Chapter IV

THE LOCAL HISTORIES OF WESTERN BENGAL

4.1 INTRODUCTION: In this chapter we would consider the volumes of local history written about the tracts of Western Bengal. For the sake of convenience we have divided Western Bengal into some sub-regions e.g. Rarh and northern Bengal. Here we will study the major works of local history in detail e.g. Nikhilnath Ray’s Murshidabader Itihas, Kumudnath Mullick’s Nadia Kahini and Sudhir Mitra’s Hughly Jelar Itihas. We will also take into account some important essays written about this area. We would primarily try to determine the sense of territoriality of these authors. We would view how they identified themselves with the area they described. It is interesting to note whether they were satisfied with the district and sub-divisional boundaries of the British period or were searching for a different geographical concept drawing on the deep-rooted tradition of the concerned area.

In this chapter, in the beginning we would take up the historical works about the various localities within Rarh and the adjacent areas. This geographical section forms the heart of the modern Indian state of West Bengal. So, before we study the concerned volumes, it would be better to determine the exact definition of the expression Rarh. Recently, Mihir Chaudhuri Kamila and Yajneshwar Chaudhuri have tried to comprehend the origin of the word ‘Rarh’. Both have said that the word actually came from the term Raur used by the Austro-Asiatic Kol tribe, which stood for a ‘rocky area’. The name Rarh is first found in Buddhist texts and it makes frequent appearances in Bengali literature from the sixteenth century. The exact geographical boundaries of Rarh have fluctuated and this issue has caused heated controversies among historians. Here we would try to summarise the views of some leading pedants:

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316 Most of the opinions compiled here can be found in Kamila’s work and in major publications on Bengal history such as Niharranjan Ray’s *Bangalir Itihas* and R.D Banerjee’s *Banglar Itihas*.
Table 4.1: Scholarly views regarding Rarh

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<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Scholars</th>
<th>Opinion</th>
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<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>Rakhaldas Banerjee</td>
<td>Virtually whole West Bengal</td>
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<td>2)</td>
<td>R. C. Majumdar</td>
<td>South – Western Bengal. Confined to the West bank of Hughly river.</td>
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<td>3)</td>
<td>Niharranjan Ray</td>
<td>Barddhaman, Birbhum, Hughly, Howrah and north-west Murshidabad.</td>
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<td>4)</td>
<td>Suniti Kumar Chatterjee</td>
<td>From Murshidabad in the north to Medinipur and 24-Parganas in the south.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>Sukumar Sen</td>
<td>On linguistic grounds, Barddhaman sadr, Hughly, Howrah, parts of 24-Parganas. Lower Damodar Valley.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6)</td>
<td>Rameshwar Shaw</td>
<td>On similar grounds, Birbhum, Barddhaman, eastern Bankura (Western Rarh), Kolkata, 24-Parganas, Nadia, Howrah, Hughly, East Medinipur, Murshidabad (Eastern Rarh)</td>
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<td>7)</td>
<td>Asutosh Bhattacharya</td>
<td>From Bhagirathi in the east to Chotanagpur plateau in the west. From Mayurakshi in the north to Damodar in the south.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8)</td>
<td>Hiteshranjan Sanyal</td>
<td>Eastern part of the Chotanagpur plateau which extended from Jharkhand to Mayurbhanj in Orissa. So it would include the rough highlands of Birbhum, North-West Barddhaman, Bankura, Puruliya and West Medinipur. Later the geo-</td>
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| political boundary of Rarh embraced whole South-Western Bengal except East Medinipur. |   | 9) **Jawhar Sircar**  
He actually excluded most of the rocky, lateritic land-masses claimed by Sanyal as Rarh, from his own definition. For him Rarh was virtually synonymous with the old ‘Burdwan division’ or the districts of Barddhaman (except the north-west areas), Birbhum, Bankura, Houghly, Howrah and East Medinipur.  

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|   | **Radhagovinda Basak**  
Area surrounded by  
Bhagirathi in the west, Ajay in the north and Rupnarayan in the south. Barddhaman formed the heart of this land. | 10) |

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|   | **Mihir Chaudhuri Kamilya**  
Parts of West Bengal situated west of Bhagirathi. This comprises of the districts of Barddhaman, Birbhum, Bankura, Puruliya, East and West Medinipur, Houghly and Howrah. Adjacent areas coming under ‘greater Rarh’ | 11) |

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|   | **Yajneshwar Chaudhuri**  
On linguistic grounds, he included Birbhum, Murshidabad, Bankura, Barddhaman, Houghly, Howrah, Medinipur (both East and West). Later extended upto Nadia. Sub-regions of Manbhum, Singbhum, Dhalbhum and Mayurbhanj, now falling within Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa also formed parts of ancient Rarh. | 12) |
In this thesis, after considering all these varied opinions, we would follow the views of Jawhar Sircar and Mihir Chaudhuri. The reason can be provided in Sircar’s own words: ‘Our Rarh denotes more of a socio-cultural context rather than being merely a geographic expression. Thus to describe very aptly the culture of Western Bengal we refer to it as *Rarhiya sanskriti* as we call persons of the Brahman and Kayastha castes who claim their ancestry from this region as the *Rarhi* Brahmans and Kayasthas.’\(^{317}\) Thus he stressed the uniqueness of the Rarh culture. According to him, only the area which cultivated this unique culture could be called Rarh. He excluded the tribal areas of western Medinipur, Bankura and Puruliya from Rarh owing to some reasons. Firstly, the Dharma cult, a distinct feature of Rarh culture, is a phenomenon that was originally restricted to the *antityaja* castes of Western Bengal and has no visible tribal connections. Also he emphasized the differences in anthropology, lifestyle and culture, between the settled agricultural Bengali in the alluvial and semi-alluvial tract and the original tribal with his primitive modes of production in the lateritic – upland territory described by Hitesh Sanyal. Mihir Chaudhuri also said: ‘After considering all the available data I have included the eight districts of West Bengal on the western banks of Bhagirathi within my definition of Rarh’\(^{318}\). It may be repeated that though Sircar excluded Puruliya from Rarh, Kamilya included it.

This geographical construct of Rarh has been further divided by scholars, especially between northern and southern Rarh. The line of demarcation between the two was supposed to be the river Ajay. According to Niharranjan Ray, Birbhum and north-western parts of Barddhaman and Murshidabad formed northern Rarh and this was traditionally known as *Vajrabhumi*. On the other hand, the rest of Barddhaman, Hughly and Howrah made up southern Rarh and this corresponded to the ancient *Suhmadesh*. Medinipur was a distinct territory called *Tampralipti-Dandabhuki*\(^{319}\). Other authorities


\(^{319}\) Niharranjan Ray, ‘Bangalir Itihas’, op.cit, p. 120.
like Radhagovinda Basak also mostly accepted this view. Hiteshranjan Sanyal went to the extent of claiming the northern portion to be the actual Rarh.\textsuperscript{320} However, recently Mihir Chaudhuri has argued that there is no point in cutting up Rarh into northern and southern parts as there is no basic geo-cultural difference between the two. Rather, on the basis of several factors, he found two new divisions for Rarh, western and eastern. Birbhum, Bankura, Puruliya, south-western Medinipur and western Barddhaman corresponded to the former while eastern Barddhaman, HHughly and Howrah with east Medinipur was synonymous with the latter.\textsuperscript{321} The geological difference is obvious as the soil of west Rarh is rocky and red (celebrated by Tagore in his writings) and that of east Rarh is of soft alluvial silt type. We would, however, not attach much importance to these partitions and consider Rarh as a whole.

Here a few observations on the historical and cultural developments of Rarh would not be out of place. For most of its history, Rarh had been dominated by small-scale, local chieftains. Often theoretically they were subordinate to a regional overlord, but practically they followed an autonomous course of action. The \textit{samanta chakra} that stood for Ramapala during his war against the Kaivartas, had members from Rarh, such as Maigal Singh of Birbhum, Pratap Singh of Senpahari in Barddhaman, Rudrasikhar of Puruliya, Birgun of Bankura etc. The most famous ‘feudal’ hero of early medieval Rarh was the legendary Ichai Ghosh of \textit{Dharmamangal}.\textsuperscript{322} During the medieval period, between the thirteenth and the eighteenth centuries, local state formation continued unabated here, with little interference from the central authorities. Two major groups were instrumental in this. First, there were migrants from North India and Orissa, like the Mahatab lineage of Barddhaman and the Gops of Gopbhum. Second, there were tribal chiefs who were entering the mainstream Hindu fold, like the Mallas of Bishnupur, and the rajas of Panchet and Mayurbhanj. From the late seventeenth century, we note attempts by the minor rulers of the terrain, to adopt the culture of the supra local royalties. In this phase, for example, the raja of Chotanagpur, to meet escalating costs of maintaining a permanent bureaucracy and constructing of fortresses and temples,

\textsuperscript{320} Hiteshranjan Sanyal, \textit{Nirbachita Prabandha} (CAST, Kolkata, 2004), p.82
\textsuperscript{321} Mihir Chaudhuri Kamila ‘Rarher Janajati’, \textit{op.cit}, p.48
\textsuperscript{322} For a discussion on Ichai or Ishwar Ghosh, see Sibsankar Ghosh, \textit{Gopbhum swarup, aitihya o samskriti}, (Prabha, Kolkata, 2005), chapter 2, ‘Gopbhumer Prachinatwa’ or the ‘antiquity of Gopbhum’.
introduced regular taxation and the jagir system. This naturally affected the simple, monolinear tribal bondings. Later with the establishment of the colonial hegemony, the domination of the macro-state increased manifold over the local society. Then it became a tale of maximum revenue extraction and destruction of indigenous handicrafts by the metropolitan state. An intermediary land-holding ‘bhadralok’ group also emerged who later played a crucial part in documenting the history of the area.323

Interesting features of the annals of Rarh are the formation of popular cults and assertion of a Hindu identity during the medieval age. During the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the antyaja or marginal-tribal sections of the Rarh populace started forsaking their ancestral occupations of hunting and fishing and moved closer to the agro-based mainstream Hindu society. Naturally, the more prosperous among them wanted not only economic security but also higher ritual status. Many of the Brahmins, who were unemployed and poor, were more than willing to accede to their demands, as they hoped to be hired as priests and teachers by these emergent bands. So they started composing works about the aboriginal gods worshipped by the tribes, e.g. Manasa, Chandi, Dharma thakur, Shitala etc, to make them acceptable within formal Hinduism. The Mangal kavyas were the most prominent among such efforts. Significantly, the cream of the kavya authors comprised of priestly or pujari Brahmins. Owing to this active effort towards assimilation, the upwardly mobile antyajas of Rarh remained within the folds of Hinduism. This did not happen in other micro-regions of Bengal.324 Another step towards social integration of the tribes was taken by the Gaudiya Vaishnavas. The form of Vaishnavism practiced by the lower castes of Rarh does bring out the complex interactions that took place between the norms of the settled Hindu society and the tribal ethos. The Vaishnava monks, despite being reputed vegetarians allowed the new devotees of this area to consume meat and wine.325

323 For a short discussion see review-essay by Ramakanta Chakravarti in Anandabazar Patrika, 18th June, 2005. He reviewed the works of Debabrata Ghosh and Subhaschandra Sen.

324 Jawhar Sircar ‘The Construction of the Hindu identity in Medieval Western Bengal?’ op.cit Chapter 11 & 12.

There was possibly an element of opposition towards politically dominant Islam in the above mentioned efforts towards ‘Hindu’ consolidation. A recent study by Mamata Vaishnav has unearthed numerous evidences from contemporary poetic texts, showing the feelings of sullen resentment the ‘Hindus’ of Rarh entertained towards Muslims.\textsuperscript{326} Vidyapati had written in Maithili (dialect of North Bihar) about the invading Turks: ‘The Turks capture innocent people for forced labour / They imprison a Brahmin pundit and place a cow’s leg on his head / They forcibly remove his tuft and holy thread and make him ride a horse / Purified rice is used for making cheap wine / temples are smashed and mosques built in their place’.\textsuperscript{327} Much later, a poet of Rarh, Krishnadas Kaviraj, portrayed how even a leading Bengali Hindu was disgraced by Muslim court officials: ‘Ramchandra had become rebellious and did not pay tax / so the angry Muslim minister came to his house / Then he encamped at the sanctified family altar and killed cows and cooked meat there’.\textsuperscript{328} The Rarhi poets also claimed that whenever possible the Hindus resisted under an able leader. Rarhi composer Brindavan Das described in his \textit{Chaitanya Bhagavat} how Sri Chaitanya foiled the infamous Qazi of Nabawip: ‘We would demolish the house of the Qazi and perform kirtan / let me see what can he do / do not entertain any fear in your heart’.

We would close this introduction on Rarh by making one or two parting observations. During early medieval times most of our Rarh, almost up to Barddhaman, was often under the influence of Orissa. The continuous warfare between the Sultans of Bengal and the Hindu Gajapatis of Orissa did much to bring erstwhile uninhabited and fallow areas into eco-political focus. As we end we may here supply some demographic data about Rarh, based on the 1881 and 2001 census.\textsuperscript{329}

\textsuperscript{326} Mamata Baishnab \textit{Rarh Banglar Itihas o Madhyayuger Bangla Sahitya} (Barddhaman University, Barddhaman 1996), p. 30. We may give one example from the writings of Vidyapati. ‘Katahun Turuk barker/ Bat jaite begardhar/ dhari anae ban van – borua/ mathan charab e gaik churu/ fot chaat janan tod/ upar charab e chaho ghod/ dhoar udi dhane madira saandh/ dhoar udi dhane madira saandh/ deul bhangi marid baandh’

\textsuperscript{327} \textit{Ibid},

\textsuperscript{328} \textit{Ibid},

\textsuperscript{329} Census data taken from the appendix of Jawhar Sircar’s ‘Construction of Hindu Identity’ op. cit
Table 4.2: Some geographical data regarding Rarh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>1881 area (sq. km.)</th>
<th>2001 area (sq. km.)</th>
<th>% of Rarh land</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barddhaman</td>
<td>6,983</td>
<td>7,024</td>
<td>19.46 &amp; 18.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>6,785</td>
<td>6,882</td>
<td>18.92 &amp; 18.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>4,546</td>
<td>4,545</td>
<td>12.67 &amp; 12.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medinipur</td>
<td>13,157</td>
<td>14,081 (both East &amp; West)</td>
<td>36.68 &amp; 37.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hughly</td>
<td>3,166</td>
<td>3,149</td>
<td>8.83 &amp; 8.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howrah</td>
<td>1,232</td>
<td>1,467</td>
<td>3.44 &amp; 3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35,869</td>
<td>37,148</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

(Source: Jawhar Sircar, *The Construction of Hindu Identity*, op.cit, Appendix)

Table 4.3: Some Demographic data regarding Rarh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Population (1881)</th>
<th>Population (2001)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barddhaman</td>
<td>1,392,168</td>
<td>6,919,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>1,042,207</td>
<td>3,191,822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>794,435</td>
<td>3,012,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medinipur</td>
<td>2,517,802</td>
<td>9,638,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hughly</td>
<td>1,011,961</td>
<td>5,040,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howrah</td>
<td>635,381</td>
<td>4,274,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,393,954</td>
<td>32,076,596</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Same as above)
Table 4.3 A: Demographic Data regarding Rarh (in graph)

( source: same as above )

4.2 HISTORIES OF WESTERN BENGAL (RARH): Now coming to the historical works themselves, we would first take up those concerned with the north-western districts of **Birbhum and Bankura** and then move southwards. The rocky and comparatively infertile part of Barddhaman has driven a wedge through the two districts, but we would leave that part for a separate treatment. The prime efforts by European officials about Birbhum and Bankura are Captain W. S. Sherwill’s *Statistical and Geographical Report of the District of Birbhum* (1855) and J. E. Gastrel’s report on
Bankura i.e. District of Bankura (1863). Coming to Birbhum, the two major books that engage our attention are Mahimaniranjan Chakraborty’s *Birbhum Bibaran* (three volumes)\(^{330}\), and *Birbhumer Itihas* (two volumes) by Gaurihar Mitra\(^{331}\). The first tome was basically the result of an earnest desire of the *Birbhum Anusandhan Samiti* (established 1911) to properly document the antiquities of the locality. The very foundation of the Samiti showed that among the educated elite of the district there existed healthy local patriotism. Naturally, the work ran into 40 chapters and more than 750 pages. Rather than providing a chronological narrative, the book, in an antiquarian spirit gave detailed accounts of every important place like Birnagar, Kanakpur, Nalhati, Ekchakra, Lavpur etc., and some noted local figures. Nagendranath Basu, who wrote a preface to the second volume, stressed the importance of practicing local history and established connection between the ‘little’ history of a locality and ‘great’ history of a nation. He said that materials regarding our antiquity were strewn across the country. If they were preserved properly, many glorious episodes of the history of Birbhum, Rarh, Eastern India and the whole country would come to light.\(^{332}\) An element of local nostalgia is also evident throughout the work. In the preface it is written: ‘Even now, along the neglected path of a village are visible the ruins of the mansion of a yesteryear merchant. In our mind’s eye we can visualize the marriage festivities of the merchant’s son and the gaiety of the flamboyant relatives … Oh! Gone are those days’\(^{333}\)

*Birbhumer Itihas* by Gaurihar Mitra comprised of two volumes, the first containing historical narrative from the earliest times to the coming of the British and the second dealing with Birbhum under the British rule. The first volume, in 14 chapters, skimmed through a large number of topics including location, boundaries, origin of the name of the district, geographical and natural features, aspects of material life etc. The

\(^{330}\) *Mahima Niranjan Chakraborty Birbhum Bibaran*, (Birbhum Anusandhan Samiti, Hetampur Rajbati, Birbhum, 1916 and 1927)

\(^{331}\) Gaurihar Mitra *Birbhumer Itihas*, (Ratan Library, Birbhum, 1936-38)

\(^{332}\) Preface to Mahimaniranjan Chakravarti ‘Birbhum Bibaran’, op.cit. ‘Puratatva alochonar jathesta upakaran itastata bikkhipta rochiache. Taha ekatra samgrihita hoile kebol Birbhum ba Rarh desh bolia nahe – prachya bharater sahit samagra bharater gaurab kirti bhasito itihaser anjayta purba bahu adhyay abiskrito hoite paribe’

\(^{333}\) Ibid, *bigyapan* or advertisement page, ‘Ekhono gramer jirna pathe baniker punya kirtir sesh nidarshan swarup istastata patito istakguli sei banik, banikputra, bibaho utsab abong sei porihas rasika kutuminir ujjal chitra smritipathe jagrata koria dey……. Hai re sekal aar ekal’ Translation mine
second volume was segmented in 10 chapters. Here we get some interesting observations e.g. the early Company officials were extremely corrupt and the weavers were actually happy under the John Company. This really goes against the grain of conventional wisdom. The expected ethnic flair is found where the sad demise of the Muslim zamindar family of Birbhum (Nagar Raj) is described. The author lamented that the former rulers of the vast Birbhum estate spent their days like petty, impoverished land-owners. A vivid narration of the Santhal rebellion is also given, based often on eye-witness accounts.

There are two other histories of the district, Birbhumer Itihas by Pratap Narayan Ray, about which no detailed information is available unfortunately and Parbatya Kahini by Prabhaschandra Ray. A couple of texts dealing with two sub-divisions of Birbhum were Bhadrapurer Itibritta by Nabinkrishna Banerjee and Hetampur Kahini by Kishorilal Sarkar. The former dealt with the family of the famous Maharaja Nanda Kumar and the latter was concerned with the lineage of Raja Ram Chakraborty, zamindar of Birbhum. Mahimaniranjan Chakraborty himself authored a few other works.

Coming to the neighbouring district of Bankura, the prime work that engages our attention is Bankura Jelar Bibaran by Ramanuja Kar. This is a largely descriptive account consisting of eight chapters. In the first chapter we find a general history from the eighteenth century onwards. The next six chapters deal with features such as population, public health and education. Administrative structure and information about zamindars are found in the eighth section. An interesting point is that Kar gave importance to activities of the nationalists and the Congress, especially during the Swadeshi era. Another book, dealing with a village in Bankura is Sanbandar Itihas by Sasanka Sekhar Bannerjee. A recent volume, emphasizing the district’s links with the famous Mallal princelings who ruled in this area in medieval times is Mallabhum

334 Gaurihar Mitra ‘Birbhumer Itihas’, op.cit, p.76
335 Pratap Narayan Ray Birbhumer Itihas (Barta Press Siuri 1911)
336 Prabhaschandra Ray Parbatya Kahini ( Haricharan Mitra, Calcutta, 1908)
337 Nabinkrishna Banerjee Bhadrapurer Itibritta (author, Bahrampur, 1911)
338 Kishorilal Sarkar Hetampur Kahini, in two volumes, (author, Birbhum, 1910 )
339 Ramanuja Kar Bankura Jelar Bibaran (author, Bankura, 1925)
340 Sasanka Sekhar Bannerjee Sanbandar Itihas (author, Bankura1941)
Bishnupur by Manoranjan Chandra. This draws upon a large corpus of literature on Mallas of Bishnupur, written earlier such as *History of Bishnupur Raj* by Abhaya Pada Mallik, and *Mallabhum Kahini* by Gangagobinda Ray. However we would not consider these works, as these are concerned with royal lineages. Still, we have to mention that the case of the Malla rajas show how legends and facts often intermingle to form the heritage of a locality. Even when critically analyzing the history of Bishnupur one has to consider the legends regarding Madanmohan, the patron-god of Bishnupur, himself repulsing the infamous Bargis or Raja Raghunath’s affair with the dancer Lalbai. The last episode has been romanticized by Ramapada Chaudhuri in his popular novel, *Lalbai* (1997).

The district of Puruliya forms the outer bastion of Rarh. Some like Jawhar Sircar have excluded it from Rarh and the area actually became a part of West Bengal only in 1956. However it was a section of the Bengal Presidency before the Partition of 1905. Anyway no great work of local history was produced here, during the time-period under consideration. Only some minor ventures regarding a few places were attempted like *Dhalbhum Bibaran* by Krishna Chandra Raul, *Panchokot Itihas* by Rakhal Chandra Chakravarti and *Lal simha* by Harinath Ghose. Here a very short introduction to a couple of volumes may be useful. Both of them delineated the life of the ‘Santhal parganas’, which in a broad sense embraced portions of Puruliya and Bankura along with the adjacent tracts of Bihar and Jharkhand. They are Prabhas Ray’s *Parbatya Kahini* and *Santhal Pargana* by Sashibhushan Ray. The former was divided into nine chapters. This book described the life of the Santhals and the ‘mountain-dwellers’, the two major groups of the region, and provided accounts of its sub-divisions. The major topic of interest is the ‘Santhal rebellion’ which was dealt with in chapter 5. On the other hand the book by Sashibhushan Ray has three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter tells the story up to the arrival of the Santhals in this area between 1790 and 1810. The activities of the ‘mountain-dwellers’ and their final suppression by the British are the main theme here. The British intervened in this terrain for the first time in 1772. The second chapter

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342 Maratha horsemen who raided Bengal in the 1740s and 50s.
343 Krishna Chandra Raul *Dhalbhum Bibaran* (author,Ghatshila, 1927)
344 Rakhal Chandra Chakravarti *Panchokot Itihas* (Bajarabhum, Purulia, 1903)
345 Harinath Ghose *Lal simha* (author,Purulia, 1913)
346 Sashibhushan Ray *Santhal Pargana* (Brijlal Dokania, Deoghar, 1926)
is concerned with British administration from 1772 to 1855 i.e. till the end of the Santhal rebellion. The third segment assesses the new administrative–judicial system that came into force after the incident. Then a special, apparently simpler, set of laws was passed for the tribal area or ‘Damin-i-koh’. According to the author the new legal structure actually made life tougher for the Santhals. He commented that their tribal organization had been dismantled under the colonial impact. The British officials remained insensitive to their plight. He wrote that owing to acute poverty many tribal inhabitants were leaving the place to become labourers elsewhere. Mr. Mcpherson, a senior official, rather unsympathetically remarked that the Santhals were in the habit of moving from one area to another. Prabhas Roy narrated the interesting anecdote that the ‘mountain-dwellers’ quickly became loyal to the foreign Britishers, but not to the Indian, Hindu and Muslim, zamindars. This is because, the Indians owing to their caste bias looked down upon the tribals. The British actually raised a tribal regiment in 1780, which was disbanded after 1857. A general historical account of the nearby district of Purniya is found in Bhabananda Sinha’s \textit{Purniyar Itibritta}. Panchakot Giri by Sarada Prasad provides a poetical description of Panchakot hills.

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The number and quality of books regarding this part of Rarh may be rather inadequate, but a few interesting essays were composed on it. They cover diverse topics. We can discuss some of them here. Birbhum is famous for its Sakta tradition. 5 of the legendary 51 Sakta \textit{Pithas} or ‘sacred places’ are in Birbhum. The well known site of Tarapith is also situated here. Naturally a number of essays were composed on Sakti worship by authors of Birbhum. ‘Bama Pagla’ by an anonymous writer describes the miraculous life of Bamacharan, the famous ascetic of Tarapith. While portraying this typically indigenous \textit{sadhu} the author made a significant observation that Bamacharan of Tarapur never ran from place to place, hunting for fame and giving melodramatic speeches. Rather, to avoid unwanted people, he often feigned madness. ‘Shibabhog’ by Jaladhar Sen tells us about a peculiar \textit{Tantrik-Sakta} ritual of Lavpur, a village of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{347} Sashibhusan Ray, ‘Santhal Parganas’, op.cit, pp.76 & 83
\item \textsuperscript{348} Bhabananda Sinha \textit{Purniyar Itibritta} (Bahrampur 1908)
\item \textsuperscript{349} Sarada Prasad \textit{Panchakot Giri} (Purulia, 1914)
\item \textsuperscript{350} Ashok Upadhay, attached with Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, had compiled a comprehensive list of essays published on these districts.
\item \textsuperscript{351} Anon, ‘Bama Pagla’ (\textit{Ved Vyasa}, Kolkata, Falgun 1295 BE, p.273-74 and Chaitra 1295, pp. 275-76)
\end{itemize}
Birbhum. There a temple of goddess Kali was situated and a Brahmin family surnamed Ojha acted as priests. There everyday after the Puja, cooked food or bhog was given to the jackals (Shiba) of the nearby jungle. Thus the mother goddesses’ hunger was satisfied. There was a field called yuddhadanga (battle ground) near the temple, where the deity was supposed to have conquered the demons. The essay narrates the supernatural exploits of Ramsagar Ojha, the temple priest.

However Vaishnava influence was also quite strong in Bankura and Birbhum. The Malla Rajas of Bishnupur were great devotees of Lord Krishna, whom they called Madanmohan. Gangagovinda Ray’s ‘Sri Sri Madanmohan O Maharaj Bir Hambir’, is an analysis of a village lore current in Bankura about Madanmohan, the state-deity of Bishnupur and Hambir the Malla chieftain. The author ultimately refuted the claims of the rural poets who tried to establish Hambir as the founder of the Vaishnava Madanmohan cult. The two articles are contrasting in spirit as one tried to glorify a native hero, while another attempted to oppose such undue lionizing. But both the authors were particular about the source-materials used. The first one was based on the findings of Nagendranath Basu, a scholar of repute, while Ray used major Vaishnava texts like Premvilas and Bhaktiratnakar. The latter also made sincere attempts to determine the date of the composition of the ballad Madanmohan gatha, discussed in this article. Gaurihar Mitra in his ‘Padkarta Jagadananda Sarkar Thakur’, projects the indigenous tradition of composing religious poetry. Here the activities of a local saintly poet are described in simple language. Owing to the blessings of Lord Krishna, Jagadananda could perform miracles. He died in 1782 and a collection of his poems were brought out in 1899. But his memory was preserved in his village, Jokalai, and a yearly fair was organised in his remembrance. As said earlier in the chapter, the cult of Dharmathakur is very popular throughout Rarh. ‘Dharmaraj Puja’ by Kalimohan Ghosh, preserves the picture of a local cult revered by the ordinary multitude of Rarh. Much has been

352 Jaladhar Sen, ‘Shibabhog’ (Sachitra Sisir, Kolkata, Aghrahan 1330 BE, pp.30-31)
353 Gangagovinda Ray, ‘Sri Sri Madanmohan O Maharaj Bir Hambir’ (Laxmi, Bankura, Kartik1312 BE), pp.411-12
written about *Dharmathakur* by established pedants.\(^{356}\) In this article the author stressed upon a few crucial points. He said that the celebrations surrounding Dharma kept the Hindus of the area united. The devotees of Dharma came mainly from the lower castes such as Hadi, Dom, Bagdi, Sadgop etc. and the Brahmins who acted as priests in this festival were virtually treated as outcastes by fellow-Brahmins. Later they gained some recognition, though. This *Puja* was held on the full-moon (*purnima*) nights of Baisakh and Jaisthya months. He gave a rather detailed description of the *Dharmaraj* festival of Raipur which went on for five consecutive days.

There are some articles which focus on the political history of Bankura and Birbhum. ‘Chandravarmar Chakrachinha’ by Nagendranath Basu, tries to identify the local hero of Susunia, Bankura’s Raja Chandravarma, with the powerful-legendary monarchs of ancient India like Chandravarma, whom Samudragupta defeated, and Chandra mentioned in the Meherauli pillar inscription.\(^{357}\) A short essay named ‘Birbumer Itihaser ek pristha’ by Tulsidas Chakravarti, celebrated the bravery of Asadullah Khan, the Afghan zamindar of Birbhum.\(^{358}\) He commented that during the era of Muslim dominance Birbhum remained a land of fearless warriors. ‘Birbahu Ali Naki Khan’ by M. Abdur Rahman, depicts the story of the brave brother of the Nawab of Birbhum, Asad-us-zaman.\(^{359}\) Ali Naki became a favourite of Siraj-ud-daulah and helped him greatly during the capture of Calcutta. According to the author, Siraj re-christened Calcutta ‘Alinagar’, for this feat of his. Is this claim jingoistic? Whatever be the case, the writer, remarkably has listed his source-materials carefully. They include works such as *Birbhum Rajvamsa, Birbhum Bibaran*, and Hunter’s *Statistical Account*.

The Bishnupur school of classical music is famous throughout Bengal. ‘Bishnupur athaba Dwitia Delhi’ by Atalbihari Bakshi brought forth this refreshingly

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\(^{357}\) Nagendranath Basu ‘Chandravarmar Chakrachinha’, (*Samiran*, KolkataBaisakh 1303 BE), pp.221-23


different aspect of Bishnupur i.e. its glorious tradition of classical music. \(^{360}\) He traced the Bishnupur *gharana* (tradition) in the following way:

The school of Bahadur Khan: Bahadur Khan (a descendent of Tansen) – Gadadhar Chakravarti – Nitai Nazir & Brindavan Nazir. The second school: Ramsankar Bhattacharya – Anantalal Mukherjee. Besides these singers, the writer also mentioned the names of some leading musicians as well like Rammohan Chakravarti and Jagatchand Goswami.

‘Banglar kshayishnu jelasamuha’ by Karmi draws a curious comparison between Birbhum and Bankura and attempts to prove the superiority of the former. \(^{361}\) This is a typical local history essay. Here the author attempts to promote the cause of his particular locality. He tries to trace the decline of Birbhum under the British. According to him Birbhum was at first more prosperous than most of the localities of Bengal. It was one of the first districts to get the benefit of railways, and this led to furtherance of education and inter-regional contacts amongst its people. Later owing to the prevalence of a number of diseases such as malaria, influenza and cholera the quality of life in Birbhum declined. Even then it remained much ahead of Bankura. To prove the excellence of Birbhum, the essayist even compared the number of lepers in the two districts! He wrote that every year much crop was destroyed in Birbhum owing to lack of rainfall. This was the major reason for the poverty of Birbhum. Still, here people did not suffer from famine as in Bankura. However, the essayist did recognize, though in an indirect manner, the affinity of Birbhum and Bankura as parts of greater unit of Rarh. Thus we see that essays on Birbhum and Bankura reflect diverse aspects of the districts’ culture and antiquity.

**Hughly and Howrah:** Now, moving down south-eastwards we reach Hughly. The annals and heritage of this place have been well-documented by local historians. As usual the Englishmen started the process. In 1846 Rev. James Long published an essay called *On the Banks of the Bhagirathi* in Calcutta Review which contains much information on modern Hughly. This was followed by magistrate George Toyenbee’s *A

\(^{360}\) Atalbihari Bakshi, ‘Bishnupur athaba Dwitia Delhi’ (*Sahitya*, Kolkata, Agrahayan, 1327 B.E), pp.525-29

Sketch of the Administration of the Hooghly District 362 and D. G. Crawford’s A Brief History of the Hughli District363. After Rev. Long another missionary William Carey wrote A Missionary Tour in the Hughli and Howrah District364. A noted venture in English by an Indian about Hughly is Shambhoo Chunder Dey’s Hooghly Past and Present.365 This is actually concerned with the port-town of Hughly rather than the district as a whole. First the author discussed the possible origins of the name of Hughly. Then he narrated the past glory of the port and compares it with modern Calcutta. He recorded the testimonies of several European globe-trotters like De Barros, Purchas and Hamilton e.g. “The town of Hooghly drives a great trade, because all foreign goods are brought hither for import, and all goods ….. of Bengal are brought hither for exportation”.366 The decline of the settlement started with the dominance of the British. Still, the tone of the work is loyalist, as Dey praised the British for improving the lot of Hughly and Chinsurah. Then the details of noted sites such as the Bandel Church, and the Imambara along with those of important persons like Prankrishna Halder are given. As sources, along with memoirs of foreign travelers, reports and notes of European officials like Mr. William Bradie are used.367

The first serious work on Hughly in Bengali is Hughly Kahini by Munindradeb Ray, a scion of the local zamindary family of Bansberia368. This is a long work divided into 25 chapters. This basically sets the standard for later Bengali history books by including a large range of topics. They encompass places like Saptagram, events such as rise and fall of the Portuguese power, topics of contemporary relevance like the history of the English rule, and significant persons like Mohd.Mohsin.369 The volume is largely descriptive in nature. However no feeling of local patriotism is clearly evident in this text.

362 George Toyenbee A Sketch of the Administration of the Hooghly District (Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1888)
363 D. G. Crawford A Brief History of the Hughli District (Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1902)
364 William Carey A Missionary Tour in the Hughli and Howrah District (Calcutta, 1888)
365 Shambhoo Chunder Dey Hooghly Past and Present (Calcutta 1906)
366 Ibid Chapter 1
367 Ibid preface
368 Munindradeb Ray Hughly Kahini (Bansberia, Hughly, 1904)
369 Ibid Contents
Such sentiments are very much in place in *Hughly ba Dakshin Rarh* by Ambikacharan Gupta. In the preface he lamented about the lack of adequate histories regarding the district. He ruefully opined that almost all districts of Bengal had their own histories. But Hughly, despite being culturally the most advanced area, did not have a proper history. Along with this he stressed Hughly’s basic connection with Barddhaman and Medinipur as part of southern (dakshin) Rarh. A supra-local tendency to stretch the history of Rarh to remote past is also there. According to him the sub-region of Rarh and its name were of great antiquity. The tract was at least 2,500 years old. The book is divided into four main chapters carrying the story upto the coming of the British. The remarkable feature of the publication is that it provides anecdotal accounts of numerous minor places such as Dwarbasini, Mahanad, Pandua, Saptagram, Tamralipti, Vishnupur, Mainagarh etc. We can see that some of these towns, now come under the jurisdiction of modern Medinipur and Bankura, not Hughly. So, here too Gupta harped on Hughly’s trans-local connection with other parts of Rarh. Besides, in this text, we come across familiar stories of marginal, petty Muslim *faqirs* and *pirs* desecrating holy Hindu lakes having regenerative qualities (*jiyatkunda*) and overthrowing local Hindu chiefs.

An attempt in similar vein was *Hughly Howrahar Itihas* by Bidhubhushan and Banikumar Bhattacharya. This work is divided in ten chapters narrating the story from the earliest times to the reign of Lakshmansena. In this volume, the contributors refused to treat Hughly and Howrah as totally separate units and considered them to be portions of a broader single entity. They wrote: ‘The annals of Hughly and Howrah were completely inter-connected during Hindu and Muslim age and therefore did not merit separate narration. Even today Howrah is virtually a segment of Hughly. So we have

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370 Ambikacharan Gupta *Hughly ba Dakshin Rarh* ( Lalitmohan Pal, Calcutta, 1914)
371 Ibid, preface, p. 4. ‘Banger pray sakal jelari itihas hoiteche ki—siksha o sabhyatay Hughly sarbagraganya hoia itihas bihin …….’ ‘Rarh bahu prachin desh … Rarh namo aprachin na adai hazarer to kathai nei …. taha apesha uha prachinatwe sandeho koribar kichu nai’ Translation mine.
372 Bidhubhushan and Banikumar Bhattacharya *Hughly Howrahar Itihas* (Kumarnath Bhattacharya, Calcutta, 1925)
given separate description of only those aspects in which Howrah is distinct from
Hughly.\textsuperscript{373}

Actually, before the twentieth century, strait-jacket compartmentalization in terms
of physical boundaries was not popular in Bengal. One particular place like Hughly often
formed the part of a larger unit such as Rarh, whose borders changed with time. This
terrain of Rarh was again known by a different nomenclature in Puranic / Vedic era. It is
pleasing to note that the Bhattacharyas had the necessary conception regarding these
shifts in time and space. They wrote that in the days of yore there was no territory called
Hughly-Howrah. So we must first determine the state of this territory in those days and
how the unit changed its nomenclature and boundaries over the years. In ancient times
modern Rarh was known as \textit{Suhmadesh}. Nilkantha, the commentator on Mahabharata
called this area, \textit{Suhma-Rarh}. Their sense of territorial perspective is further proved by the
assertion that while describing the history of Hughly and Howrah during the Hindu age,
we have to discuss the ancient annals of allied units like Gauda, Rarh and Tampralipta
also.\textsuperscript{374} Then they made strenuous attempts to connect the mythic Gangaridie with Rarh
and prove them to be inhabitants of Western Bengal. As the Gangarides were supposed
to be very powerful the writers assumed the existence of a strong state in Western and
Northern Bengal during the Nanda-Maurya age. According to them the Rarhis even
defied the might of the great Mauryas. They claimed that Rarh was definitely smaller
than Chandragupta Maurya’s empire, but it was populous and mighty enough to preserve
its independence. Significantly, Chandragupta and Asoka never attacked Rarh.\textsuperscript{375}
However, their enthusiasm crossed all bounds when they analyzed the contribution of
Rarh in the field of Hindu religion and philosophy. They wrote: ‘The eclectic system of
the Tantras was the brainchild of the far-sighted Brahmins of Rarh …... the dynamic
Japanese had converted to Tantrism under the Gaudiya Tantriks in the sixth century C. E.
and started their progressive journey. In 526 C.E. the Tantrik savant Bodhidharma arrived
at Canton from Tampralipta. He was received by the Emperor of China himself who held

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\textsuperscript{373}Ibid, p. 8. ‘Hindu O Musalman yuge Hughly O Howrarhar itihas parasparg toei sangshisho je taha prithak
prithak barnana koribar abashyak no. Ekhono Howrah jela ek prakar Hughlyir antargata. Sutarang je je
bishoye Howrah-Hughly hoite prithak kebal sei sei bishoy prithak bhabe bornito hoibe’ Translation mine.
\textsuperscript{374} Ibid, pp. 37-39 & 41.
\textsuperscript{375} Ibid, p. 60.
\end{flushright}
religious discourses with him. A broad spatial background is indeed necessary to appreciate the history of a locality, but here it becomes a bit too broad! No less than China and Japan! Here one is reminded of Nirad C. Chaudhuri’s caustic comment that the Bengalis went far, but the Bengali poet went further! Fortunately such rush of adrenalin was not evident throughout the text. Rather they admitted that the town of Hughly was not that old. They held that if Hughly was genuinely an old settlement we would have certainly found its mention in traditional texts like the Puranas. But the name Hughly is not found even in the poem Chandi composed by Mukundram Chakravarti just 400 years ago.

The last noted venture on Hughly district as a whole was Hughy Jelar Itihas by Sudhir Kumar Mitra which was later expanded into Hughly Jelar Itihas O Bangasamaj, between 1961 and ’68. Mitra was a prolific contributor on local history of Hughly, his other works being Jejurer Mitra Vamsa (The Mitra family of Jejur), Tarakeshwarer Itikatha (The annals of Tarakeshwar) and Hughly Jelar Debdeul (Temples of Hughly). ‘He divided his Hughly Jelar Itihas in 20 chapters. The volume is noted for the huge amount of data found in it about important places and personages of Hughly. The important places include Debanandapur, Mahanad, Garh-Mandaran, Digha, Pandua, and Kathagarh. The remarkable persons described include Bharatchandra Ray Gunakar, Gauri Sen, Bhairab Halder and Rasikchandra Ray. Local phenomena such as Sati, European commerce, and indigo plantation are also considered. Interesting events like ‘Mohanto-Elokeshi sambad’ and fall of the now forgotten Ostend Company of the German traders also find their place. Here Mitra places the history of Hughly in the broader perspective of the narrative of Rarh and Bengal. He spent the first 25 pages of the book in exactly defining Rarh and other divisions of ancient Bengal. He also held that Rarh comprised of Hughly, Howrah, Barddhaman, Birbhum etc. But unlike Bidhubhusan Bhattacharya, he accepted that Rarh did form a part of the pan-India empire of the Mauryas. In fact Mitra

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376 Ibid, pp. 75-76. “Rarh deshiyo…… Mahanubhab Brahminganer asadharan saktibale udar tantramater udhob hoi. …… je japanbasigan mahasaktidhar jati bolia akhshya paia asiache, tahara krishta sastha satake Gaudiya tantrikganer maha saktimantre dikshito o nababale bolian hoia unnatimarge agrasar hoite arambha kariachilo. Translation mine.

377 Ibid, p. 4.

378 Sudhir Kumar Mitra Hughy Jelar Itihas (Sishir Publishing, Calcutta, 1948). According to the magazine Chinsurah Bartabaha Anadinath Muherjee and Gurudas Roy had prepared a history of Hughly which was unfortunately lost. However Anadinath wrote over 200 articles on the district and an account of Saptagram
was sensible enough to keep the larger Indian picture in mind while delineating the incidents of Hughly. He wrote ‘While describing the history of Hughly, I often had to retell the annals of Bengal briefly. This actually brings the contribution of Hughly in various fields like religion, society and politics, more prominently in focus. One should treat this effort as an insignificant part of constructing a comprehensive history of India’. The author was writing this book in the 1940s. This was a period when the nationalist movement was at its height and India was about to gain its independence. Thus it was possibly natural for a patriot like Mitra, to view Hughly and Bengal as parts of greater India. So he, unlike the Bhattacharyyas, was not much interested in establishing the political autonomy of Hughly in the past.

A sense of nostalgia is present throughout the work. Sometimes the author was guided more by his emotion and this is shown in the following section portraying the natural beauty of Hughly. We may provide an example here: ‘On the banks of the Ganges, there are numerous bathing ghats, picturesque gardens, many holy temples ….. somewhere there are palm trees or reeds almost touching the water or old banyan trees with their wide-spread roots are standing as witness of by-gone days’ The spirit of local patriotism is found in the preface also where he rated the people of Hughly as pioneers in all India in almost every walk of human life, from producing the first Anglo-Bengali dictionary to becoming the first Christian! The way he tried to analyse various opinions current about the origins of many settlements, shows his critical spirit. Akshay Chandra Sarkar held that the name Chinsurah was derived from Kshudra or ‘small’. But Mitra differed from this. He discussed the flourishing literature and culture of the area.Curious events like dacoities are also dealt with by him.

Other than tomes encapsulating the history of the entire district, there are works about specific sub-regions and lineages of Hughly. Here we may analyze a few of them to understand the historiographical trend of the area. Srirampur Mahakumar Itihas by

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380 Ibid, p. 42

381 Ibid p.466, Mitra quoted other opinions in his support.
Basanta Kumar Basu\textsuperscript{382} is an account of an important habitation of the district. The book is divided into 13 chapters plus an introduction and an epilogue. The most important section is concerned with the activity of the Danes. At first the station was made up of three villages, Sripur, Gopinathpur and Mohanpur. The Danes developed the place and renamed it Fredericks Nagar and then Srirampur in 1755. Some curious anecdotes are provided e.g. insolvent members of respectable families from different parts of Bengal fled to Srirampur to escape legal action, after failing to pay off their debts\textsuperscript{383}. Besides, even before the British Government, the Danish authorities banned Charak puja on recommendation from Carey and Marshman in 1803.\textsuperscript{384} Finally the Danish government sold Srirampur to the British in 1845 for Rs. 12 lakh & 50 thousand. The Indian employees of the Danish Company like Gopal Chandra Mukherjee were absorbed by the East India Company. Basu recorded many incidents about conversions of local people to Christianity.\textsuperscript{385} Some important families such as the Chakravarti \textit{Diwan} family and the Goswami family are mentioned. Remarkable events like enactment of sati and the Mohanto-Elokeshi case are also recorded.

In the preface the author tried to connect his place with greater identities. There a hint of local patriotism was also evident. ‘Many incidents of Bengal, of India as a whole or even the Western world, have close connections to Srirampur Mahakuma / subdivision. This is the meeting ground of Oriental and Occidental ideas and of great men of wealth and learning.’\textsuperscript{386}

\textit{Uttarpara Bibaran} by Abanimohan Banerjee was basically an award – winning lengthy essay.\textsuperscript{387} The book is divided into nine chapters. This tries to provide an all round view of the habitation. So there are interesting chapters on the local zamindary family, emigrant Uttarpara residents and men of letters of the place. Characters and facts come to life in this effort. The pride of place is occupied by Jaykrishna Mukherjee, the famous

\textsuperscript{382} Basanta Kumar Basu \textit{Srirampur Mahakumar Itihas} (Oriental Printing Work Kolkata , 1917)
\textsuperscript{383} Ibid, pp. 44-45.
\textsuperscript{384} Ibid, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{385} Ibid, see between pages 89 and 111.
\textsuperscript{386} Ibid, preface
\textsuperscript{387} Abanimohan Banerjee \textit{Uttarpara Bibaran} (Kuntalin Press, Kolkata 1920). The competition was organized by Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, Hughly, in 1919. The Mahesh-Kamalini Suvarna Padak, sponsored by Debnarayan Ghosh, was given as award.
zamindar of Uttarpara, well-known for his philanthropic activities such as sponsoring the path breaking essay ‘Govinda Samanta’ by Lal Behari Dey. Banerjee quoted a popular lay composed in his honour. The adventures of Pyarimohan Banerjee, known as the ‘fighting munsiff’ for his pro-British role in the mutiny of 1857, and the last Sati of Uttarpara are also described. Owing to her memory, the whole family was called Agun Khakir Vamsa or ‘the Family of the Fire-eater’. There is a striking statement which brings out how local historians tried to appropriate important personages of the other areas as their own. He said: ‘Hemchandra Bandopadhyay had slight connection with Uttarpara, still we should claim him as one of our own!’

_Ula ba Birnagar_ by Srijannath Mitra Mustaufi is the history of a prosperous village. This is an exhaustive treatment comprising of 20 chapters. He dwelt extensively on the origin of the name Ula. The main strength of the book lies in the number of local anecdotes it presents. A few examples can be provided here. This place came to be known as Birnagar because of the prowess of its inhabitants like Anadinath Mustaufi and Mahadeb Mukherjee who were expert in capturing dacoits. In contrast, the residents of Shantipur supposedly displayed cowardice and so the local magistrate renamed the town, Gadhanagar or ‘city of donkeys’. A graphic description of the malaria epidemic that shook up Ula during 1856-60 is also provided. According to the author, the haunted look of desolate houses of the deceased malaria victims, gave rise to many popular ghost stories. This possibly holds true for the entire province. He also narrated how in pre-British days even respectable Brahmins indulged in obscenities and eve-teasing was very much there. Ironically, these things were accepted as normal then.

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390 Srijannath Mitra Mustaufi _Ula ba Birnagar_ (Bela Printing Press, Hughly, 1926)., Price Rs. 2

391 Several opinions regarding the origin of the name Ula is presented. a) the place was situated near a large bush of ‘Ula’ grass, b) A particular incarnation of Goddess Chandi was worshipped in that forest, known as ‘Ulani Chandi’.
Here we can just skim along some of the important essays written on Hughly. Like the books, the essays on the district also are large in numbers and varied in topics. They range from the ancient history of the area to the Danish settlement of Srirampur. Locally significant personalities like Haji Mohd. Mohsin Darap Khan Ghazi and the poet Mathuresh were also celebrated. Important places like the Bandel Church complex and Satgaon port also find their mention. Now we can consider some of them in detail.

‘Chandannagarer Itihaser ek pristha’ focuses on the custom of slavery prevalent in the pre-colonial indigenous society. The narrator commented that slavery was a most popular custom in those days and many rich persons had a drove of them. Interestingly, in 1753, Nawab Alivardi Khan captured 12-15 thousand banjaras or roving bandits and sold them as slaves. Learning about this, Dupleix, the French governor, immediately ordered them to be purchased. Large quantity of such information is available in this essay.

A lively portrait of the day-to-day existence on the banks of Hughly is also found in ‘Deshparichayer Dhara’ by an anonymous author. A spirit of nostalgia about the bygone golden age of Bengal is present throughout the work. He made the remark: ‘Then the lush greenery on the banks of Hughly and the palm-tree forests used to soothe the eyes and mind of the Bengalis. They had an overall zest for life. They had healthy minds in healthy bodies, and were experts in both singing and fighting’. In the second part of the article the author gives the description of the Mandali village and its Mukherjee zamindary family. Some curious facts on the social life of Mandali and the neighbouring Ilchoba village are found here e.g. on the day of the Paus-sankranti the residents of Ilchoba used to hang brooms and shoes from the trees along the approach to the village so that ghosts could not enter. The motive of the author for visiting the hamlets was to gather old stories and see obscure temples. In ‘Hughly Jelar Gaurab’ a discussion about the religious identity of Hughly is provided. Here the focus is on local sects especially the Rajballabhis of Bansberia. Their egalitarianism was striking, as on their holy day of

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392 Charuchandra Roy, ‘Chandannagarer Itihaser ek pristha’, (Prabartak, Kolkata, Falgun, 1328 B.E.)
393 Anon ‘Deshparichayer Dhara’ (Prabartak, Kolkata, Baisakh 1336 BE), pp.18-23
394 Ibid, p.23 ‘Tatkale Hughly nadir kule kule sabujer mela, tal tamal beshtita banarajir murti Bangalir nayan o mon snigdha kore tulto …… Bangalir swastha chilo, sahas chilo, utsahe buk neche uhto, prasasta prangane lathi ghurie bole parichay dito, mathe gan gaito’ Translation mine.
395 Anon, ‘Hughly Jelar Gaurab’ (Prabartak, Kolkata, Jaistha 1336B.E.), pp.111-12
Shivachaturdashi passages from Gita, Quran and Bible were read and all the members, irrespective of caste took their food together. An example of their religious chanting is provided here.  

An essay from archaeological angle is ‘Duiti Murtir parichay’, which tried to draw attention towards two remarkable stone statues which were lying in neglect in two villages in Hugly. One was a statue of the Sun-god found in Nimai Tirtha. The style of sculpture indicated that it was a foreign import. But not even the elders of the village could say when it was first seen. Another found in the Palta Gor village was possibly a Shakti statue. The real intention of the author was to draw attention to the fact that archaeological artifacts were lying neglected in our countryside. Now we may touch upon one or two short biographical sketches. ‘Jandrel Kalu’ narrates the story of Kalicharan Ghosh who received the honorary title of General (Jandrel in Bengali tongue) from the British government. He was a mere commissariat clerk, but led the British army in an emergency situation during the second Anglo-Maratha War. For this unauthorized act, the Government conferred the title of General on him. Quite strangely, the Hindu society boycotted him for donning the dress of a foreign warrior! Ultimately, he was re-inducted in the Kayastha-samaj owing to the efforts of Raja Rajkrishna, a British loyalist. The entire adventure seems rather incredible and possibly a large amount of exaggeration is involved in this yarn. Most likely this is an attempt to celebrate the martial ability of the Bengalis in a colonial situation.

Another such venture was ‘Europe Mahasamare Pratham Bangali’. This essay was about the Bengali volunteers from Chandannagore who joined the French army in the First World War. The pride of the place was occupied by Narendranath Sarkar who organized the group. Another noted Bengali soldier was Jogendranath Sen, who was actually killed in the War. His services were recognized by the French Government.

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396 Ibid p.112 ‘Kalikrishna Garh sudo/ Kono naam nahi bodha/ Badir bibad dwidha/ Tate nahi tolore’ (We bow to Kalikrishna / Gods of all religion are equal / Don’t be swayed by considerations like quarrels and doubts) Translation mine.

397 Bibhutibhusan Bannerjee, ‘Duiti Murtir parichay’, (Bhatibhushan, Kolkata, Falgun 1349 BE ) p.237

398 Ashwinikumar Sen, ‘Jandrel Kalu’, (Bharati, Kolkata, Agrahayan, 1318 B.E.), pp.814-17

There are two types of patriotism evident in the essay. Firstly the author noted that while no volunteer came forth from Pondicherry, many joined the army from Chandannagore. Also, he mentioned that Narendranath Sarkar was a Sadgop by caste. Fittingly, the essay was published in the Sadgop Patrika. Thus here we note dual loyalty towards one’s sub-nationality (Bengali) and caste. There were many other efforts at extolling one’s own caste.  

The production of local histories in the neighbouring district of Howrah was certainly less prolific. Howrah became an entity, different from Hughly only in 1843. Even then it remained under the latter’s influence, at least till 1938. Possibly, owing to this, no classic text was written in Bengali on Howrah till 1950. Still, Howrah has its own distinction. The Howrah town is a very old settlement. Then, being the entry-point to Kolkata it has a highly heterogeneous population, in ethnic and linguistic terms. There were a few productions on some areas within the district like Shibpur Kahini by Annadaprasad Chatterjee Balir Itihaser Bhumika by Prabhash Chandra Banerjee and Khariap Barta by Haridas Smrititirtha. None of them reached any great heights and were mostly long pamphlets e.g. Shibpur Kahini was a 80 page work, divided into nine chapters, providing a general account of the place.  

There was one history of Howrah written by a Bengali, but the book was in English. That was Chandranath Bannerjee’s An Account of Howrah: Past and Present (1872). Otherwise, books on Howrah before 1947, comprised of mostly official publications, including O’Maelly and Manomohan Chankravarti’s District Gazetteer: Howrah and Howrah District Census Handbook. This is rather strange, as there were  

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400 Among others, Kayastha Samhita by Kalikishore Ray, Anwasthatatva Kaumudi by Shyamal Sen (1916) and Ugrakshatriya Parichay by Haricharan Bandhu(1916), serve as examples of the attempts of non-Brahmin castes to glorify themselves and claim a superior status. Both Ray and Bandhu claimed that Kayasthas and Ugra kshatriyas were not Shudras but Vedic Kshatriyas, while Sen held that Anwastha or Vaidyas were as good as Brahmins. Some information about history of various localities were found in these books. Kalikishore Ray recorded that contrary to the popular belief, Bengali Vaishyas and Kshatriyas can be found, in Mymensingh and Sylhet respectively. Also in parts of East Bengal, there were offsprings of Kayastha-Shudra marriage known as Upakayasthas. A Brahmanical rejoinder to their efforts was Kulasamsgraha by Rohinikanta Mukherjee(1888). The familiar lament that pre-colonial Bengalis lacked sense of history is found in all these works.  

401 Annadaprasad Chatterjee Shibpur Kahini (Author, Shibpur, 1919)  

402 Prabhash Chandra Banerjee Balir Itihaser Bhumika (Author, Bali, 1936)  

403 Haridas Smrititirtha Khariap Barta (Author, Khariap, 1914)
many local-level popular writers in colonial Howrah. Recently, Shibendu Manna had listed the names of the authors from Howrah who had contributed to the *Bat tala* genre of Bengali literature.\textsuperscript{404} Chandranath Banerjee had divided his account of Howrah in seven chapters. This work, in the gazetteer style, tries to cover all significant aspects of the district’s life ranging from geography to commerce. The historical section comprises of actually two chapters, the second one named ‘antiquities’ and the third one titled ‘History’. The former contains the descriptions of historical ruins visited by the author, mainly the Badrah temple of Govinda established by the zamindar Narsingha Deb Chuckervarty, and the *Rath* of Jagannath at Sulkea. The latter chapter is concerned with the historical narrative of the British age. According to Banerjee, the importance of Howrah increased greatly owing to the inauguration of railways. However in this book the author laid maximum emphasis on the Howrah town, while neglecting the countryside.

Though there are no major texts on Howrah there are quite a few essays which do give an idea of the historiographical trend of the area. ‘Howrah Itihas’, was written as a part of *Howrah Sahitya Sammilan*’s attempt to compile the history of the district. Here information about the related villages of Singti and Shibpur is given.\textsuperscript{405} In this essay, the dissertor focuses on mainly the religio-cultural life of the habitations, and also tries to trace the origin of the name Shibpur. Some interesting historical observations are also made e.g. Singti – Shibpur was once a flourishing trading settlement, but later it declined owing to the change in course of the river Ganges. Also the place was infested with wild animals, so the peasants residing there used to worship jungle-gods like Dakshin Ray and Bankura Ray. ‘Baligramer Prachin Samaj’\textsuperscript{406} traces the history of the Brahmins of Bali village. According to the author, on the eve of the British rule Bali had become a noted centre of orthodox Brahminism comparable to Krishnanagar. He also mentioned an interesting anecdote; some Brahmins of Bali had witnessed the execution of Maharaja Nandakumar. They were so shocked that they performed ritual bath in the Ganges and

\textsuperscript{405} Jibandas Bammerjee, ‘Howrah Itihas’, (*Sahitya Sambad*, Howrah, Agrahayan 1320 BE), pp.233-36
\textsuperscript{406} Nabinechandra Mishra, ‘Baligramer Prachin Samaj’, (*Sahitya Sambad*, Howrah, Chaitra 1326 and Baisakh- Jaistha 1327), pp.383-6
vowed never to set foot in Calcutta. ‘Ray-Baghini’\textsuperscript{407}, reports a delightful anecdote regarding Rani Bhabasankari of Bhursut, a lady zamindar, who defeated the Afghan chief Osman (immortalized by Bankim Chandra in \textit{Durgeshnandini}) during the reign of Akbar. Another essay regarding Bhursut is ‘Dakshin Rarher Islami-Banglar Kabi’.\textsuperscript{408} This deals with obscure, Muslim poets who composed works like ‘Amir – Humza, Bahar Danesh, Chahar Darbesh etc. which were later published by the Bata Publishers. Though not accepted by the bhadraloks, these works enjoyed fair amount of patronage from boatmen, petty-shopkeepers and servants. This genre centred around the pir-cult of Bhursut and Mandaran inspired by Sufi Khan, Bara Khan Ghazi and Taj Khan Masnad. One of the oldest poets of the genre was Garibullah. An example of his poetry is provided here\textsuperscript{409}.

The southernmost district of Rarh, as defined in this thesis, is Medinipur (now divided into two parts). Except Hughly, this district only has a well-established tradition of local-history writing in Rarh. A high degree of literacy amongst its populace and the fact that many emigrants from Medinipur used to work in Kolkata presses might have contributed to this. The first major work on the district that draws our attention is Trailokyanath Pal’s \textit{Medinipurer Itihas} (Two parts)\textsuperscript{410}. This book is basically a collection of accounts of various zamindari families of the area. It is interesting to note that unlike Barddhaman or Rajshahi, Medinipur was parcelled out between a dozen minor zaminduries like Mahisadal, Maynagarh, Sujamutha and Majnamutha. The admiration of the author for the zamindars is evident from the following statement; ‘Many noted personages have been born into these landed families. If we can compile the annals of these landlords and their estates, it would be a valuable possession indeed.’ \textsuperscript{411} He had a distinct sense of local patriotism and nostalgia for the good old days. He said: ‘Now is the time to revive the lost glories of the Aryans. Medinipur has given birth to many great souls. In the history of Bengali language, the name of Medinipur is indelible.’ \textsuperscript{412}

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\textsuperscript{407} Chandramohan Chakravarti, ‘Ray Baghini’, (\textit{Bharatbarsha}, Kolkata,Kartik1350 B.E.), pp.411-12
\textsuperscript{408} Sukumar Sen, ‘Dakshin Rarher Islami Banglar Kabi’, (\textit{Desh Saradiya} or puja special number, Kolkata 1354 B.E.) pp.183-87
\textsuperscript{409} ‘Allahar Maqubul Shaha Garibullah naam/ Naalia Hafezpur jahar mokam’
\textsuperscript{410} Trailokyanath Pal, \textit{Medinipurer Itihas}, (G.C. Bose & Co. Calcutta, 1888 and ’97 )
\textsuperscript{411} \textit{Ibid}, p.2
\textsuperscript{412} \textit{Ibid}, preface
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Another comparable work is *Medinipurer Itihas* by Yogesh Chandra Basu. This book is divided into two parts. The first deals with a narrative history of Medinipur, and is divided into 10 chapters. The second part, similarly segmented, is concerned with various social aspects such as language, education, religious group and zamindar families. Basu was attached to his patria, but at the same time he was conscious enough to connect the district’s history with greater units. He explained: ‘Medinipur is my birth place. Its history is closely connected with that of Bengal and Orissa. The purpose of this work is to show that the by gone days of Medinipur are not without glory.’ He went on to say that Medinipur was the birth place of Mukundaram, Rameshwar Bhattacharya and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. The author achieves distinction, when he narrates incidents and legends of the locality, which are neglected in the mainstream histories, with an indigenous flair. They were concerned with Mangal Kavya characters such as Behula – Lakhindar, Dhanapati and mythical figures like Rankini Devi and Pir Lohani. A text stressing the district identity of Medinipur is *Medinipur Bibhag* by Jibankrishna Maiti. This is actually a translation of *Midnapur Partition*, an English work by Birendranath Sasmal. This is written as a rejoinder to the claim of some Oriyas who wanted South Medinipur to be attached to Orissa. A historical account of the area, known in Bengali tradition, as Vakadwip or Bagri, in the district of Medinipur is found in Motilal Biswas’s *Vakadwip*.

Literature regarding various sub-district units of Medinipur is extremely rich, especially about the port-towns of Tampralipti, Khejuri and Hijli. The more noted efforts are *Tamoluk Itihas* by Trailokyanath Rakshit, *Tamluker Itihas* by Sebananda Bharati, *Khejuri Bandar* and *Hijlir Masnad-i-Ala* by Mahendranath Karan. Among them special mention should be made of Mahendranath (1886-1928), who was a classic self-educated amateur pedant of rather weak health. But this did not prevent him from meticulously gathering information about Medinipur. The above-mentioned books

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413 Yogeshchandra Basu, *Medinipurer Itihas*, (Sen brothers, Kolkata, 1921)
414 *Ibid* preface.
415 Jibankrishna Maiti *Medinipur Bibhag* (Anti-Partition Society, Medinipur, Kandi, 1931)
416 Motilal Biswas *Vakadwip* (Kolkata 1915)
417 Trailokyanath Rakshit, *Tamoluk Itihas*, (Hare Press, Calcutta, 1902)
418 Sebananda Bharati, *Tamluker Itihas* (Narendranath Das, Calcutta, 1319 BE)
419 Mahendranath Karan, *Khejuri Bandar* (K K Karan, Medinipur, 1334 BE)
420 Mahendranath Karan, *Hijlir Masnad-i-Ala* (K K Karan, Medinipur, 1333 BE)
were products of such research. In the preface to the second edition of *Hijlir Masnad-i-Ala*, Mahendranath made important reflection on his view of history. He stressed upon the inseparable bond between Hijli and Khejuri, both of which further went on to form essential parts of Medinipur. Restorative vision also influenced his work as he lamented that the Bengalis had no sense of history and many ancient remains were rapidly becoming ruins. He also emphasized that a historian must not be swayed by communal or personal considerations. He then acknowledged the help he had received from Satish Chandra Mitra, thereby recording a delightful instance of cooperation between two local historians. A careful reading of the preface would further prove our point.421 Mahendranath, a local pedant, received cordial acknowledgement from Sir Jadunath Sarkar, a major institutional historian. Sir Jadunath accepted that Mahendranath gathered all possible information on every aspect of the life of Hijli. He was not only laborious but extremely critical about his sources, and used only those whose authenticity was undoubted. For this quality, Mahendranath’s effort had become an ideal local history. 422

Rainbow sentiments of a local historian are also found in Sebananda Bharati’s *Tamluker Itihas ba Tamralipta Rajya ba Dakshin Banglar Aitihasik Chitra*. The very title is significant as it connects Tamluk with the broader identity of *Dakshin Bangla* or South Bengal. Micro-jingoism is evident in the book. There are frequent statements such as: ‘The residents of Tamralipta had colonized large areas in South India, Sri Lanka, Java and Sumatra and triumphantly spread Aryan culture there. The modern Tamils are their descendents.’ 423 In his work also there was the familiar lament that Bengalis had no history and it was extremely difficult even to gather necessary material to compose a historical work. *Kesairi* by Radhanath Pati is a descriptive account of a settlement in Baghbhum, between Bengal and Orissa. Interestingly, this does not include a historical narrative.424

421 *Hijlir Masnad-i-Ala*. Prakkathan by Jadunath Sarkar.
422 Ibid
423 Sebananda Bharati, ‘Tamluker Itihas’, op.cit, preface
A large number of essays were also composed on Medinipur. Many of them are about Tamluk, Hijli and Khejurī. Some of the articles also cover sundry aspects of Medinipur’s life, like the antiquity of Medinipur, its treasures in the field of art and architecture, the ordeals of the salt industry under the British etc. Only a few of them can be touched upon here. Amulyacharan Vidyabhushan in his ‘Banglar Itihasa Medinipur’ stressed the significance of Medinipur in the history of Bengal. He was also conscious of Medinipur’s position as an intermediary between Bengal and Orissa. He said: i) ‘In ancient Medinipur every religious sect of Bengal had been active in different phases. Remains of different levels of old settlements are found here. Previously, the culture, society, religion and commerce of Medinipur had contributed much to the annals of Bengal’\textsuperscript{425} ..... ii)‘In days of yore Medinipur was closely associated with Kalinga or Orissa and Suhma or South Bengal.’ \textsuperscript{426}

Mahendranath Karan in ‘Prachin O Adhunik Shilpasampade Medinipur’ spoke about the numerous handicrafts of the district.\textsuperscript{427} Owing to the presence of famous parts of Tamluk and Hijli, many local centres of production cropped up like Kesairi (Tasar silk), Ghatal (Tasar silk and cotton), Ramgarh (iron weapons), Medinipur (wooden articles) etc. Jitendra Kumar Nag in ‘Banglar Laban Shilpa’\textsuperscript{428} and ‘Banglar Laban Shilper Punarbikash’ had vividly portrayed how Bengal’s self-sufficiency in salt production was deliberately destroyed by owing to British mercantile interest.\textsuperscript{429} He also pointed out the high quality of indigenous salt which had gone unnoticed by the urban buyers. Nag then mentioned that the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931, helped the partial revival of the salt industry. The plus point of Nag’s essays were that he quoted original documents frequently and provided profuse illustrations and photographs.

Local patriotism is evident in a work regarding a small portion of Medinipur. We are talking about \textit{Daspurer Itihas} by Panchanan Ray Kabyatirtha. \textsuperscript{430}This is a unique book, as it is concerned in considerable detail with a single \textit{thana}. However, as it was published in 1958, we would not assess it critically. In the preface the author says that his

\textsuperscript{425} see Kamal Chaudhuri ed, \textit{Medinipurer Itihas}, (Dey’s Publishing, Kolkata 2008), p. 35.
\textsuperscript{426} \textit{Ibid}
\textsuperscript{427} \textit{Ibid} p.624.
\textsuperscript{428} Jitendra Kumar Nag ‘Banglar Laban Shilpa’ (\textit{Probasi}, Kolkata, Srbaban, 1342)
\textsuperscript{429} Jitendra Kumar Nag ‘Banglar Laban Shilper Punarbikash’ (\textit{Probasi}, Kolkata, Asadh, 1343)
\textsuperscript{430} Panchanan Ray Kabyatirtha, \textit{Daspurer Itihas},(Haripada Patra, Calcutta,1958)
birth place Daspur was neglected by major historians therefore it was his duty to bring its story to light. He also lamented that he was ridiculed by his fellow residents of Daspur for his efforts and nobody really supplied him with source materials. In the main narrative he glorified Shova Singh to an unbelievable extent. Shova Singh was the landlord of the small estate of Chetua in Daspur who conducted a local rebellion in 1695. However, Panchanan Ray makes him a great visionary patriot who wanted to create an independent Bengal on the ruins of the Mughal empire. He was supposed to be the forerunner of famous anti-colonial armed nationalists such as Khudiram Bose and Manabendranath Ray. In fact, Ray was so impressed with him that he called Shova Singh, Banga Shivaji or the ‘Shivaji of Bengal’ and credited him with the foundation of Calcutta. An interesting case of nano-historiographical rivalry is seen here. Ray called Kirtichand, the Raja of Barddhaman, the ‘arch-traitor’ for dubiously defeating Shova Singh. But the historians of Barddhaman have rated Kirtichand a great hero and Shova Singh a detestable villain.

Some other major intellectuals have also highlighted the distinction of Medinipur. R.C. Majumdar said that Medinipur formed the first battle ground for the Bengalis against the invaders from the South. Dharmapala of Dandabhukti was one such Bengali knight who resisted the great Rajendra Chola. Many adventurers and sailors flocked at the great port-city of Tamralipta and from there journeyed towards South-east Asia. They fearlessly risked their lives and fortunes in those perilous ventures and upheld Indian culture in the foreign lands. They were no less than the great European navigators who discovered the sea-route to India. Besides, Pramatha Chaudhuri honoured Medinipur for being the birth place of some of the pioneers of Bengali prose like Mrittunjoy Vidyalankara and Isvarchandra Vidyasagar. Kshitimohan Sen Shashtri too eulogised Medinipur as a place with special characteristics in his ‘Medinipur of Vidyasagar’. He especially highlighted the religio-cultural distinction of Medinipur. It was the home of several Vaishnava preachers like Shyamananda. However, Shakta Tantriks had also flourished here. Besides, the residents of Medinipur never blindly followed the dictates of

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434 Ibid., p. 378.
435 Ibid., p. 381.
metropoliton Bengali social gurus. When Vallal sena wanted to impose Kulinism-centric social restrictions, the Brahmins of Medinipur defied him. Thus it was but natural that Medinipur would give birth to an off-beat intellectual like Vidyasagar.

Thus after scanning the major local histories of Rarh we note that while eastern Rarh has produced a fair amount of historical literature, western Rarh lags far behind. One possible reason for this may be that eastern Rarh is a more fertile, settled area where society was better organized and prominent political / historical events could take place. Naturally it was a culturally more advanced place, where there was a tendency to record history. The economy and society of eastern Rarh could support a bhadralok class who actively cultivated this tradition of writing history. In contrast western Rarh was a rocky infertile area where tribal society and culture dominated. Thus the tendency to write / record history in the mainstream way never developed.

4.3 HISTORIES OF WESTERN BENGAL (OUTSIDE RARH): After completing our survey of the Rarh centric local histories, we can now move towards the neighbouring districts. It would not be surprising if we take up the case of Nadia first. Nadia is linked closely with Rarh both geographically and culturally. Here by Nadia we mean the territory known by the name in undivided India. During the Partition of India, Krishnanagar and Ranaghat sub-divisions of united Nadia came within India, while Kushtia, Chuadanga and Meherpur went to Pakistan. At the time of Raja Krishnachandra (1728-82) the Nadia Raj stretched from Plassey in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the South, Dhuliapur in the East to Bhagirathi in the West. We would keep the boundaries of this ‘greater’ Nadia in mind while judging the trend of its local history tradition.

Even in pre-British days, some works were composed there which contained much information on local history. Bharat Chandra Ray composed his Annadamangal (1751) in Nadia zamindary court. Here we get a portrait of socio-political life of Nadia Raj in its infancy. The major performers of the Kabigaan (a type of ballad) included curious data on culture and history of Nadia. Some of them were Haru Thakur, Anthony Firinghi, Bhola Moira and Dasrathi Ray. In the colonial era, one of the earliest works on

436 see Chandi Lahiri, ‘Nabadwiper Lok-Samskriti’ in Yajneshwar Chaudhuri Anchalik Itihas Charchay Nadia,(Nabadwip Puratatva Parishad, Nadia 2007)
local history Maharaja Krishna Chandra Rayaysa Charitram (1805) is concerned primarily with the annals of the district. Then Bholanath Chandra’s Travels of Hindoo (1869) encapsulated considerable data on Nadia’s archaeology, economy and manners. In Sekaler Darogar Kahini by Girish Chandra Bose numerous anecdotes are found about the indigo planters, zamindars and Robin-hood like dacoits. Bose was a police officer in the district between 1853 and ’60. So he could access apparently insignificant local data normally not available to the formal historian. He made the significant observation that the complete history of Bengal can never be written without compiling such minor data.

However, the first book which encompasses the entire history and culture of Nadia is Kantichandra Rarhi’s Nabadvip Mahima. Here, much information about the Nabadvip town and the district is found. The first four chapters depict the Sena rule in Nadia, while the later ones discuss the three main philosophical schools, Smriti, Nyaya and Tantra along with the biographies of their experts. The life of Chaitanya is given in detail too. But, as Mrittunjay Mandal has shown, Rarhi often violated the norms of authentic history while trying to prove the antiquity of Nabadvip. He tried to identify ‘Naggadwip’ of old Buddhist texts with modern Nabadvip without any concrete proof. Again he tried to show that the Nabam or ninth island of traditional Indic geography, mentioned in the Vishnupurana, is none other than Nabadvip. Still the value of his work as a basic text remains considerable. A few other books on Nadia as a whole are Nabadvip – Parikrama, Sri Sri Nabadvip Darpan, Adim Nadiar Katha and Prachin Nadiar Abasthiti Mimangsha. Examples of works on important sub-divisions of Nadia are Shantipur Parichay (two vols, 1937) by Kali Krishna Bhattacharya; a large book focusing on the life of Advaitacharya, and Shantipur Smriti (1929), a small compilation of local legends about Vaishnava Goswamis. Some include, taking later

438 Kantichandra Rarhi Nabadvip Mahima (Author,Hughli, 1884)
440 Nagendranath Basu and Narahari Chakravarti Nabadvip – Parikrama (Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, Kolkata, 1909),
441 Brajamohan Das Sri Sri Nabadvip Darpan (Sri Radha Press Nadia, 1920)
442 Haridas Nandi Adim Nadiar Katha (Author, Krishnanagar, 1919)
443 Jagadish Das Adhikari and Priyananth Mukherjee Prachin Nadiar Abasthiti Mimangsha (Author, Nadia, 1919).
inter-district boundary adjustments into consideration, *Ula ba Birnagar* within the literature on Nadia. Volumes on Sri Chaitanya Deva and Gaudiya Vaishnavism have contributed towards the historiography of Nadia. The above mentioned books contain some interesting features. The orthodox Vaishnava writer Narahari Chakravarti deliberately Sanskritized the names of local villages and Simlia became Simantadwip and Gadigacha turned into Godrumdwip. *Chitre Navadwip* by Saradindu Narayan Ray provides a general introduction to Nadia District. Nagendranath Basu wrote a preface to the work.\(^{444}\)

The most important text on Nadia, though, was *Nadia Kahini* by Kumudnath Mullick.\(^{445}\) The author was a prosperous landlord. In the gazetteer style, the book touches upon every aspect of Nadia’s life. But the local flair is evident in the sections dealing with the origin of the place name Nadia and the intellectual heritage of the district. The author’s deep attachment to his locality is found in the opening page of the text. In the preface also he claimed: ‘If one analyses the history of Nadia with a calm frame of mind, he would realize that Nadia was not suited for warfare and narrow politics. Rather the practice of knowledge, wisdom and religion flourished naturally here……. Nadia’s fame is world-wide owing to its cultivation of knowledge.’\(^{446}\) Local anecdotes and characters came to life in his narrative. It is delightful to read how Raja Krishnachandra duped Nawab Ali Vardi Khan by showing the jungles near Calcutta as his zamindari, from where very little revenue could be obtained and how the legendary *Bishe dacoit* or Biswanath Ray countered rapacious English officials. Numerous stories about the pedants of Nabadwip of course form the back-bone of the work.\(^{447}\)

Sadly though, Mullick could not appreciate all phenomena typical to Nadia. The various minor religious sects like the Kartabhajas did not receive a fair deal in his hands. Mullick dismissed them as licentious and ignorant. But nowadays the scholars tend to take a different view. Mohit Ray, who had edited *Nadia Kahini* in 1998, wrote: ‘The songs of the minor sects should not be mistaken as mere religious compositions, as rather

\(^{444}\)Saradindu Narayan Ray *Chitre Navadwip* (Author, Banagram, 1930)  
\(^{446}\)Ibid, p1.  
\(^{447}\)Ibid, p. 79-205.
crucial information about the contemporary society and culture is hidden beneath their complex symbolism ….. The downtrodden majority of the society had taken shelter under the protective wings of the popular groups following Gaudiya Vaishnivism.\textsuperscript{448} Other more complex textual layers of Mullick’s work would be taken up in relevant chapters. But this should be mentioned here that Kumudnath had a clear notion about Nadia’s connection with the greater entity of Bengal. He wrote: ‘While portraying the past of Nadia, often I had to delineate the general history of Bengal. I did this especially to establish the connection between the annals of Nadia and Bengal and to bring out the former’s influence over the society, religion and polity of the latter.’\textsuperscript{449}

Some essays written about Nadia reflect similar concerns about establishing the glorious heritage of the area. A few of them deal with the antiquity of the place itself. ‘Sekaler Nabadwip’ depicts the prosperous life style of fifteenth-sixteenth century Nabadwip.\textsuperscript{450} Using Vaishnava literature and Ramayana of Krittivas as sources the author tried to prove that the citizens of Nabadwip and its suburbs were content and lived in perfect social harmony. The intellectual excellence of Nabadwip was also stressed. However, Banerjee blamed the Turko-Islamic invaders for being unsympathetic towards the development of Nabadwip. He also criticized some other local pedants for unnecessarily hero-worshipping Sri-Chaitanya. Another article celebrating the glory of Nabadwip is ‘Nadiar Katha’.\textsuperscript{451} Here the writer went to the extent of proclaiming Nadia synonymous with ancient Bengal. The essay is full of geographical and environmental details.

It is virtually impossible to establish the antiquity of an area without proper archeological proof. So the author of ‘Nadia o tar Pratnasampad’\textsuperscript{452} tried to draw attention to the archeological wealth of Nadia. Here he discussed the archeological site of Balosha Rajar Garh near Maharajpur village. It was a place containing large number of tanks (pukur o bil). During some primary forays, remains of days of yore like structures of boats, bullock carts and skeletons of crockodiles were discovered. So, detailed

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{448} see pp.10 & 348 for criticism of Mullick by Ray.
\textsuperscript{449} \textit{Ibid}, Nibedan section p.26
\textsuperscript{450} Kaliprasanna Banerjee, ‘Sekaler Nabadwip’ , (NarayanKolkata, Asadh 1323 B.E), pp-786-95.
\textsuperscript{451} Birendramohan Acharya, ‘Nadiar Katha’, (Bangasree,Kolkata,Chaitra,1344 B.E), pp-384-386.
\textsuperscript{452} Prafulla kumar Sarkar, ‘Nadia o tar Pratnasampad’, (Bharatbarsha,Kolkata, Sravan,1323 ), pp-228-29.
\end{footnotesize}
excavations of the site were necessary. The author mentioned a few interesting local legends here. A similar attempt was ‘Pabanduter Bijaypur Kothay?’ Here the author tried to exactly locate Laxmansena’s capital Bijaypur, through a critical assessment of sources. This Bijaypur is mentioned in Dhoiyi’s Pabandutam. According to Dhoiyi Bijaypur was situated on the banks of Bhagirathi, within Rarh. The writer claimed that from Dhoiyi’s description it is clear Nabadwip was Bijaypur of old. He recalled the opinions of scholars such as Nagendranath Basu and Rakhardas Banerjee in his support. The author was liberal enough to admit that his opinions might have to be revised in future. Some other articles advertise the exploits of local heroes. One such person was Ashananda Banerjee, nicknamed Dhenki or husk-pedal. He got this name because he once repelled a band of dacoits with a husk-pedal only. In ‘Mahabir Ashananda’ the author attempted a short biographical sketch of the brave. Here we come to know that Ashananda was a rich and stout person. So, in the initial years of the British rule, when law and order had broken down, he could come to the aid of the commoners oppressed by the robbers. He was a man of ideal character who promoted sports and physical exercise among the mass to build a healthy nation. The writer of ‘Ashananda Dhenki’ narrated how the fire-eater got his nick name. His thrilling exploits against dacoit-zamindar of Dumur doho and his gang is reported here. This story is also found in Yogendranath Gupta’s famous book Banglar Dakat (Dacoits of Bengal, 1951). A star of a different constellation was Krishnananada Agambagish, the chief Bengali commentator on Tantra. The author of ‘Agambagish Bhattacharya r Kal nirnaya’ tried to determine the age of the famous sage. But this article has virtually become a refutation of Dr. D.C. Sarkar’s arguments which placed Agambagish in the 1670s. Another script celebrating the savants of the tract is ‘Nadia Jelar Kayekjan Samanyaypanthi Sadhak’. This depicted the lives of syncretic saints such as Aaulchand, Maunibaba, Lalan Shah Fakir, Kangal Harinath, Shibchandra Bidyarnab etc. In the beginning of the nineteenth century the traditional

social set-up of Nadia came under challenge from the new urban values emanating from colonial rule. Naturally the common people were confused regarding the ideal way of life. In this scenario, these holy men upheld a simple, egalitarian and secular life-style which filled the psychological void of the people. In the end the author laments that many of the literary compositions of such saints as Hiru Shah and Panchu Shah were on the verge of being extinct. Expectedly, none were bothered!

After Nadia, we should zoom on Murshidabad, certainly a name to conjure with in Bengali romance and history. Scholars like Kamal Banerjee and Satyaranjan Bakshi held Murshidabad (at least the Western half) to be a part of Rarh458 while Niharranjan Ray regarded it as an intermediate area between Pundra-Varendra and Rarh. The earliest work on Murshidabad, as mentioned before, was Shyamdhan Mukherjee’s *Murshidabader Itihas* (1864). As we have studied the work in detail in chapter 2, it would not engage us here. Among the later historians on Murshidabad, Nikhilnath Ray occupies the numero uno spot. Here we would consider two of his major works, *Murshidabad Kahini* (1897) and *Murshidabader Itihas* (1902)459. The former was a collection of popular essays on different facets of Murshidabad’s antiquity and culture, while the latter was chronologically a more disciplined effort.

Ray’s sense of local attachment was evident throughout his attempts. Here we may select a piece from the article ‘Motijhil’ in *Murshidabad Kahini*: ‘Whenever we come across an ancient habitation, or an old legend enters our ear, our mind is automatically filled with inexpressible enthusiasm.’460 Connection between the histories of Murshidabad, Bengal and India is established in the essay ‘Plassey’: ‘In the field of Plassey, the fortunes of Bengal and even India were decisively changed. …. There, not only did the Muslim royal power collapse, but the prospect of Hindu revival also became a chimera.’ 461 Ray was often bitterly satirical about the poor historical memory of his countrymen. To express his feelings he produced this quote from Umeschandra

458 Banerjee Kamal and Bakshi Satyaranjan, *Murshidabader Rarh Elaka* (Gauri Bakshi, Bahrampur, 1983)
461 *Ibid* p. 156.

158
Batyabal’s writings: ‘Siraj-ud-daulah was captured on the banks of Kalindi. The place came to be known as *Subahmar* or the field where the Subahdar was killed. Sadly nowadays the local populace pronounces it as *Suarmara* or the field where a pig was killed! Oh God! How could you convert Siraj into a pig?’ \(^{462}\)

Nikhilnath Ray’s sense of history is revealed in his biographical sketches of the Nawabs. Here we would consider the example of Murshid Quli Khan, the founder of the Bengal Nawabi. First of all Ray thoroughly narrated the positive features of Murshid Quli highlighted by the contemporary Muslim historians like his efficiency, impartiality, simplicity, intelligence and unblemished character. He fully acknowledged that Murshid Quli rose from a most humble state to a great station owing solely to his singular personal ability. Then, after bestowing fulsome praise, he criticized the flaws of the Nawab. According to Nikhilnath, the governor suffered from three major faults: a) undue harshness in judicial matters, especially towards the defaulter zamindars, b) covert promotion of Muslims. Ray noted that Murshid Quli never showed any severity towards the Muslim zamindar of Birbhum, c) occasional corruption. However in the end he rated the Khan highly, ‘Undoubtedly Mushid Quli was an ideal ruler, despite a few lapses.’ \(^{463}\)

Tagore himself praised Nikhilnath Ray for his efforts regarding Murshidabad. He said that while reading Nikhilnath’s books the reader felt himself transported to the bygone world of the Nawabs.\(^{464}\)

Another account of Murshidabad was *Murshidabad Katha* by Srishchandra Chatterjee.\(^{465}\) This work contains accounts of the Nawabi family and other leading houses and persons of the district. In the first part of the work general information on the life of the district is given like education, commerce, agriculture, natural spots, temples and shrines. The second part is concerned with history of the place. A deep feeling of nostalgia is present throughout the work. Chatterjee commented that neither Ram nor Ayodhya were there any more. The metropolis of Murshidabad was now just a skeleton

\(^{462}\) *Ibid*, footnotes p. 156  
\(^{463}\) Nikhilnath Ray, ‘Murshidabader Iithas’, op.cit, p. 592  
\(^{464}\) Prabodhchandra Sen & Pulinbehari Sen ed. Iithas (The historical writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Visvabharati, Kolkata, 1955)  
\(^{465}\) Srishchandra Chatterjee *Murshidabad Katha* (Author, Murshidabad, 1932)
of its former self. Thus we come to end of our discussion about the historical works on Rarh and the adjacent areas.

Now we may move upwards towards Western half of Pundravardhana i.e. Maldah and Western Dinajpur. Sadly, virtually no major text exists on this area. The sole exception is *Paundravardhan O Karatoya* by Haragopal Daskundu. The very title suggests that the book is concerned with the two major markers of the region, the concept of Pundravardhana and the river Karatoya which sustained the land. Sentiment of local patriotism is evident in the introduction itself: ‘The name of Pundravardhana is written in golden letters in the purana-itihasa texts. Actually, the history of Bengal starts with civilization in Pundra. It was treated with respect by Parashurama, Mahavira and Buddha.’ \(^{466}\) Then he gathered formidable evidence about the exact site and antiquity of Pundra. The religious heritage of the place is also dealt with. Hiuen-Tsang’s work is quoted at considerable length to prove the social prosperity of Pundra in ancient and early medieval times. In the second volume of the work, *Karatoya*, the author deals with the various legends about the said river and its historical role. It is related how the river was created out of the water from Mahadev’s palm or *Kara* and was named ‘Karatoya’. The writer mentioned that the river played an important role in halting the advance of Bakhtyar Khalji in the thirteenth century. Another book about the area was *Maldah jela: Bhaugalik Bibaran O Samkhipta itihas* by Rajendranarayan Chaudhuri\(^{467}\), which was more of a general account. *Lupta Tirtha Prakash* by Haladhar Nandi is an interesting work. The author located many of the places mentioned in Hindu *Puranas* in modern Dinajpur. This is a case of rediscovering indigenous heritage.\(^{468}\)

No major work exists about the district of Dinajpur. But that does not mean the literati of the area were historically unconscious. This district included a large number of important archaeological sites connected with the medieval metropolis of Gauda. They attracted the attention of European observers such as Buchannan Hamilton and Henry Creighton. Following their lead local scholars enthusiastically collected and studied archaeological artefacts of the tract. The name of Raja Girijanath Ray is important in this

\(^{466}\) Haragopal Daskundu *Paundravardhan O Karatoya* (Author, Serpur, 1919), Introduction.

\(^{467}\) Rajendranarayan Chaudhuri *Maldah jela: Bhaugalik Bibaran O Samkhipta itihas* (Bipinbihari Ghosh, Maldah, 1911)

\(^{468}\) Haladhar Nandi *Lupta Tirtha Prakash* (Dutta Press, Sirajgunj, 1935)
respect as he built a private museum. His court poet Maheschandra Tarkachuramani composed a Sanskrit history of the zamindar family called *Dinajpur Rajvamsam*. The influence of the Brahmo movement further encouraged historical enquiry here. Some Brahmos like Brajendrachandra Simha Chaudhuri founded the *Dinajpur Patrika* in 1885 to cultivate the history and culture of Dinajpur. There Yogeshchandra Dutta wrote a series of articles on the history of the district titled *Atit*. Later famous pedants such as Rakhaldas Banerjee and Nalinikanta Bhattashali visited the district.

A few works were composed on the ancient metropolis of Gauda, situated in the present Maldah district. Most important of them were *Gauda Rajmala* by Ramaprasada Chanda (published 1912), *Gauda Lekhamala* by Akshaykumar Maitrea (1912) and *Gauder Itihas* by Rajanikanta Chakraborty (1910). These books occupy important places in Bengali historiography, but they need not concern us here. This is because they do not deal with the modern district of Maldah, but largely with the abandoned city of Gauda and its relations with the rest of Bengal. It would not be correct to accept histories of Gauda as local annals of Maldah. Gauda denoted an identity which was much larger than a single district. Sometimes, the whole province of undivided Bengal was known by that name. This distinction was quite apparent to historians of Gauda like Akshay Kumar Maitreya and Ramaprasad Chanda. A glance at the contents of Rajanikanta Chakraborty’s *Gauder Itihas* would show that the book covers the history of entire Bengal, not merely of any district, from the earliest times to the Mughal invasion.\(^{469}\) This book is the fruit of a continuous research procedure on Gauda undertaken by several scholars for a number of years. So, the definition of Gauda given in this work can be taken as authoritative: ‘Anga (East Bihar), Vanga (East Bengal), Rarh and Suhma (West Bengal) were included within Gauda kingdom. Often Magadha (South Bihar and Jharkhand), Mithila and Videha (North Bihar) were also parts of it’.\(^{470}\) The editor of a recent edition of *Gauder Itihas*, Malayshankar Bhattacharya further added that in the middle ages Pundravardhana or North Bengal also came within the radius of Gauda. Thus we see that in pre-Mughal times Gauda stood for entire Bengal and most of Bihar, not for just Maldah and neighbouring tracts. So during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Bengali

\(^{469}\) Rajnikanta Chakraborty, *Gauder Itihas* (Dey’s Publishing, Kolkata, 1999, Originally Published in 1909)

\(^{470}\) Ibid, p. 21.
historians, inspired by the rising tide of nationalism and interested in establishing the past glory of Bengal, often used the term Gauda to denote the whole province. Rajanikanta’s effort too was inspired by patriotism, and this is evident from his text. He was part of an intellectual-patriotic movement centred in two neighbouring cities, Rajshahi and English bazar (Maldah). Some of his fellow participants were Akshay Kumar Maitreya of Rajshahi, Radheshchandra Seth, Binoy Kumar Sarkar and Haridas Palit of English bazaar. They lived in proximity to many former capitals of Bengal such as Gauda, Pandua, Tanda and Rajmahal, and were thus inspired by a sense of regional glory. This particular feeling was shared not only by intellectuals but by landlords as well. One of them, Krishnalal Chowdhury bore the expenses for the first volume of Rajanikanta’s work while another, Abid Ali Khan did the same for the second volume. This also shows the secular character of Gauda patriotism!

4.4 THE NORTHERN AREAS: Now we would enter an area, which ethnically and geologically was not a part of Bengal, and was acquired by the British. This landmass is formed by the districts of Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar and Darjeeling. One pedant clubbed these with Dinajpur and Maldah to form an identity called ‘North Bengal’. However, we have already dealt with Dinajpur and Maldah and here we would be concerned with the three ethnically distinct non-Bengali districts. The local histories written about them by the Bengali bhadraloks are therefore not attempts to glorify one’s own sub-region, but ventures to portray the life-style and traditions of an essentially alien people. Along with the indigenous populace and the Bengalis another group of people were there, the tea plantation labourers from Chota Nagpur and Central Provinces. They played their part in the hills by organizing anti colonial/ planter agitations e.g the Oraon agitation of 1915. This was not a mere labourers’ agitation and the Oraons talked of driving the British away and establishing their own Raj. In this area, the Bengalis were outsiders, present mostly as government servants and tourists. The spirit of these local histories was essentially different from those concerned with other sections of the province. So here we would try to see how a Bengali bhadralok looked at a locality, which was not his own. The most prominent volume about this region is Harimohan

Sanyal’s *Darjeelinger Itihas*. This is divided into six chapters out of which only the last one provides a historical description. However, for us, the fifth chapter concerned with assessment of various indigenous races such as Mech, Dhimal, Nepali and Lepchas is of real interest. Regarding the social practices of Bhutias, Sanyal remarked, ‘they worship abominable goddesses and goblins. Women are at liberty to partake multiple husbands and so chastity is rare.’ Sanyal also narrated the curious reason for the persistence of polyandry in the Bhutia / Tibetan society. Each household of that tract had to pay one-fourth of its earnings to the local government as tax, so often a single female was married off to all the male adults of a family, so that the household was not separated and the tax-burden did not increase.

Another work of importance was Nalinikanta Majumdar’s *Darjeelinger Parbatya jati*. Like Sanyal, he too made rather unfavourable comments about the habits of the Nepalis, ‘both males and females keep the same dress on their bodies for days together without taking a bath. So stench comes out of their bodies and caterpillars infest their clothes.’ However, Majumdar made strenuous attempts to connect the mountain-dwellers with the mainstream Hindu-Bengali tradition. He said: ‘It can be shown from history that in hoary past Hindus lived in Nepal. During the Islamic invasions many Hindu Rajputs fled into the mountains and thick jungles of Nepal.’ Some of the practices of the Nepalis did earn praise from the author: ‘Unlike members of other demographic groups, they do not consider physical labour degrading …..Many pass adverse comments on the moral character of the hill tribes. But if we observe sympathetically we would see that in the humble hutments of poor villagers, women play the roles of affectionate mothers, faithful wives and caring daughters.’ About the historical view of the Nepalese the author wrote, ‘In the Nepali chronicle *Nepalko Vamsavali* it is said that the Kirat chief Jitedasthi, was killed in the Kurukshetra battle, fighting for the Pandavas. It was in his reign that Sakyasimha or Buddha visited Nepal.’

472 Harimohan Sanyal, *Darjeelinger Itihas* (Dey’s Publishing, Kolkata, originally Mathuranath Press, Kumar Khali, 1880 ), p. 74
473 Nalinikanta Majumdar *Darjeelinger Parbatya jati* (Kolkata, 1926).
474 ‘Darjeelinger Itihas’ op.cit, p. 109
475 Ibid p. 108
476 Ibid p. 110
Punyalata Chakravarty, the daughter of Upendrakishore Ray Chaudhuri, made an important observation in her autobiography: ‘As the train halted at Ghum station, the “old woman of Ghum” appeared with her toothless smile……. We don’t know why the Europeans called her the “Witch of Ghum”. Her innocent appearance is pleasing, and people willingly give her alms.’

The above quotations amply bring out the various strands of thought of the bhadraloks about the mountain dwellers. The Bengalis were active in those areas largely as agents of British colonialism. So, some of the statements like that of Sanyal and Majumdar about the Nepali habits smack of typical colonial mentality. The Nepalis and the allied peoples were viewed as essentially inferior races, in dire need of civilized masters. In Bengali popular literature and films, the Nepalis were almost invariably portrayed as door keepers or menials. But the comment of Majumdar about the Nepali women and that of Punyalata Chakravarty reveal a more sympathetic side of Bengali character. Here the authors became representatives of a colonized group, like the Nepalis themselves. So they tried to break the imperialist stereotype about the latter and paint a realistic, positive picture of their society.

The Bengali historiography of North Bengal was inspired by the ‘Himalayan Studies’ initiated by the British from the 1820s. The English colonizers were fearful of the epidemics and the hot climate of the plains. So they wanted to create a safe haven for their administrators and soldiers in cool hill stations. So from 1830s till at least 1850s the entire Himalayan range, in all its aspects, became subject to intense scientific scrutiny. Works of naturalists like Joseph Dalton Hooker and Brian Houghton Hodgson were products of such investigations. From then only hilly phenomena such as Mt. Everest and Yeti became household names in Bengal.

Koch Bihar: The Princely State of Koch Bihar has a historiography of its own. The initial history writing efforts were made, as usual by the British administrators. In 1820 Buchanan Hamilton’s An Account of Assam was published in The

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477 Ibid p. 120
478 Ibid, introduction
479 For details, Seshadriprasad Bose ed., Regional Histories & their Possibilities (Ashadeep, Kolkata, 2011), Introduction.
Oriental Literature and in 1849 Major Francis Jenkins, in charge of North Eastern Frontier, composed a report on the tribes of Koch Bihar. Such publications as E.A Gait’s Koch Kings of Kamrup increased after the 1857 Mutiny. The Koch rajas patronized the composition of their history and a large number of Bengali histories about the tract were produced. They include Gosani Mangal Kavya, a tribute to patron-Goddess Chandi, by Radhakrishna Das Bairagi480 and Jainath Munshi’s Rajupakhyan,481 both composed during the reign of Harendra Narayan. Vrindeswari Devi, the queen of Raja Shibendra Narayan wrote a description of the life and times of her husband in 1859 called Beharadonta.482 This contains a vivid description of the Koch society, especially under the reforming British, and of the 1854 famine. She lamented that none except the Diwan cared for the privations of the commoners. In the same reign, in 1847, Ripunjoy Dam wrote Maharajangbali.483 From the 1880s serious cultivation of history took off in this state. In 1882 and 1883 Bhagabaticharan Bannerjee and Jadav Chandra Chakravarti respectively wrote two general histories of the Kingdom.484 In 1886 Manimohan Rakshit wrote Gosanimarir Bibaran.485 Gosanimari was a place 14 miles south-east of Koch Bihar town, named after Goddess Gosani. There the ruins of medieval principality of Kamtapur could be seen. A work about a similar theme was Nabagosani Mangal by Jagatmohan Das Naskar written in 1894.486 This tells us the story of the founding of the Kamtapur kingdom by Kantesvar who got boon from Goddess Gosani. Out of the ruins of Kamtapur rose the modern state of Koch Bihar. Koch Bihar Rajchitra by Ghanashyam Dalai, written in 1915, is an illustrated work containing poetic descriptions of Koch rulers.487 Koch Bihar er Patra Bibaran by K.M. Brahma (1917) contains a short account of the state and a map.488 Koch Bihar Rajvamser Aitihasik Bibaran by Chakradhar Qazi (1919) contains a history of the Chapghar family and pre-historic accounts of the Koch

480 Radhakrishna Das Bairagi Gosani Mangal Kavya (Author,Koch Bihar, 1823)
481 Jainath Munshi Rajupakhyan (Cooch behar state,Koch Bihar, date unknown)
482 Vrindeswari Devi Beharadonta (Cooch behar state, Koch Bihar,1859)
483 Ripunjoy Dam Maharajangbali (Author, Koch Bihar 1847)
484 Bhagabaticharan Bannerjee, Koch Bihar er Itihas (Cooch Behar State Press, Koch Bihar, 1883)
485 Manimohan Rakshit Gosanimarir Bibaran (Author, Calcutta, 1886)
486 Jagatmohan Das Naskar Nabagosani Mangal (Author, Bhatmari 1894)
487 Ghanashyam Dalai Koch Bihar Rajchitra (Author, Calcutta, 1915)
488 K.M. Brahma Koch Bihar er Patra Bibaran (Author, Koch Bihar 1917)
royal family.\footnote{Chakradhar Qazi Koch Bihar Rajvamser Atithasik Bibaran (Author, Koch Bihar 1919)} Koch Bihar er Sampkhipta Bibaran by Nibaranchandra Bhattacharya (1922) is a short account of the state.\footnote{Nibaranchandra Bhattacharya Koch Bihar er Sampkhipta Bibaran (Author, Koch Bihar 1922)}

The most notable effort on the Koch Bihar was History of Cooch Bihar by Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah Ahmed. This is a detailed narrative history of the state, right from the days of Pragjyotishpur. At the beginning the origin and antiquity of the name Koch Bihar has been determined. Then interesting anecdotes, some of them rather improbable, are mentioned about the activities of Muslim \textit{pirs} and \textit{faqirs} and Guru Nanak. It is remarkable to note that Sikh tradition in Punjab had preserved a legend about Guru Nanak’s visit to Koch Bihar.\footnote{Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah Ahmed, History of Cooch Bihar (Cooch Behar state, State press, Koch Bihar 1936), p.137} The bulk of the book is concerned with the achievements of the local ruling house. Interactions with Mughal and British administration are described in detail. A reliable geneology of the ruling family is also provided. Most of the histories of Koch Bihar, produced under royal patronage suffered from some basic shortcomings. Their authors traced the royal lineage from lord Shiva. This stress on ‘Divine Origin of Kingship’ naturally defied fundamental canons of history and logic. From the time of Raja Harendranarayan \textit{Shakta} philosophy took a firm grip over Koch society and Vaishanavism went into oblivion. So the Koch historians such as Jairam Munshi, Ripunjoy Dam and Rani Vrindeswari Devi remained silent regarding the signal contributions of the Vaishnava Sankaradeva. The anti-Mughal measures of Raja Prannarayan also received no mention from them. The struggle of Khangendranarayan, who tried to drive out the British with the help of rebel Sannayasis and Momarias, remained similarly neglected. Possibly to keep the British in good humour, the Koch writers deliberately downplayed the role of these patriots.\footnote{For more details, Partha Sen, ‘Unabingsha sataker madhyabhage Anchalik Itihas Charcha: Kamta-Koch Bihar’ in Regional Histories & their Possibilities (Ashadeep,Kolkata,2011), pp.250-51.}

However, the total number of books produced on North Bengal is rather insignificant in the period under consideration. This observation holds true even in the current scenario. Some reasons can be advanced for this scarcity in North Bengali historical production. These include lack of administrative records, ignorance of local
languages like Tibetan, low level of literacy amongst the populace which prevented the growth of a literary-historical tradition, and absence of patronage except that of the Koch Bihar princes. Partition of 1947 added to the woes. Large parts of Varendri, including its cultural heartland Rajshahi, realm fell within East Pakistan. Thus the Bengali bhadraloks of Maldah and Jalpaiguri lost access to their fountain of cultural inspiration. One can easily appreciate the loss suffered owing to non-inclusion of an institution like *Varendra Anusandhan Samiti* in post 1947 West Bengal. Still, it must be remembered that scholars such as Charuchandra Sanyal, Ranajit Dasgupta and Bishwanath Das have produced praiseworthy efforts even under such circumstances. Charuchandra Sanyal has made pioneering observations on the Rajbanshi community. Bishwanath Das has studied the local history writing tradition of Koch Bihar and Ranjit Dasgupta has written a formal history of Jalpaiguri, using professional techniques, *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal, Jalpaiguri 1869-1947*.493

4.5 ARCHAEOLOGY & LOCAL HISTORY: As in eastern Bengal, in Western Bengal too, the effort to collect and preserve local archaeological remains is clearly visible. Here, we would focus mainly on museums in countryside rather than in Kolkata. In Tamluk or ancient Tampralippta, Umacharan Adhikari excelled in the arts of both writing history and collecting archaeological evidences. He wrote, *Tomoluker Prachin o Adhunik Bibaran* and at the same time wandered extensively on the banks of Rupnarayan in search of long forgotten statues, coins and seals. He was ably succeeded by Gourdas Basak, a government official, who along with his orderly, discovered the famous statue of the *Panchachura Yakshini* (nymph) near Rupnarayan in 1883. It was a striking example of Buddhist art of Mauryan times. Basak made his finding public in 1889, when he wrote about the statue in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*.494 In Murshidabad, Nawab Ferazun Jah (reigned 1838-81) converted parts of his famous *Hazarduari* palace (Palace with a thousand doors) virtually into a museum by displaying his ancestral properties and personal possessions there.495 They include rare specimens like weapons used by Siraj-ud-Daula and Alivardi. Also copies of the 1765 firman of Shah Alam and original letters

493 Ranjit Dasgupta *Economy, Society and Politics in Bengal, Jalpaiguri 1869-1947* (OUP, New Delhi, 1992)
by English Governor-Generals are there. His example was followed by residents of Murshidabad like Rai Bahadur Surendranarayan Sinha. He collected a large number of statues and sculptures, mainly of the Pala-Sena period. Based on his collections the state government later started the Murshidabad District Museum.

The European missionaries of Srirampur should also be given due credit for encouraging organisation of museums among Bengalis. Carey and his Christian colleagues, in order to spread education on missionary lines, collected a large number of old manuscripts, statues, coins, mineral, coral and rock specimens. These formed the basis of the museum founded in 1822 at Srirampur College. The missionaries even established a primitive laboratory and the first printing press in India. Along with the printing press, workshops for producing paper, metal blocks and ink were also founded. These novel steps certainly impressed the Bengalis and opened up new vistas before them. The French in Chandannagar also took such steps and in 1951, the French Administrative Centre was converted into a Museum. Harihar Seth, the central figure of Indian nationalism there, devoted his entire collection of rare specimens to this museum. Thus the Chandannagar museum has a unique Indo-French blend. The Bengali organisation, centred in West Bengal, which took up the cause of preservation of historical objects most sincerely, was the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat. The museum section took off after this organisation had its own building in 1908. The museum possesses a number of archaeological rarities and literary memorabilia. Rakhaldas Banerjee, the famous archaeologist, played a noted role in collecting coins, statutes, sculptures and keeping them systematically there. The museum venture had the backing of reputed zamindars like Manindrachandra Nandi and Jogindranarayan Ray.

However, the activities of the Parishat were not confined to Kolkata and it patronised similar efforts in the districts. One such example is ‘Jogeshchandra Purakriti Bhavan’ of Bishnupur in Bankura. Bishnupur is extremely rich in archaeological treasures. Jogeshchandra Ray Vidyanidhi understood the importance of establishing an institute to preserve the cultural heritage of the area. He was ably seconded by Maniklal Sinha who was a teacher and the Secretary of the Bishnupur branch of the Sahitya

496 Ibid., p. 209.
497 Ibid., p. 257.
498 Ibid, p. 129.
Parishad. Together they collected many little known materials which formed the basis of this Museum. It was formally inaugurated in 1951. Sinha and his students continued their good work after that and collected around five thousand old manuscripts, undergoing many privations. They form a special feature of the institute collection. A similar effort was visible in Medinipur, where a branch of the Parishat was established in 1915. In 1920, led by Naliniranjan Pandit, attempts were made to have a separate building for the Parishad and create a museum there. Availability of funds and land were problems, but fortunately some noted residents of the area came forward and finally the museum got successfully started. Here mention should be made of Mahendranath Karan, who is known for his histories of Hijli and Khejuri. Along with writing history, he did his best to found a museum at Kandi (Contai) especially in 1923. But sadly, the inhabitants of the tract failed to appreciate its historical significance and the venture did not fare well.

Some individuals were inspired by nationalism to preserve the rural heritage of Bengal. One such person was the famous Gurusadai Dutta, I.C.S. who started the ‘Bratachari’ movement to build the character of the Bengali youth. An ardent patriot he felt the need for preserving the local and rural cultural specimens of Bengal. With this view, he established a Bratachari village in North 24-Paraganas and a Bratachari museum there in 1940. He collected innumerable examples of Bengali folk art such as Patchitra, Chalchitra and Nakshi Kantha. His venture was praised by none other than Abanindranath Tagore. Some lesser known, but equally devoted nationalists were Kantha Sen and Haripada Dawn of Purulia. Their efforts led to the foundation of Haripada Sahitya Mandir the first library-cum-museum of Purulia. Then Purulia was not a part of Bengal, but of Bihar. So the Bengalis there had to wage a dual struggle to secure Indian freedom and preserve their own cultural identity. Guided by this spirit, these nationalists founded a centre where the historical heritage of the area would be preserved. So, the Haripada Sahitya Mandir was started at a very small scale in 1926. Later their torch was born by persons like Anil chaudhuri and Mrs Rekha Mullick and the Museum assumed a much larger shape. Purulia became a part of West Bengal in 1956 and the Museum was

500 Ibid, p. 89.
patronised by the Central Government from 1960. Thus we see that before independence, men and women from various walks of life, Nawabs, government officials, historians, teachers and local antiquarians felt interested in preserving the local heritage of Bengal.

4.6 STYLE & APPROACH: Now we may consider the issue of the chronological scheme adopted by the major local historians of the western half. Unlike, some of the pedants of Eastern Bengal, the above mentioned scholars adopted the mainstream Hindu /Muslim / British time-pattern, instead of being innovative. The tendency to use peculiar local events as timemarkers is absent in their efforts. Nikhilnath Ray in his Murshidabader Itihas divided his narrative into Hindu & Buddhist era, Pathan rule, Mughal rule and then the Nawabi age. He made one important observation about the difficulty in maintaining regular chronology while writing Indian history: ‘In this country political events took place out of the blue, so it is difficult to establish a sequence of events in a historical work.’503 Kumudnath Mullick’s Nadia Kahini has a pithy narrative section, Nadiar Rajnaitik Bibaran, comprising of 74 pages. This is parcelled simply into Hindu, Muslim and British periods. The second phase starts from the fall of Nabadwip in the hands of Ikhtiyaruddin Khalji, and the third from the grant of Diwani in 1765. Sudhir Kumar Mitra’s Hughly Jelar Itihas follows a rather different time scheme. Here virtually no political narrative is there. In separate chapters, various aspects of life of Hughly are dealt with. So incidents from early, medieval and modern era are dealt with in the same section according to the exigencies e.g. in the fourth chapter, the revenue measures of Murshid Quli and the British are analysed, but in the very next segment the narrative moves back to the Sena times. However, the Occidental tripartite scheme sometimes resurfaces in topics like Hindu Rajatye Desher Abasta. But here also, the situation of the Hindus in ancient days is connected with contemporary reform movements like abolition of Sati.

4.7 CONCLUDING NOTE: So, in this chapter we have tried to assess the nano historical tradition of Western Bengal. We have noticed a number of interesting features in the local history volumes of Western Bengal. We have tried to trace the different courses along which the historiography of various districts moved and we have attempted

to uncover the reasons behind such movements. We have seen that authors like Ambikacharan Gupta and Bidhubhushan Bhattacharya were mentally not restricted by the district boundaries drawn by the British. They were aware of the supra-local connections between the districts within Rarh. Authors such as Basanta kumar Basu, and Sudhir Mitra tried to place the histories of their localities in the broader perspective of regional and national narratives. Antiquarians like Kumudnath Mullick and Nikhilnath Ray highlighted peculiar features of their areas such as dominance of Sanskrit pedants in Nadia and Nawabi influence in Murshidabad. In northern hilly tracts like Darjeeling the case was different. Here the Bengalis were trying to portray another group of people. Normally they looked down upon the hilly people such as Nepalis and Lepchas. But often the Bengalis felt that both they and the hill men belonged to the colonized group dominated by the British. This dual sense of identity is present in the works of Harimohon Sanyal and Punyalata Chakravarti. We have also noted the efforts of local antiquarians to gather archaeological artifacts of the place and found small-scale museums. Actually writing local history and gathering archaeological materials were part of the same project of discovering the local heritage of various sub regions of Bengal. In the next chapter we would analyze the ideological issues embedded in the books of nano-history and would bring out their shortcomings.