An Abstract of the Thesis

The Local History of Bengal, C. 1850-1950

- A Study In Historiography.

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The term local history refers to those narratives that relate not to macro-historical units like nation-states or provinces but to smaller and local units such as districts, sub-divisions, country-towns and even villages. In Bengal, from the mid-nineteenth down to the mid-twentieth century, such sub-regional historical annals were produced in considerable quantity. However, this genre of historiography did not receive proper attention from later-day researchers. Works regarding West Bengal districts remain specially neglected. The historical tradition of a district like Barddhaman remains virtually undiscussed. This research venture has tried to analyze local history as a separate branch of Bengali history-writing, distinct from subaltern history or folklore studies. In this thesis we have sometimes used the expression *nano-history* to denote histories of small units. The study of local history is necessary for various purposes. This thesis starts with an introductory chapter which would discuss issues which prepared the ground for the development of local history writing in Bengal. This would be followed by the main body of the thesis which contains five more chapters. The second chapter will deal with several issues important for the analysis of local history of Bengal, such as the biographical sketches of the authors, their handling of source materials, the formation of the sub-regional units of Bengal and elements of local history in pre-colonial Sanskrit and pre-modern literature of Bengal. The third chapter will focus on the histories of Eastern Bengal and adjacent areas. The fourth chapter will similarly zero in on accounts of Western Bengal and nearby tracts. The fifth chapter will discuss the major ideological factors that influenced the efforts of the nano-historians. The shortcomings of these volumes would be discussed here. The sixth one will be concerned exclusively with history writing on Barddhaman. This district occupies a very important place in the history and geography of modern West Bengal. But, for long, it did not receive adequate attention from mainstream historians. The uniqueness of nano-history on Barddhaman will be brought out in this chapter. This would be followed by a concluding section, where the relevance of local history in the contemporary world would be stressed.

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