

Chapter- VI

Varendra Research Society and the construction of Bengal's Past

The contribution of Varendra Research Society in the reconstruction of early history of Bengal can only be evaluated by taking into account the nature of historical activities which had prevailed before the establishment of this institution.

It may be asserted that though the scientific documentation of history resulting from its emergence as an independent discipline, although started evolving during the fifteenth-sixteenth century Europe, yet it took more than a few centuries for the Indian sub- continent to reach at the same stage. To be fair enough, the condition of Indian history was dismal enough before the onset of the British Colonial rule, which intern gave birth to the Asiatic Society. Bengal's history was hardly an exception. Moreover, even after the commencement of the Asiatic Society, the history of Bengal, particularly the ancient history of Bengal witnessed no major improvements. Hence after the formation of Fort William College in 1800, when a catalogue was prepared for the sake of familiarizing the British officials with the culture and civilization of India, then books like *Rajabali (1808)*, a work by Mrityunjoy Tarkalankar based on *Kulasastra* or *Pratapaditya Charita (1801)* by Ramram Basu or *Raja Krsnachandra Rahasya Charita (1805)* by Rajiblochan Mukhopadhaya had to be included as the references. William Kerry himself had written a book *Itihashamala (A Garland of History* was the sub title of this book in English) in that line. Despite the endeavour undertaken by some scholars to project this writers, Mrityunjoy Tarkalankar and Ramram Basu as the precursors who developed a new paradigm of hybridity of the view by amalgamating the old approach with the new in the task of history-writing. Yet the fact cannot be overlooked that whatever new experiments Mrityunjoy Tarkalankar or Ramram Basu or Rajiblochan

Mukhopadhaya did, but their works which were loaded with stories and fables can never be leveled as a historical account. This will get thoroughly clarified if we go through the content of one of these works. Let us take, for the sake of illustration, the book written by Mrityunjay Vidyalankar. The subject matter of the work is the biographical sketches of the kings that started with Yudhisthir ¹ and ended with Tipu Sultan. Despite been aware of Raziuddin Aquil and Partha Chatterjee's recently published *History in the Vernacular*² (2008) or Romila Thapar's (ed.) *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*³ (2000) yet without any doubt it can be affirmed that *Rajabali* is not a historical text, rather a work full of illusionary fables. *Pratapaditya Charita* or other contemporary works fall within this same category. Actually the historical study of any part of ancient India cannot realize its full potential on the basis of literary sources alone. Explaining the reason behind this the famous Indian archaeologist Dilip Kumar Chakrabarty has written:

“The sources which have been used beginning with the Rig-Veda, were not meant for historical resources and whatever historical information has been gleaned from them is not free from questions(Kalhan's *Rajtarangini*) regarding their chronology, geological applicability and even context.”⁴ K. A. N. Sastri also rendered his voice of the “utter impossibility of basing any part of the ancient history of India solely, or even primarily upon literary evidences.”⁵

The task of inculcating the ancient history of Bengal was much difficult one. Moreover the sequential explorations that was required to collect the resources for writing the ancient history of Bengal and also by comparing it with the other evidences related to Bengal's history, that were scattered all over India, was quite impossible a task for a single individual. As a solution, Varendra Research Society was set up as an institution that would symbolize collective endeavor. With the painstaking efforts of its members the Varendra Research Society was successful to carry out works of explorations adjacent to North Bengal

and some other parts of Bengal, as well as few places of northern India. It also carried out works of excavations in some ancient sites of Bengal. Consequently, it has been able to assimilate huge collection of splendid and unique relics of the past civilization of Bengal, that consisting of stone and copper plate inscriptions, sculptures, numismatic evidences, ancient documents and other antiquities of a miscellaneous nature. The relics represent successive phases of the bygone culture of the country extending from the pre Aryan times to the Mughal period. The library of the Varendra Research Society/ Varendra Research Museum has been able to secure 11075 volumes by October, 1964. These invaluable archaeological cum literary sources were indispensably required for any serious investigation, particularly the ones that were related to the political and cultural history of ancient Bengal. Henceforth, it can be affirmed that the creation of a repository of the ingredients prerequisite for scribbling down the history of Bengal, particularly that of the ancient times, is one of the major contributions made by Varendra Research Society.

Varendra Research Society, however, was not satiated in creating only a depository for the components of writing the history of Bengal. Within two years by its publication of *Gaudarajamala* it has provided the required blow needed to change the conventional notion of history in Bengal. Its very release created profound commotion among the historical circuits. For, the society became beacon bearer who showed the path of writing the ancient history of Bengal on the basis of stone and copper inscriptions. It is to be noted that *Gaudarajaramala* has been considered as the path breaking work concerning the ancient history of Bengal, to have been ever written in scientific procedure.

Quite naturally one might develop inquisitive about the reasons that made *Gaudarajamala* one of the most prestigious deeds. As a response to such queries one might visit the introductory preface to *Gaudarajamala* where Askshay Kumar Maitra had

extensively discussed the methodology followed in writing the book. Commenting on the context in relation to which *Gaudarajamala* must be read, Askshay Kumar Maitra has stated:

“before the advent of the Muslim rule, Gouda region was under the reign of the rulers who represented the Sena dynasty. Prior to that the Palas dominated over this region. This fact is prevalent even among the most ahistoric among the Bengalees. This facts have got intertwined with many imaginary incidents interpolated by the folk; the fiction writers have exaggerated much by their story telling capabilities. However reality needs to be extracted from the various controversies pertaining to various issues like, under which circumstances and from which exact time the Pala kings gained their power; what conditions and time frame resulted in their surrender before the rulers of the Sena dynasty and how eventually the Senas too lost their domain ; the sort of relationship they maintained with their subjects and so on. All these issues of the history of Bengal that every Bengalee should have been aware of, failed to gained popularity due to the absence of a proper discursive method.”⁶ *Gaudarajamala* deserves the credit of bridging this gap by highlighting the scientific style of narrating the sequential history of ancient Bengal. This text has carefully omitted the classical legends like Yudhisthir on the one hand and characters like Adisur, whose presents cannot be derived from any historical source but from mere folk etymology.

Guadarajamala is not only a historical treatise of the Pala and Sena period. For it illustrates chronologically the ups and downs in the Gouda Empire(The Pala and Sena period).

Ramaprasad’s *Gaudarajamala*, never the less is not beyond any criticism. Although meager, yet the shortcomings cannot be fully overlooked.

In fact, ages have lapsed after the publication of *Gaudarajamala* resulting in the discovery of various inscriptions that revealed before us many new incidents as well as informations regarding unknown kings and their dynasties which in effect acted in the alterations of some of the old notions, through fresh investigations. D. C. Sircar in his introduction¹¹ to the 1975 edition of *Gaudarajamala* (published by Nababharat Publishers), pointed out a few of such alterations.

In spite of that, the review¹² of *Gaudarajamala* given by no other than Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, is worth mentioning here:

“ . . . a few books that were available before this, regarding the history of Bengal were mere compilations of legendaries and ancient myths like that of Rajabali . *Gaudarajamala* is the first history book of Bengal written by following the modern scientific methodology. Much new information regarding the ancient history of Bengal got illuminated by this book and many old notions got turned as null and void.”

Thus it can be said that there was no conscious distortion of history in *Gaudarajamala*, written on the basis of the information available till 1912. The foundation of ancient history of Bengal laid by *Gaudarajamala* did not require any reconstruction for it was crafted by very strong artifact like Ramaprasad Chanda. What followed next was only the replacement of the old colour with the newly gathered information and making new rooms for the new entries like Chandra dynasty, Varma dynasty and so on.

In the reconstruction of the history of Bengal, another revolutionary contribution of Varendra Research Society was the writing and publication of a book regarding the origin of Bengalees, entitled *Indo-Aryan Races*. “There is hardly any Aryan blood among the Indian and among the Bengalees it is almost nil” – the opinion conveyed in a report during the

month of May, 1901 by Herbart Risley had stimulated Ramaprasad to go through various books for quite a long period in order to refute the notion through correct information. Since this issue is related to anthropology, he had efficiently adopted the anthropological research methodologies. With a borrowed instrument he personally travelled from Kashmir to Chhotanagpur collecting data regarding the proportion of the length and width of the head, hair colour and the disparity between the structural formations of the different parts of the body, among various communities. As a result of this experimentations and long term study, he wrote *Indo-Aryan Races* in order to reject Risley's view.

It is worth mentioning that Risley used to think that who so ever used Aryan languages were all people with elongated skull and people of Aryan languages without it, were for him of a hybrid origin resulting from the amalgamation of Non Aryan – Mongoloid races. Noticing the Brachycephalic symptom Risley in 1901 census report had mentioned that Bengalees originated from the mixing of the Mongolians and Dravidians. Not onle risley but even Bengalee archaeologist like Haraprasad Sastri imitating the former had written:

“ the contemporary anthropologists have pointed out that the origin of the Bengalees resulted in the mixing of the Dravidians with the Mongolians. Aryans have come to this place for a short while. It is felt that the Aryans could extent little influence over Bengal surrounded by sea-coast. . . . if the final rites of the Hindus need to be done by an authentic Brahmin, then the Brahmins of Brahmabarta are the most suitable ones; the Brahmins of Bengal are not at all suitable. While analizing the reason, it could be found that the other races apart from Aryans were in majority in Bengal.”¹³ It is interesting to note that following Risley, although Sastri had portrayed Bengalees as Dravida-Mongolian hybrid , yet he did not include the Brahmins. Explaining the reasons, he had stated,

“Around 732 A.D. when Yashavarma was the ruler of Kanouj with Vaidic Churamani Bhababhuti as his court poet, at that time most of the rulers of Bengal used to approach him for sending Brahmins for the performance of Vaidic Yajnas (sacrifices). During those days five Brahmins arrived at Bengal along with introducing the Brahmin cult in this region. Even before this, it has been hard that many Brahmins used to come from outside to this place.”¹⁴

Ramaprasad Chanda by his extensive research on Indo-Aryan Races had been able to prove that the broad cranium is not a feature limited only among the Mongoloids or the broad cranium is not the only characteristics of the Mongoloids. Therefore, according to Ramaprasad, it was futile to declare Bengalees as the amalgamation of the Dravida-Mongoloids on the basis of broad cranium alone because the Armenians of Western Asia and the Slav and Celt of Europe also possessed broad skull although they all used Aryan language. Ramaprasad also informed that the unique features of the Mongoloids were, the declining nose-end, the bulging larynx, thinner eye-brows with curved eyes and none of these features were visible among the Bengalees. In another words the Bengali language and the outlook with sharp nose and faces full of mustache and beard was pole apart from that of the Mongolians. Hence he had come to the conclusion that the people related to the predecessors of Santal and Oraon were the probable aborigins of Bengal and these aboriginals having mixed with the alien Aryans with broad skulls or medium skulls had resulted in the origination of the Bengalees. However he had kept Koch-Rajbashi-Poliya groups of North Bengal outside this category for he had perceived more of Mongolian features in them.

The three volumes of the collection of inscriptions published by Varendra Research Society has been regarded as the major source book of the history of Bengal. We know that Gauda vis-à-vis Bengal possess no written history. Not only Bengal but the entire India suffers from the same situation. The country without any written history has to depend

mainly upon the inscriptions to recover the past. Hence it is quite palpable that the most requisite task was to assemble descriptions from the inscriptions.

Among the three collections, A.K.Maitra's *Gaudalekhamala* needs to be named first. It is noteworthy that although A.K.Maitra's initial fame was dependent upon his treatment of the characters like Sirajudaulah, MirKashim, drawn from the modern history of Bengal, yet after the commencement of Varendra Research Society, he seems to have shifted towards the study of the original sources of ancient Bengal and his command on the Sanskrit language had assisted him to become one of the most worthy man for the task. The fifteen Pala inscriptions, treasured with historical information which were edited and translated by Maitra in *Gaudalekhamala* where previously misinterpreted or partially translated by archaeological experts like Umeshchandra Batbal, Rajendralal Mitra, Balantain, Wilkins, Colebrook, Kilharn, Nagendra Nath Basu and so on. Since none of the explanations were impeccable enough Maitra in *Gaudalekhamala* had to again translate and interpret all the fifteen inscriptions.

The extent of mistakes committed by the former commentators could be illustrated with a few examples. Let us begin with the first inscription of *Gaudalekhamala*. Explaining this Khalimpur Copper Plate of Dharmapala, Umeshchandra Batabyal had previously depicted it as the copperplate for donating land to a famous Brahmin poet called Bhattanarayan by Dharmapala. The immaturity of such explanation gets revealed while comparing it with Maitra's version. According to Maitra it is the copperplate for donating four villages to the Mahasamanta Narayan Varma by Dharmapal. Thereby it was impossible for Batabyal to recover the information regarding the history of Bengal scattered all through this copperplate and for Akshaya Kumar this copperplate deserved to be treated as one of the ingredients of the history of Bengal since it consisted of the accounts of ascendance of the Pala dynasty. Similarly while explaining the third inscription, that is the Mungyer

copperplate of Devapala discovered in 1780, Charles Wilkins had projected Devapala as the son of Bakpala, Dharmapala's brother and eventually many scholars followed Wilkins in their essays. Maitra rectified the mistakes and translated the entire inscription into Bengali.

Apart from these two, Akshaya Kumar also rectified the previous versions of the thirteen other inscriptions, along with providing new information and also translated them for they were important historical evidences regarding the Pala regime.

One important aspect we have to remember here is that the previous commentators were only engaged in identifying the rulers and the dynasties where as Maitra from these ancient inscriptions had explained about other important issues. Witnessing an extraordinary sense of rhetoric in the composition of these inscriptions Maitra has concluded that "in ancient period the study of Sanskrit was regarded as higher education in this country."¹⁵ Therefore R.C. Majumdar, while commenting on *Gaudalekhamala*, had justly observed,

"The first collection of important inscriptions of Bengal, will always rank high among the sourcebooks of the history of Bengal."¹⁶

Thus we see that even after the laps of hundred years of the publication of *Gaudalekhamala* in 1912 and even though many new inscriptions and information have been found, yet for the scholars of Pala history this book has still remain as an indispensable one.

The efficient editing of *Gaudalekhamala* had established A. K. Maitra as one of the authoritarian researchers of the Pala history which had been able to continue till death. For this reason he was invited from the university of Calcutta in 1915 to deliver a course of lectures on Pala history which resulted in an invaluable course of lectures, entitled the *Fall of the Pala Empire*.¹⁷

The second source book, brought into being by Varendra Research Society, to deal the ancient history of Bengal, was Nanigopal Majumdar's *Inscriptions of Bengal, Volume III*. In its preface Majumdar himself had written that the main object that he had always kept in view was to students, dealing with the history of Bengal, a useful sourcebook, with such bibliographical details as might be necessary for their guidance.

In this work Majumdar had fetched together each and every one known inscriptions (17) of the reigns of the Chandra and Varman kings and their instantaneous successor Senas. It is to be cited that till 1929 these seventeen inscriptions were the solitary reliable bits and pieces to be had for the history of this phases. Therefore, Majumdar had made available a cautious translation of these priceless inscriptions. Besides, he had measured up to the transcriptions of the early examiners in the field by means of the original stones or copper plates and also examined various interpretations supplied by them.¹⁸ preventative measures has been taken by him to bundle off the all legendary data and give a real meaning of detail description of the records.

Importance of this collection to the contemporary scholars would be apparent if we mention here some of the information of the same. Till date there were no more than three (Edilpur copper plate, Kedarpur plate and Rampal copper plate) revealed inscriptions of the Chandra's. Among them, the Edilpur copper plate was published in *Dacca Review* (Oct, 1912) and *Epigraphia Indica*, Volume-XVIII from which one can merely be acquainted with the fact that the inscription was issued from Vikrampur by Srichandra and he was mediated on the feet of the Mharajadhiraja Trailokyachandradeva.¹⁹ The second one, the Kedarpur Copper Plate is an incomplete deed which was first edited by N. K. Bhattashalli from which one can get a fractional genealogy (Purnachandra – Trailokyachandra- Srichandra) of the Chandra's.²⁰ Consequently, the third inscription or the Rampal Copper Plate was the single evidence that might be utilized for the historical purposes i.e. for restoration of the history of

the Chandra's. Therefore, Society's member Radhagobinda Basak at the outset and subsequently Nanigopal Mazumdar as the first inscription in this imperative collection had provided detailed translations and elucidations. Therefore it would not be an overstatement to pronounce that because of the efforts of the Varendra Research Society it became possible to get the historical data like that the Chandra's were original inhabitant of Rohtasgadh (Rohitagiri), Shahabad district of Bihar and set up their rule under the leadership of Trailokyachandra in Eastern Bengal i.e. Harikela by taking the advantage of the declining power of the Palas. Moreover, Nanigopal resolved that the Chandra's were the devotee of Buddhism.

For the reconstruction of the history of the Varman's too, the *Inscription Of Bengal, Volume-III* is undoubtedly, the major source book. No other works, even the first scientific history of ancient Bengal, the *Gaudarajamala* of Ramaprasad Chanda did not offer a satisfactory amount of information concerning the Varmana rule. *Gadurajamala* just furnishes the information regarding the establishment of the Varmana rule in Eastern Bengal on the feet of the Palas and the name of a king, Hari Varman of this line.

Actually till that point of time, merely two inscriptions of the Varmanas have been unearthed and published. First one was Harivarman's copper plate and the next one was Bhatta Bhavadeva's (a minister of Varmana reign) Bhubaneswar Inscription which did not provide much information. Nanigopal, therefore, had deciphered and given explanation of the third inscription of the Varmanas i.e. the Belava copper plate of Bhoja Varman with immense importance. However, it should be mentioned that Nanigopal was not the first scholar to decipher it. The Belava copper plate was first published in *Dacca Review* (July, 1912) and then translated by Radhagobinda Basak in *Shahitya* and thirdly interpreted by Rakhaldas Bondopadyay in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Volume-X). But Nanigopal did not admit those inconsistent and perplexed explanations regarding this

valuable inscription and presented a clear and complete explanation of the same. Nanigopal's interpretation had brought in a comprehensive identity of the Varmanas (Vajravarman - Jatavarman – Samalavarman – Bhojavarman). Among the Varmana rulers, Jatavarman, as Nanigopal interpreted, was the powerful king who extended his supreme power, by casting a shadow on the glory of Prithu, son of Vena, by expanding his dominance over the Angas, by mortifying the dignity of Kamrupa, by bringing into disrepute of the strength of the arms of Divya, by destructing the fate of Govardhana.²¹ Likewise, it became clear from Nanigopal's explanation that Jatavarman, his son Samalavarman and his son Bhojavarman were the contemporaries of Vighrahapala, Kumarpala and Madanapala respectively.

In this Volume so as to the eleven Sena inscriptions were translated and clarified, among them, Madhainagar copper plate of Lkshmanasena, Edilpur copperplate of Kesavasena and Madanapada copper plate and Calcutta Shahitya Parisad copper plate of Visvarupasena are of particular attention for us. For the reason that the explanation of the rest seven inscriptions neither had made any significant alterations of the previous explanations, nor it succeeded to highlight any important changes of the description of the *Gadurajamala*. But the account of the above cited four inscriptions supplies a number of important new information. Among the four, in the account of Lakshmanasena's Madhainagar inscription, Majumdar had confirmed that still after their migration to Bengal, the Senas obtained a clean access of the Deccan blood. The rhyme 9th of the inscription speaks that Vallalsena got married Ramadevi, the daughter of a Chalukya king. For this basis Samantasena was described as Karnatakshatriya but Lkashamasena was entitled Brahmakshatriya. An additional amazing point regarding the accomplishment of Lakshmanasena has been extorted by Majumdar from this inscription. Though the Deopara inscription states that Lakshamasena's grandfather Vijayasena caused Gaudendra to make a quick retreat, but Nanigopal Majumdar affirmed that either Vijayasena was not able to take

possession of the then Gauda territory, or become unsuccessful to keep hold of the control for any span of time. In support of his claim Majumdar referred to the information of this Madhainagar inscription which states that Lakshmanasena, when a Kumara, during the reign of his father dispossessed the Gauda king of his destiny. Not only that, according to the interpretation of Majumdar, Lakshmanasena raided Kalinga, conquered the king of Kashi and suppressed Kamrupa by means of his proficiency. In the same way the Edilpur copperplate disclosed that Lakshmanasena had two sons, Visvarupasena and Kesavasena and subsequent to the death of Lakshmanasena, Kesavasena became the ruler of Gauda. Conversely, the Madanapada Copper Plate states that Maharajadhiraja Visvarupasena mediated on the foot of the illustrious Lakshmanasena. Both the copperplates were issued not from Vikrampura, but from Falgunagrama and both the kings were complimented as 'the day of destruction' to a certain line of Yavanas. Majumdar proclaimed that it indicates a victory of this two kings jointly or separately over a party of Muhammedan raiders lead by Ghori. But there is not anything in prop up of the statement.

The next volume of compilation of inscriptions manufactured by Varendra research Society was *Inscriptions of Bengal, Volume-IV* . But it is not the source book of ancient history of Bengal, it is linked up with the Medieval history of Bengal. This Volume, therefore, cannot claim the same weight with the early Volumes on inscriptions since there is the existence of a number of written documents of Medieval Bengal's history. Nevertheless, it helps out the researcher and historians in the reconstruction of the history of Medieval Bengal as no contemporary scholars (of medieval time) had left behind any consistent record of accounts of facts. In fact the contemporary Muslim historians directed their operation of outline mainly the happenings connected to their respective benefactor monarchs at Delhi and had diminutive tendency to sneak a look into the events of Bengal, far remotely located from the majestic capital; Bengal was mentioned in their writings only at the time when somewhat

unusual took place in the region, fundamentally had an effect on the interest of the central government at Delhi. Additionally, a few irregular occurrences of Bengal were brought together and put in order by scholars like Ghulam Hussain Salim, Salimullah, Munshi Ilahi Bakhsh and so on their respective works like *Riadus-Salatin*, *Tarikhi Bangla* and *Khurshidi-Jahan-Numa*, which were actually fusion of both the fictitious and unconvincing reports based mostly on local traditions and legendary accounts.²² For all these, the *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Volume IV is a dependable anthology to a certain extent to fill up the draw backs and to put up the genuine and allied political history of Muslim Bengal. Moreover Shams-uddin Ahmad, the editor of the collection has dealt with the subject matters in a extremely methodical approach and has attempted to put aside the erroneous readings of the earlier scholars but tossed sufficient light on the historical values of the inscriptions.

Varendra Research Society made the historians of Bengal indebted to it by publishing the *Ramacaritam*, the one of the important literary documents of ancient Bengal, predominantly, the history of the Palas, under the edition of R.C. Majumdar, Radhagobinda Basak and Nanigopal Banerjee. It may be known to all that the *Ramacaritam* furnishes an account of the successful uprising in Northern Bengal which costs the Pala king Mahipala, his life and throne and of the reinstatement of the Pala rule by Rampala, his youngest brother. No other Indian text deals with such significant contemporary historical events with such possessions of details.²³ It is to be mentioned that since the early reading and explanation of M.M. Haraprasad Sastri was erroneous and as there was no translations of commented or uncommented portions, the Society published a fresh and critical edition of the text, with a running commentary and English translation. And because of the endeavor of Varendra Research Society the subject matter written in twisted form of *Ramacaritam* turned out to be totally understandable to all.

The monographs, the lectures and essays contributed by the members of the Society have in the same way been got going a lofty character of research and made input in reconstructing ancient history of Bengal.

The activities of Varendra Research Society or the collected antiquities were centered round not only the kings, kingdoms, warfare ,defeat and triumph or about histories that were chiefly political. Rather they revealed the accounts of the common people, their common belief in religion. And most of the activities of ancient Bengal got triggered off the religious issues. The religious imagination gave birth to the idols, the idols necessitated in the construction of the temples, the temples with their conventional ritual enhanced in the discursive formation of the Sastras, the Sastras with their demand of apprehension and propagation gave rise to the educational institutes like that of Sompuri, Odantapuri, Jagaddal and Vikramshila. And for all this causes the exploration, excavation and gatherings of enormous sculptures and architectural remains by the Varendra Research Society in a large sections of Bengal, principally in Varendra was excessively significant. It can not be taken for granted that Varendra Research Society had discovered a arena of the spiritual convictions. What the Society had done was to make clear the unclear notion which was developed from the study of the description of the old records and due to the discovery of religious sculptures and inscriptions. In other words, the Society attested the existing notion regarding the religious belief of the ancient Bengalees with the help of the archaeological evidences. It is because of the activities of Varendra Research Society we came to be acquainted with that the influence and extension of Buddhism in Bengal was extensive from the pre-Gupta period to the reign of the Chandras and after the fall of the Chandras , the Buddhism was completely lost state patronize in Bengal.²⁴ However, the Buddhism was stayed behind in North Bengal down to the 12th century A.D. ²⁵ At the same time, the Brahminical and Shaiva images of the Pala period collected by the Society affirmed that no

matter what might be the royal religion, a huge section of the common people of the kingdom of Gauda were followed Brahminical and Shaiva religion. And the unearthing²⁶ of the icons of Santinath and Simhanad-Lokeswar, the Jaina Tirthankars from Varendra by the Society demonstrates that atleast a few section of Gauda people were the admirer of Jainism.

The art specimens brought together by Varendra Research Society were from a different philosophy of art. Because these sculptures formulate dissimilarity from other schools of Indian art by means of their sharp characteristics and arty execution. In reality, the sculptures of Varendra region assumed diminutive or no foreign influences which represent the Mouryan, Sunga and Gupta sculptures. For that reason the sculptures of the Varendra Research Museum, whether Buddhist, Hindu or Jaina show signs of a usual refinement of the figures represented (stood for) and an exacting traditional values to the hieratic perception of art. The costume, the adornment, the hair style, every single item possess a typical temperament of their own. Mukhlesur Rahman correctly pointed out that one may possibly miss in the specimens the old vigour which characterizes Gupta art, but this has been more than compensated by the liveliness and subtle grace of the figures, that bestow them a exceptional poetic excellence and constitute their principal merit as a great works of art.²⁷ Due to the activities and research of the scholars of Varendra Research Society this different art of philosophy became familiar as the Varendra School of art or Gaudiya School of art. However, it is shocking to remember that prior to the establishment of the Varendra Research Society, being unsuccessful to mark out the lines on which the sculptures had been crafted, the scholars used to categorize the sculptures of this region with that of the Magadha's and the relics of Orissa as provincial one.

It can be mentioned here that even in Lamataranatha's description it has been mentioned that " During the time of Dharmapala, two eminent artists(sculptors), namely Dhiman and his son Bitpala appeared in Varendra led to the rise of a different philosophy of

art, which in due course was extended in various parts of Nepal, Tibet and even China.”

The influence of this school of art can be traced even at Far-east places like Java Island. It is remarkable that, despite not being an art scholar, Sarat Kumar Ray, the president of the Varendra Research Society in 1912, having observed the sculptures collected from Varendra, expressed his own opinion which in turn, rectified Vincent Smith’s notion. He stated that “ Vincent Smith while discussing the sculptures of Java’s Barabudur, failed to trace out the lines on which they had been crafted and therefore sometimes he related the style with that of the Chinese and sometimes with the Indians ; and ultimately unable to form a balance between his contrary views , he accepted it as Indians; The impression that got expressed about the artifacts of Barabudur by Smith in his work entitled ‘*History of Indian Art*’ when being compared and contrasted with the collected evidences of art by us, then it can be clear that from this school of art the artistic style was developed in Barabudur. After witnessing the icons of Varendra he seems to have developed his impression.”²⁸ Nanigopal Majumdar, while analyzing the reasons of the overwhelming popularity of Varendra style of art to far off Java islands, recorded his opinion of the background in the first monograph entitled *Nalanda Copper plate of Devapaladeva* and concluded that the Nalanda was the source from which the Buddhist religion and art were derived by islands of Indian Archipelago.²⁹ Discussing the origin and extension of Gauda school of art A. K. Maitra has written that “ to be simple enough, the Gauda school of art started evolving out as the consequence of the Mahayana school of Philosophy. Till the fifth Pala king, Nayapala, the Mahayana School retained its purity which later on had deteriorated and the decadence got reflected even in art. The Varendra style of art was flourished even in Orissa, Magadh and Java islands. Magadh and Gauda being intimately related, with the declining of the Mahayana Buddhism, the relics of these two places also faced decadence. However, due to the difference of background, it was improvised by and large in the areas namely Orissa and Java islands. The brief historical

trajectory of the Gauda School of art lies in the fact that it was originated from Varendra, fortified in Orissa and finally manifested in Java islands. The regional style of art, although transcreates upon the mother style, however, cannot fully alter it. Having distinguished the regional and the source, it is easy to apprehend that the school of art adopted in Orissa and the Islands of Indian archipelago has actually been the Gauda School of art.³⁰

Well, as the consequence of the emergence of a different philosophy of art i.e. Varendra school of art, the Varendra artists seemed to have formed guilds. For instance it can be mentioned the name of Ranaka Sulapani, the engraver of Vijayasena's Deopara inscription. Sulapani was described as the 'crest jewel' of Varendraka – Shilpigosthi which has been translated as the 'Guild of the Varendra Artists.'³¹ Over and above, the scholars of Varendra Research Society, like Sarasi Kumar Saraswati, Nrirodbandhu Sanyal, Nanigopal Majumdar, Tarapada Bhattacharya, kshitish Chandra Sarkar, Mukhleusr Rahman and so on followed a line of study and research on the artifacts of this school of art and put up a prosperous history of the same. Among them, the input of the first three scholars was massive. Saraswati worked on '*Art & Archaeology of Bengal*'³² as the third post graduate research scholar of the Society. Moreover, he wrote down a huge number of research articles and volumes which helped out to attain the place of one of the authorities on the art of Gauda. The position of Nirodbandhu Sanyal would be the next in this regard.

In conclusion it won't be erroneous to assert that the Varendra Research Society has facilitated the Bengalees in obtaining knowledge of their antique art and culture. The Bengalees as a race, hence, be supposed to be appreciative to the Society for their contribution in rediscovering their outstanding artistic legacy.

Notes & References

1. Yudhisthir was not, obviously a historical character. He was the symbol of an honest and pious man which was a character of the great epic *Mahabharata*.
2. In the work, *History in the Vernacular*, the authors have raised question about that there was no history writing in India before colonialism and they suggests that careful readings reveal distinctly indigenous historical narratives. To them, those narratives might be embedded within non-historical literary genres, such as poems, ballads and works within the itihasha- purana tradition, but they are marked by discursive signs that allow them to be recognized as historical.
3. In the work *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*, Romila Thapar explored the society of the heroes in the epics and the later tradition of venerating the hero through a new viewpoint. Accordingly she gave a new life to the character Shakuntala.
4. Dilip Kumar Chakravarti, *India: An Archaeological History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 1.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Ramaprasad Chanda, *Gaudarajamala*, VRS, 1912, republished by Nababharat publishers, Calcutta, 1975, p. 1.
7. With the help of the information of Megasthenese in *Indica*, Diodorus jotted down that the river Ganges was flowing through the eastern boundary of the Gangaridoi and finally merged with the sea water.
8. Nanigopal Majumdar (ed.), *Inscriptions of Bengal*, Volume- III, VRS, 1929, p. 60.
11. Ramaprasad Chanda, *op. cit.* p.2, See *Introduction* of this book written by D. C. Sircar.

12. Ramaprasad Chanda, *Itihase Bangali*(Collection of Essays of Ramaprasad Chanda), K. P. Bagchi & Company, Calcutta, 1981(1997), See Preface by Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, pp. ix- x.
13. *Ibid.* p. 40.
14. *Ibid.* p. 44.
15. Akshaya Kumar Maitra, *Gaudalekhamala*, Varendra Research Society, 1912, republished by Sanskrita Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta, 2004, p.6.
16. *Monographs No- 7*, VRS, 1949, See Foreword of R. C. Majumdar.
- 17., Akshaya Kumar Maitra, *The Fall of the Pala Empire*, University of North Bengal, 1987, See Introduction by D. C. Sirkar, p. i.
18. Nanigopal Majumdar (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. v.
19. *Op cit.*, Appendics, p. 166.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
22. Shas- ud- din Ahmed (ed.), *Inscriptions of Bengal*, volume- IV, VRM, 1960, p. vii.
23. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Radhagovinda Basak & Nanigopal Banerji (ed.), *The Ramacaritam* of Sandhyakaranandin, VRM, 1939, p. v.
24. Sarat Kumar Ray, ‘Uttarbanger Pratnasampad,’ an article in *Uttarbanger Puratatta: Sankhipta Itihas*, University of North Bengal, 2005, p. 10.
25. Nanigopal Majumdar (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

26. *Ibid.* p. 100.

27. Mukhlesur Rahman expressed his feelings regarding the sculptures in such manner in the Report of the working of the Varendra Research Museum, from August 14, 1947 to June 30, 1969, p. 7.

28. Sarat Kumar Ray, *Presidential Address*, 1319 B. S.

29. *Monographs*, No- 1, p. 12.

30. *Letter*(11 Baishakh 1319) which had been written to Ardhendu Kumar Ganguly by Akshaya Kumar Maitra, presently attached in *Akshaya Kumar Maitra : Jibon O Sadhana* by Nirmal Chandra Choudhury, University of North Bengal, 1984, pp. 173- 174.

31. Majumdar, Nanigopal (ed.), *op. cit.*, 45.

32. *Annual Report for the year 1931- 32.*
