eslam}, (Kolkata, Jaistha 1324 BE), pp.81-87
\item \textsuperscript{720} \textit{Ibid} pp.97-105 ‘Bankim bankim pathe Bankim bhabey cholia thaken’
\item \textsuperscript{721} \textit{Ibid} p.81 ‘Astam adhibesener karya bibaran namdhayo pustake oi prabandher anekangsha bad dia, kath chant koria, kartipaksha emonhbabe prakash koriachen je, tahate Musalman Shahi gauraber bishoy tuku ekebare bad poria giache.’
\item \textsuperscript{722} Abdul Latif ‘Shah Etim’, \textit{Sahitya}, (Kolkata, Paus 1324 BE), pp.625-28
\end{itemize}
Valmiki, the sage-poet, a Hindu myth. The local Muslims paid their reverence to the tomb of the saint even in the author’s day.

In ‘Mangalkoter Katha’ (The story of Mangalkot) also the writer, Kader Nawaz, did not reveal any special leaning towards Islam. He wrote this article for a childrens’ magazine. Nawaz discussed the origin of some place names around Mangalkot. The names indicated that these habitats were once seats of feudal chiefs e.g. Jauharpur (site of royal treasury), Barabazaar (the big mart) and Rajar Danga (the tract of the King). That he is nostalgic about the area is shown in the following remark: ‘In these dusty plains, once dwelt numerous kings, chieftains, sages and scholars.' However, the essay ‘Hajrat Bahman Shahid’ is composed in a more Islamic fashion. This again is a story of a sub-regional pir told by Abdul Latif. His mouseleum was situated in the Suata hamlet of Barddhaman. The author tried to place the holyman in the context of broader Islamic history. He said that Pir Bahman was related to the Bahmani royal family. He is shown as propagator of aggressive Islam as he tried to dislodge the local Hindu king. Apparently, the pir was offended with the Raja’s practice of offering human sacrifice before the goddess Shibakhya. In this case, the chief of the tract was victorious and the Muslim warrior-preacher lost his life. However, his memory lived on and later the Hindu kingdom was destroyed by the Muslim settlers. In this essay there are some definite statements in favour of Islam. He called the practice of human sacrifice maha pap or ‘great sin’ and termed the struggle with the local chief as dharmayuddha or religious war. Besides, he refused to believe that the Hindu potentate of the area provided money to maintain the mouselem. His criticism of the Hindu bhadralok historians is also interesting to read. He complained that anti-Muslim historians and novelists (‘Muslim bidweshi aitihasik o oupannasik’) have distorted the achievements of noble Muslim holy-warriors and have portrayed them as fanatical persecutors of Hindus. Thus we see that in essays written about Barddhaman by the Muslims both liberal and orthodox sentiments

723 Ibid p.627
724 Kader Nawaz ‘Mangalkoter Katha’, Shishusathi, (Kolkata, Baisakh 1346 BE), pp.35-39
725 Ibid p.35
726 Abdul Latif ‘Hajrat Bahman Shahid’, Kohinoor, (Faridpur, Paus 1322 BE), pp.306-12
727 Ibid p.308
728 Ibid p.310
are present. And at least some of the authors did have genuine attachment with this district.

After this, we would discuss a few essays which are not directly related to the history of Barddhaman and nor do describe any particular religio-cultural sect. They are concerned with diverse aspects of the district life such as female education, the condition of weavers under the British, and modern educational institutions like the Raj College. But these essays do contain some valuable statements and information on historical and social aspects as well. ‘Momgalano dhatu – shilpa ba dokra kaaj’ by Ashish Basu is concerned with a peculiar local craft found in Ausgram-Guskara in Barddhaman along with Bankura. This essay is interesting because of the number of anecdotes recorded about the craftsmen and the description of their current horrid living condition. ‘Grammya itibritter ek tukro’ by Bhairabchandra Dutta tells an interesting anecdote about the Ray family of Srirampur. The essay is noted for the memorable description of Hyantal Chandir Maath, an example of the typical rural waste-land which might have provided the inspiration for the idea of Tepantarer maath in the fairy-tales. The very name Hyantal Chandir Maath suggests a far-off landscape of folk-tales. The field is vast, with just a few pipal trees and small ponds in its midst. The author described it in this fashion: ‘With the blazing summer sun beating down on one’s head, it feels like the endless Sahara desert’.

‘Katwar Tantubay Brittanta’ by Krishnahari Dutta records the traditions about the weavers of Katwa. It is described how they emigrated during the Bargi raids and some of their caste members received the blessings of Sri Chaitanya. Sites where the great savant placed his feet like Keshmancha and Bharati Goswamir Sthan are also described. The institutional changes during the colonial times which pushed the weavers into economic periphery are also mentioned. The author said that nowadays our coats and trousers are made of jeans and long cloth. In those days our khaddar was the main dress

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729 Ashish Basu ‘Momgalano dhatu – shilpa ba dokra kaaj’, Masik Basumati, (Kolkata, Bhadra 1369 BE), pp.946-47. This essay was published much after the period under consideration in this thesis. Still we have included it as a good example of its kind.
730 Bhairabchandra Dutta ‘Grammya itibritter ek tukro’, Yamuna, (Kolkata, Jaistha 1317 BE), pp.63-65
731 Ibid p.63
732 Krishnahari Dutta ‘Katwar Tantubay Brittanta’, Tantu o Tantri, (Bagura, Chaitra 1335 BE), pp.367-69
material for the Europeans. Ultimately machine-made British cloth pushed it out of the market.\textsuperscript{733} ‘Indrapuja’ is an account of a strange local custom which survived till the anonymous author’s day.\textsuperscript{734} This was the worship of the Vedic high god Indra, who was relegated to a minor position in the Hindu pantheon around the early years of Christian era. In Barddhaman this worship continued, alongside Birbhum and Murshidabad, in the form of \textit{Bhanjo} festival. This was celebrated to have better crops. Remarkably, the participants were women only. While singing and dancing before the idol of Indra they often used to utter lewd words. According to the author this was a release of their pent-up feelings which could not be expressed publicly in a closed, rural society.\textsuperscript{735} A case of proto-feminism indeed! The author was sympathetic towards the women, but on the whole he appears to be a Hindu revivalist, who longed for the bygone Vedic era. He lamented: ‘The sanctified offerings are offered no more to the holy fire lit to worship Indra and Varuna. Nowadays the Puranic gods such as Kali and Durga and incarnations like Rama and Krishna occupy popular imagination. Naturally in the place of genuine devotion only pompous ceremonies performed by ignorant priests are there.’\textsuperscript{736} Another faithful documentation of a peculiar festival is ‘Bagh Naach’ (Tiger Dance) by Ramendu Dutta\textsuperscript{737}. This art was performed only at Bhaitagram, during the night of \textit{Navami} of Durgapuja. Possibly this was performed in remembrance of an age when tigers used to frequent scattered human habitations. Thus this festival had a kind of primitive, natural quality which had been ably brought out by the author.\textsuperscript{738} He urged his countrymen to visit the remote villages, casting away their urban inhibitions, to discover the real India.

In ‘\textit{Stri-shikshaprasare Barddhamaner sekal o ekal},’ ‘(Female Education in Barddhaman, Yesterday and Today)’ we get a lively description of this controversial

\textsuperscript{733} Ibid p.368
\textsuperscript{734} Anon ‘Indrapuja’, \textit{Sadhana}, (Kolkata, Falgun 1301 BE), pp.333-40
\textsuperscript{735} Ibid p.338
\textsuperscript{736} Ibid op. cit ‘Indra-Varuner uddheshe prajjalita homagnite aar debabhogya pabitra habi nikshipta hoi na. Kali Durga prabhriti Pauranik debdebi o Ram Krishnadi avatargan ekhon Vaidik debtaganer sthan adhikar koriachen……ache kebol Dhakdhol , noivadiya, gandamurkha purohita ebong Tathaibacha pratima.’ Translation mine.
\textsuperscript{737} Ramendu Dutta ‘Bagh Naach’, \textit{Masik Basumati}, (Kolkata, Kartik 1338 BE) pp.44-48
\textsuperscript{738} Ibid p.45

There is a curious narrative about the existence of eve-teasing even in those days. The author noted that the lumpens used to roam about like vagabonds and teased school going girl students in such a fashion that the parents were forced to stop them from going to school.\footnote{Ibid p.124 ‘…….pathe pathe alas, nishkarma hoye ghure berato, schooler choto choto meyeder school jaoa-asar pathe emonbabe utyakta korte je ahbhibhabakra badhya hoye meyeder school jaoa bandha korten’}

The essay is written by a female author and it ends with a note of optimism. ‘Barddhaman Raj College’ by Rajanikanta Konar deals with a short history of the said institution which was languishing during the author’s days\footnote{Rajanikanta Konar ‘Barddhaman Raj College’, \textit{Ugrakhsatriya Pratinidhi}, (Kolkata, Agrahayan 1298 BE), pp.245-49}. The institution was formed by Raja Mahatabchand in 1817 as Raj school. The author provides an interesting fact that the British government was forced to wind up its own district school facing stiff competition from the Raj school. ‘Ethorar Mining Vidyalaya’ (The Mining school of Ethora) by Nikhilnath Ray is another essay about an educational centre.\footnote{Nikhilnath Ray ‘Ethorar Mining Vidyalaya’, \textit{Shaswati}, (Kolkata, Asadh 1323 BE), pp.239-48}

This is descriptive in nature and contains a few sections on duty of citizens and zamindars. It contains an interesting remark that students rush after those courses which offer more career opportunities.

An extremely remarkable essay is ‘Sripat Jhamatpur’ by Shibratan Mitra.\footnote{Shibratan Mitra ‘Sripat Jhamatpur’, \textit{Manasi o Marmabani}, (Kolkata, Agrahayan 1336 BE), pp.347-51}

This essay glaringly exposed the hypocracies surrounding local traditions and artefacts. The author went to visit Jhamatpur, the birth place of the Vaishnava poet Krishnadas Kaviraj. The first shock came to the author when he discovered that the pundit of the \textit{pathsala} or primary school maintained at Kaviraj’s house knew simply nothing about the savant. This supposed repository of local knowledge frantically sent for the \textit{mohanto} or chief-monk of the \textit{Sripat} when asked about Kaviraj. The second jolt came in the temple of Raghunath, where the idol was painted not in the usual black or blue hue, but in green. The priest explained it to be the fault of the artisan! The place of worship, \textit{bhajansthal} of Krishnadas, too was in a miserably dilapidated condition though the funds and labour to preserve it were easily available. The lack of consciousness among the authorities like
priests and pundits shocked Mitra, who burst out: Your livelihood depends totally on the fame of Krishnadas Kaviraj. Then how can you make this cruel joke of his memory?744

The most jarring incident occurred when the narrator wanted to see the copy of Chaitanya Charitamrita copied by Mukunda Kaviraj, a direct disciple of Krishnadas. The manuscript should have been approximately 400 years old. But, from its physical appearance it was clear that the text provided by the priest was only about 128-150 years old. The last page where the name and address of the author were written was also missing. This indicated only one thing; the script preserved at the temple was a forged one. The author could only mutter in anguish: ‘Oh priest, if you could gauge our outraged feelings!’ 745

6.6 AN ASSESSMENT: So after this survey, we can very clearly see that many historical texts were written about Barddhaman, mostly by its own citizens. Somehow the historical tradition of the district did not receive public recognition like that of Dhaka and Rajshahi. This is owing to the fact that most of the productions on Barddhaman were small essays, not full-length books. But, why so few major texts were produced by the inhabitants of the area? Barddhaman was a fertile agricultural land, where most of the people led a sedentary life-style. We have seen that under the Raj family, Barddhaman developed a self-contained distinct politico-cultural identity. On account of this and the physical distance involved, people of Barddhaman in general, came only in marginal contact with the Bengali cultural capital of Kolkata where there was a regular cultivation of the western episteme of history. As had been said earlier, in Barddhaman’s historical memory, chronological facts intermingled with devotional ideas and folk-tale themes e.g. in Sibakhya-Kinkar Kavya. The European light that would have clearly differentiated between reality and myth did not blaze strongly enough before the eyes of Barddhaman literati. So, no major historical text on the district could be produced. Instead some piece-meal essays were attempted. Besides, the Raj family captivated the psyche of the intellectuals of this area. So, the meagre historical effort they undertook was concentrated

744 Ibid p.351
745 Ibid ‘………. amader monomadhye je kirup bhaber uday hailo, hai purohit, tumi jadi anumatrao o taha anubhab korite’. Translation mine.
on the royal lineage, instead of any other theme. Thus, a *Barddhaman Rajvamsanucharita* could be composed, but not a *History of Barddhaman*.

There were some other reasons for the failure of the light of ‘Bengal Renaissance’ to reach Barddhaman. Owing to changes in the courses of the neighbouring rivers from the mid nineteenth century Barddhaman town became less important as a commercial centre. Thus a few European tradesmen and officials came here and they could not influence the life of the settlement. Barddhaman was a metropolis surrounded by villages, and in the absence of a European counterbalance, rural sentiment dominated the socio-cultural scene of the town. The British administrators did little to develop the town socio-economically, though the district headquarter was situated there. The Maharajas also never introduced any significant economic innovation in the town. It never became an important commercial centre in the modern sense. It just remained a distribution centre for agricultural products such as rice, indigo, sugar, tobacco and coarse silk. So, during the nineteenth century, no real urban social structure could develop in Barddhaman and the elite of the town consisted of landed gentry, traditional merchants and bankers. Educated professionals like lawyers, teachers and doctors, natives or immigrants from Kolkata, were few in number. These people were the most enthusiastic cultivators of modern academic activities elsewhere. Their absence meant the neglect of proper history writing in Barddhaman.

Owing to similar factors other large settlements of the district like Mankar, Panagarh, Raniganj, Kalna and Katwa failed to develop into full-fledged towns and support urban culture, even in 1860. The overwhelming presence of rural mentality impeded the progress of Western education in this district and in 1884 there were only 27 modern schools in the district and only one second-grade college in Barddhaman town. Kalna remained a partial exception, in this depressing scenario. Being situated on the banks of the Bhagirathi Kalna was in direct contact with Kolkata. Some of the prominent businessmen of Kalna had their concerns in Kolkata as well. Some residents of Kalna were sufficiently educated in Kolkata and found jobs in the teaching field there. Naturally, through such citizens, Western education and ideas spread into Kalna and

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746 Indrani Ganguly, ‘Of Rajas and Prajas..’, op.cit, p.253
neighbouring areas like Vaidyapur, Mirhat and Akal Paush. Some English style schools also came up there in the nineteenth century. Thus we see that the modern education did not spread enough in Barddhaman district and even in the early twentieth century the literacy rate in Barddhaman was well below 10%. Expectedly, there were only a few inhabitants in the district who were conscious and adequately equipped to attempt a large-scale historical venture regarding the area.

We have noted earlier that patriotic spirit often urged the intellectuals to pen local histories. Sadly, modern patriotism took a fairly long time to make an impact on Barddhaman. The Barddhaman Raj actually helped the British during the Santhal Rebellion (1855), and the Revolt of 1857. In 1864 the Municipalaty in Barddhaman was established, but the citizens got partial voting rights only in 1874. Soon a branch of the Indian Association was established in Barddhaman town, where some prosperous landholders got involved. In 1878, the first association to protect the interests of the common peasants of the area, Barddhaman Sanjivani came up. It criticized the landlords and the Government itself for the neglect of the peasantry. Thus we see that by 1880s, various sections of the populace of Barddhaman district were getting politically conscious. But the progress of political awakening was indeed very slow. The Indian National Congress or the United Patriotic Association of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan did not open any branch in Barddhaman initially. However, the residents of Barddhaman were getting restive and their anti-British feelings suddenly burst forth during the Swadeshi movement starting from 1905. Just before that in 1904, Viceroy Lord Curzon was given a gala reception in Barddhaman town by the Raja and the ‘Star of India’ gate was erected in his honour. Now it is known as Bijoy Toron and is the landmark of Barddhaman town. Raja Bijoychand also supported the Partition of Bengal and displayed his loyalism. However the residents of the district refused to take the British provocation lying down and protested vehemently. Kalna, a more aware and literate tract took the lead in organising anti-imperialist protest. Modern politics had finally arrived in Barddhaman.

748 Ramakanta Chakraborty, ‘Barddhaman Jelai Swadhinata Andolan’ in Paschimbanga journal, Barddhaman District Special Number, op cit, p. 57.
But this late arrival considerably baulked the progress of local history writing in the district.\textsuperscript{749}

The Barddhaman Raj family remained fully loyal to the British from the time of Raja Mahatabchand (accession 1832). Why? A startling event taking place within the Raj family is responsible for this mystery. The Barddhaman Raj family was established by Sangam Rai in early seventeenth century. His descendents obtained the title of ‘Maharaja of Barddhaman’ from the Mughal Emperor and gradually brought the whole district under their control. These Rajas were anti-British in their attitude. They strongly resisted the intrusion of the East India Company in Barddhaman. In fact, Raja Trilokchand fought one of the first battles of Bengali independence against the British in 1760 at Sangatgola. However, in 1821, Pratapchand, the only son of Raj Tejchand reportedly died under mysterious circumstances without leaving any heir. Paranchand Kapur, the father-in-law of Tejchand, cajoled the heart-broken Raja into adopting his own son Chunilal as the heir to the throne. Paranchand originally came from a very humble family. Chunilal came to the throne in 1832 as Mahatabchand. Years later, a monk appeared in Barddhaman and proclaimed himself as Pratapchand. Many residents of Barddhaman accepted him as such. However, Paranchand vehemently denied the assertion and was determined to prove the monk an imposter.

After complicated legal battles he was successful, the monk got nothing and ultimately died in poverty. The case remains doubtful till date, but it seems that the British Government and some leading men in Kolkata were determined to prove the monk false and cooperated with Paranchand. So the court judgement was possibly biased. The real Pratapchand was brave, intelligent and fiercely anti-British. So, it was quite possible that the British Government sided with Paranchand to arrange for Pratap’s disappearance and later foiled his bid for restoration. With the British help, Paranchand’s descendents became the Maharajas. The actual line of Sangam Rai came to an end abruptly.\textsuperscript{750} As they owed their elevation to the British, the ‘adopted’ Maharajas were

\textsuperscript{749} Ekkari Chatterjee, op.cit, p. 427.
\textsuperscript{750} For a modern treatment of Pratapchand controversy see Gautam Bhadra, \textit{Jaal Rajar Katha} (Ananda, Kolkata, 2004). Here Bhadra tried to appreciate the complex nature of the case. He used sources, both official and local.
abjectly pliant to them. They delayed the flourishing of nationalism in Barddhaman as much as possible. They also discouraged the writing of any anti-British impartial history of Barddhaman.\textsuperscript{751}

Hughly too, was a fertile agricultural land. But Hughly could become a prime centre of production of local history. This was possible because of the string of European settlements in this district. The local literati could interact more freely with the European missionaries and scholars who had precise sense of history. The printing press also came first in Hughly. So, there was wide diffusion of a literary-historical tradition. According to the same logic, Howrah too should have nourished an important tradition of local history. But this did not happen. This is because, firstly, Howrah was situated in the immediate neighbourhood of Calcutta. Also it was a part of Hughly till 1845. So, the development of an independent identity was seriously hampered here. But the cultivation of such an autonomous spirit was the most important factor behind the growth of the genre of local history anywhere. Also the moist environment of Howrah made the preservation of documents by families of ordinary means extremely difficult. In the early nineteenth century, the whole of Central Howrah comprised virtually of marshy low lands (Haor in Bengali). Even in the 1950s, Howrah town was surrounded by five large marshes. This, according to some, led to the destruction of many valuable historical sources, literary and archaeological in Howrah. Thus it became difficult to write the history of Howrah. This adverse impression was shared by C.N. Bannerjee who composed the first serious work on the district, \textit{Howrah Past & Present}. Influenced by him, no other local historian attempted a reliable account of the area till independence. The Government Gazetteer blamed the changing courses of rivers for the destruction of historical sources there. However, this negative view is being increasingly challenged by local literati since 1960.\textsuperscript{752} Led by Tarapada Santra, they gathered numerous artefacts and features from Howrah and founded the Anandaniketan Museum for preserving them. Banking on these sources, pedants like Shibendu Manna are now penning noted works on

\textsuperscript{751} Sudhir Chandra Dawn, \textit{Barddhaman Saharer Itibritta} (General Books, Kolkata, 2002), p. 140.
Howrah. For all these factors, Barddhaman and the neighbouring districts developed differing traditions of local history.  

Now we may just try to observe whether the history books written on Barddhaman reflected the broader contemporary social sentiments. Here the effort by Nagendranath Basu and his fellow scholars should not be considered as it was more of a collection of anecdotes penned by outside visitors. The sections on Barddhaman in Durgachandra Ray’s Debganer Martye Agaman were also composed by an exotic traveller. Mere royal eulogies should also be ignored. Unfortunately, till the 1890s, when pro-British feelings were strong among the Bengali literati, no important book on local history was produced by residents of Barddhaman. Thus there is no hope of studying the complex interaction between loyalism and suppressed patriotism from the annals of Barddhaman. However the work on Katwa by Nibaranchandra Chatterjee composed in 1918 did reflect the rising nationalist psyche. From the textual examples quoted above it is clear that the author was aware of the novel spirit that was spreading throughout the province from 1905. Such sentiments were expressed more clearly in Balai Debsharma’s venture which was written actually after India’s independence, in 1958.

Coming to the essays, which actually form the bulk of historical literature on Barddhaman, we find little historical consciousness in them till we go beyond the first decade of the twentieth century. Pieces composed between 1880s and 1910 mostly portray lives of essentially local personalities and some particular customs. Some examples are ‘Radhamohan Babu’ (1921), ‘Chandi the Blind’ (1893), ‘Kamalakanta Bhattacharya’ (1881) and ‘Indra Puja’ (1894). A few blindly loyalist royal eulogies are found like ‘Barddhaman Rajvamsa’ (1909) Quite strangely the influence of nationalism, becoming dominant from 1905, could not perturb the essayists of Barddhaman. We find virtually no article analyzing nationalism, written by writers of the district, during the 1930s. Only in the 1940s we come across scripts like ‘Barddhaman Parichiti’ by Sudhirchandra Raha (1941). In this essay we see a hazy attempt to connect the heritage of Barddhaman with that of other districts. The reasons discussed in the previous paragraph are possibly responsible for this disinterest in greater nationalism. However, we note a

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753 These deductions resulted from interactions with the local intellectuals.
marked attempt to construct local patriotic spirit in articles such as ‘Paschimbanger Pratapaditya’, discussed above and ‘Adisurer Aithiasikata’ (1928). During the 1920s and 30s we also note an assertion of caste identitites. A few examples of this genre have been discussed above. This can be linked with similar attempts that were being made in other parts of Bengal like Anwasthattava Kaumudi by Shyamlal Sen (1916) and Ugrakshatriya Parichay by Haricharan Bandhu (1916). Actually with the appreciation of the importance of census from the 1880s, this type of books became popular. Along with these trends of thought visible mostly in the writings of Hindu bhadraloks, one intellectual current remained active in the Barddhaman episteme right from the first decade of the twentieth century till the end of our research period. This was Muslim revivalism. ‘Khwaja Anwarer Gorasthan’ (1914), ‘Shah Etim’ (1917) and ‘Mangalkoter Katha’ (1939) are examples of the continuous production of this particular school.754 Regarding the linguistic improvement of the Barddhaman chroniclers through the ages little can be said. Their language remained ordinary right from the 1880s to 1940s. Instances from their writings have been presented above in relevant sections.

6.7 CONCLUSION: In this chapter we have tried to study the genre of local history as it developed in Barddhaman district. We have seen that in Barddhaman a large number of essays were composed on its history and culture. They covered a diverse range of topics from local festivals to biographies of important persons. The Barddhaman royal court also patronized a number of Sanskrit eulogies. Still, the number of full-fledged proper history books regarding the district remained very few in number till the 1950s. Nagendranath Basu, Balai Debsharma and Satyakinkar Mukherjee remained exceptions who tried to write holistic accounts of the district. We have tried to address this problem here. However Katwa, a sub division within Barddhaman district had a developed school of historiography. Here we have discussed the geographical, cultural and historical features of the district. We have analysed many books and essays on the history of Barddhaman. The pattern of the evolution of historiography in Barddhaman has also been traced. We have seen that the failure of the light of Bengal Renaissance to reach Barddhaman and the late flourishing of modern patriotism there crucially shaped the

754 Details of books and essays referred to in this section are provided earlier in the chapter.
course of historiography of the district. Lastly we have tried to compare and contrast the local history writing schools of Barddhaman, Hughly and Howrah.

So, while concluding, the author can only hope that this effort would counter many misconceptions about the development of history-writing in Barddhaman.