

# VARENDRA RESEARCH SOCIETY: ITS VISION AND MISSION (1910-1963)

## ABSTRACT

The thesis under consideration entitled 'Varendra Research Society: Its Vision and Mission' is an inclusive study in which an endeavor has been made to focus the input of Varendra Research Society in reconstructing the history, predominantly, the early history of Bengal.

It is to be mentioned that the historical researches in Bengal as well as India, broadly speaking in scientific style, seem to have started with the establishment of British rule in India. Sir William Jones may be regarded as one of the pioneer researchers in the discovery of India's past for his association in founding Asiatic Society in 1784. 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.

It is quite unfortunate that till the middle of nineteenth century, neither in Bengal nor in India there was an ambiance of historical culture in the truest sense. At that time, since historical research based on the study of original documents was hardly known, the history of Bengal, specifically the ancient history of Bengalees, has not been composed. Owing to this, 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.

Roughly, subsequent the eighties of the nineteenth century the consciousness about history seemed to have got a greater flow. Thus in such ripened circumstances a number of research societies and institutions gradually got growing in Bengal from the last decade of Nineteenth and first decade of Twentieth century. Accordingly, the Varendra Research Society was

founded in 1910, in Rajshahi, now in Bangladesh, principally with the efforts of Sarat Kumar Ray, Akshaya Kumar Maitra and Ramaprasad Chanda. The Society's museum came into existence when two of the Public Library's rooms were arranged for the preservation and exhibition of the assembled antiquities. The Society also developed a well set off library in the museum.

Keeping the influence and inspiration of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, established in 1784 and the absence of written history, particularly of ancient period in view, it is to be mentioned that the establishment of a historical research society at Rajshahi, was the result of another set of factors. These can be categorized and analyzed under following heads:

1. The ancient heritage and ample archaeological evidences of Varendra region along with the inspirations provided by the British investigators like Wilkins, Buchanan and Cunningham.
2. The influence of the grievances expressed by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore in their writings related to history regarding the paucity of documentation.
3. The historical temper and attachment of the three principal founders—Akshaya Kumar Maitra (henceforth A. K. Maitra), Sarat kumar Roy(henceforth S. K. Roy) and Ramaprasad Chanda.
4. To safeguard the history of India as well as Bengal from distortion.
5. The favourable cultural ambience of Rajshahi town.

To administer the activities of the Varendra Research Society, there was a Council of Management. At the outset there were 11(eleven)<sup>12</sup> members and subsequently the number revolved to 12(twelve). But the museum and the library of the Society came under a separate

Committee of management in 1937 since the Society approached the Provincial Government to take over its museum under Charitable Endowments Act, 1890, with certain reservation of rights and provisions. However the relation between Society and museum remained unaffected.

It is to be noted that rediscovery of early history of Bengal as well as the Bengalees was the eventual vision of the Varendra Research Society. In the light of the vision; the Society had fixed up its mission under following heads:

I) Collection of antiquities through - a) Exploration b) Excavation

II) Research &

III) Publication

Within 1912 the VRS succeeded to explore a number of places and came off with nearly 150 stone and metal sculptures and over 500 manuscripts and a few stone and copperplate inscriptions in their disposal. Exhilarating by the sensation of the success of exploration, the Varendra Research Society made an effort to put its exertion in a number of perceptive excavation. In actual fact, there was a prerequisite of excavation in some sites to ascertain the genuine and flourishing history of pre-Islamic Bengal. They excavated the ancient sites like Kumarpur, Mahisantosh, Deo-para Padumeshwar and Paharpur.

In consequence of these exploration, excavation and other alternative mode of collection, the museum of the Varendra Research Society was came out as an epistolary of antiquities for the history of ancient Bengal. It is to be kept in mind that the museum of the VRS was not filled up merely with sculptures, inscriptions, terra-cotta and coins of the Ancient period of Bengal, a lot of Muslim inscriptions, sculptures were also added to the museum.

On the other hand, the library, the nucleus of the museum of VRS too came into view as a prosperous library comprising of manuscripts, rare books, periodicals, bulletins, magazines, reports and other well-off literary stuffs.

Varendra Research Society, however, was not satiated in creating only a depository for the components of writing the history of Bengal. But by the skill of the Society's scholars it was, indeed, shaped into a proper space for research. With the Publication of research outcome like *Gaudarajamala*, *Gaudalekhamala*, *Inscription of Bengal Volume III* and others, it has provided the required blow needed to change the conventional notion of history in Bengal. 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 *Gaudarajamala* is the first history book written in modern scientific style. And *Gaudalekhamala* and *Inscription of Bengal Volume III* are the major source book of the early history of Bengal. The other research books and articles of the scholars (like, Nanigopal Majumder, Nirodbandhu Sanyal, Sarashikumar Saraswati, Upendranath Ghoshal, Radhagobindo Basak, Dinesh Chandra Bhattacharya) of the Society had contributed to fill many gaps of the ancient history of Bengal. It has also made contribution in the medieval history of Bengal by publishing *Inscription of Bengal Volume IV*.

However, the Varendra Research Society had to countenance a range of problems and intimidations. A few of them were got to the bottom of. But the Society became abortive to overcome most of its problems. And owing to the collective result of these inflamed problems and intimidations, the VRS was totally wiped out in 1963. The foster child of the society was transferred to the hands of the University of Rajshahi in October 1964.

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