

## INTRODUCTION

The scientific documentation of history resulting from its emergence as an independent discipline started evolving during the fifteenth-sixteenth century Europe.<sup>1</sup> In fact, in the fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe, as a byproduct of the European renaissance, humanism got evolved. This humanism was the vital foundation of all cultural changes, including the historical ideas pertaining to the renaissance in Europe. The historians got powerfully influenced by the Secular humanism particularly. In reality, there was an absence of the complete historical sense earlier. The beginning of the humanist movement with Petrarch and Boccaccio helped in germination of a sense of history.<sup>2</sup> Petrarch's *Letters to the Ancient Dead*, cultivated awareness among the writers of his time. The same attitude provoked them to approach the ancient art. This sense of distance exotically paralleled with development of a wisdom of perspective in the common interest in archaeology. There was an inclination to retreat back into the past, to restructure those types of thought and expression which had been the most characteristic of it.<sup>3</sup> History was no longer a descriptive attachment to theology; slowly but surely history emerged as a discipline in its own right; The theological interpretation of history and the mystical ingredient in history were swapped by a new secular interpretation.<sup>4</sup>

But the historical research in India was not started in a systematic manner prior to the institution of British rule. Sir William Jones and his Asiatic Society may be regarded as the pioneers in the discovery of India's past. Even, though Jones was not the earliest among the Orientalists. Investigation, pertaining to the knowledge of history and heritage of Bengal in some degree had begun with the very establishment of British rule in Bengal. In fact, the British East India Company employed a number of Supervisors who had been assigned to amass roughly, the indigenous customs, traditions, Socio-economic condition and history of

different quarters of Bengal, along with their ordinary duty to inspect the performances of the employee of the department of revenue. Still, Jones seems to be the primary one to think in terms of foregrounding an enduring institution, for Oriental studies and researches at a grand scale in this country. In 1784, he founded the Asiatic Society “for enquiry into the history and antiquities, arts, science and literatures of Asia” (*Journal of the Asiatic society of Bengal*, 1832). Actually, Jones and other thirty founder members wanted to grow it as a centre for Asian studies together with nearly the whole thing in relation to man and nature inside the geographical confines of the continent.<sup>5</sup> This Asiatic Society, undeniably, had inspired in establishing a few other research societies and institutions, government and non-government, in various parts of India. However, it took more than hundred years to originate such institutions.

In fact till the middle of nineteenth century historical research based on the study of original documents was hardly known and consequently the history of Bengal, in particular the ancient history of Bengalees, has not been composed. Moreover at that time the Bengalees were quite unaware of utilizing archaeology as the major ingredient<sup>6</sup> of writing the ancient history. Although a few disjunctive surveys were conducted by the Britishers<sup>7</sup> but those hardly contributed to the composition of the ancient history of Bengal. They were also indifferent towards Northern Bengal which has been central to ancient history of Bengal. And consequently there was no major explorations made at this region. This however does not imply that there was no existence of any significant Bengalee archaeologist at the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the nineteenth century. As evidence one can name Rajendralal Mitra. Yet his two significant essays were focused on Orissa and Bihar. Rajendralal Mitra, who had initially been the librarian, and later on secretary, assistant president and finally the first Indian president of the Asiatic society, published articles on inscription and subsequently researched the antiquities of Orissa and the ruin of Bodhgaya under governmental patronage. Due to all these, thinkers

like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, even during the eighties of the nineteenth century had to lament and crave for the history of Bengal vis-à-vis the Bengalees.<sup>8</sup>

However, the situation was changing gradually. As a result the controversy emerged out regarding what would be the proper scientific way of writing history. This debate continued not only in Bengal but rather it was a pan Indian controversy. Another important matter that seemed to have bothered the contemporaries was that Indian history ought to be written by its own natives and at the same time it has to be unbiased.<sup>9</sup> The scholars were the major participants in this debatable issue were mainly Akshaya Kumar Maitra from Bengal, Nilkantha Sastri from Madras, Ghyanshyam Ojha from Rajasthan and many others. Akshaya Kumar Maitra created carved a niche for him as the pioneer of writing the history of Bengal in scientific style. It is to be noted that the British scholars of Bengal, from their biased and motivated outlook had painted a bleak image of Sirajudaulah and Mirkashim and strangely enough, none felt doubtful and accepted it as a genuine history. But Maitra challenged the accuracy of it and formulated his own view with the formidable array of facts culled from old and authentic documents. Not only he had rejected the notions fueled by the British writers but Akshaya Kumar had also refuted Bankim Chandra's standpoint regarding Mirkashim and wrote a correct history.

Hence in such state of affairs a number of research societies step by step got emerging in Bengal as well as India from the last decade of Nineteenth century. Lord Curzon's initiatives regarding the Preservation of Ancient Monuments Act certainly resulted in the founding of at least 30 archaeological museums(government sponsored) in India, including those at Sarnath(1904), Agra(1906), Ajmer(1908), Delhi Fort(1909), Bijapur(1912), Nalanda(1917) and Sanchi(1919).<sup>10</sup> Accordingly,the Bengal Academy of Literature( though it was a literary society, it had interest on history and heritage) came into being in 1893, which was changed to Bangiya Sahitya Parishad on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1894.<sup>11</sup> Calcutta Historical Society,

an organization of the British officials was formed in 1907 to congregate a goodly pile of information and afford the stuff in favour of a full and enduring history of old Calcutta.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the Varendra Research Society was founded in 1910, Punjab Historical Society in 1910<sup>13</sup>, Kamrupa Anusandhana Samiti in 1912<sup>14</sup>, Bihar and Orissa Research Society in 1915<sup>15</sup>, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in July 1915<sup>16</sup>, the K. R. Cama Oriental Institute(although the proposal was come in 1909) in 1916<sup>17</sup>, the Andhra Historical Research Society about the middle of 1921<sup>18</sup> and the Bombay Historical Society in April 1925<sup>19</sup>. And they were pursued by a number of other similar institutions. The aims and objectives of all these societies and institutions were directed more or less, to explore and record the aspects of regional and local history and culture. But the sticking point of the present investigator is definitely the Varendra Research Society (Varendra Anushandhan Samiti) which was established (1910) in Rajshahi, now in Bangladesh, primarily with the objective of the rediscovery of early history and culture of Bengal.

The foundation of Varendra Research Society can be taken as a breakthrough for the goals it intended to achieve from the beginning to investigate and record history, heritage and culture of early history of Bengal. It appears that at least three illustrious sons of Bengal took the leading role for the foundation of this research institution. They were Sarat Kumar of Dayarampur (Dighapatiya Raj family), Akshaya Kumar Maitra, a prominent lawyer of Rajshahi and Ramaprasad Chanda, a local school teacher.

With the objective of the rediscovery of early history of Bengal the Varendra Research Society since its inception down to its extinction in 1963 took up a number of projects or missions and as a result of the implementation of those missions it developed into one of the most renowned research institutions of eastern India.

Keeping in mind the above fact the present dissertation titled *Varendra Research Society: Its Vision and Mission* attempts to present a comprehensive history of the Society from the very time of its onset. Among the major aspects that the dissertation is to scan and highlight are the idea and genesis of the Varendra Research Society, its management, growth with prospects, its problems and relation with similar contemporary institutions. One of the important design of the work is to record its achievements for the reconstruction of the early history of Bengal.

## Notes & References

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