

## Chapter - I

### Idea and Genesis of the Varendra Research Society

Since the Varendra research Society was named after Varendra region, not after the Rajshahi town, it seems to be the first and foremost duty of the present investigator to analyze the term in brief before inflowing into the discourses of its idea and genesis. Therefore, it is necessary to note that the Indian sources talk about quite a lot of physical names which refer to different regional divisions of Bengal. Varendra was one of such unit which was co-extensive with large tracts of North Bengal. The land is now called Barind, Barinda or Varendra—derived from the old name ‘Varindri’, the form in which it occurs in Sanskrit literature. The area lies on the north of the Ganges, in the colonial division of Rajshahi, between two rivers—the Mahananda on the west and the Karotoya on the east.<sup>1</sup> It was a mandala of the ancient Bhukti of Pundravardhana.<sup>2</sup> It is to be mentioned that, according to the description of inscriptions discovered in different parts of Bengal (colonial), we find that, before the Muslim rule the country was divided for administrative purposes into bhuktis or provinces. These were subdivided into mandalas or divisions. Varendra, the land of the Pundra people, which along with Vanga (east Bengal), Samatata (the Gangetic delta), Suhma (West Bengal called Radha), Anga territory round Bhagalpur, Mithila (Tirhut), Magadha (South Bihar) and kalinga (Orissa) used to be regarded as the Prachi (the east). Sandhyakar Nandi, the famous poet of the eleventh century of the Christian era, called it the holiest land on account of the sacred rivers, the Ganges and Karotoya—flowing by its two sides and Punarbhava running through the middle.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of the inscriptions of the Senas, Nihar Ranjan Roy has included present Bagura, greater Dinajpur, Rajshahi and Pabna (Padumba) into Varendra region.<sup>4</sup> However, the western boundary of Varendri is, in no way

clear to us.<sup>5</sup> Although, there is possibility that some portions of the eastern parts of malda would also have been into this region.<sup>6</sup>

Anyway, keeping the influence and inspiration of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, established in 1784 and the absence of written history<sup>7</sup>, particularly of ancient period in view, it may 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:

6. The ancient heritage and ample archaeological evidences of Varendra region along with the inspirations provided by the British investigators like Wilkins, Buchanan and Cunningham.
7. The influence of the grievances expressed by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore in their writings related to history regarding the paucity of documentation.
8. 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.
9. To safeguard the history of India as well as Bengal from distortion.
10. The favourable cultural ambience of Rajshahi town.

Looking at the ancient history of Bengal, one can trace that the present areas of Varendra-Pundra-Gaur happened to be the center of culture and civilization. In other words, we can say that the history of ancient Bengal is in fact the history of Varendra-Pundra-Gaur and vice versa. Therefore, there should not be any hesitation in calling Varendra region as the cradle of the archaeological evidences of the history of Bengal. But there was no proper recurrent exploration made in order to assemble these evidences. As a result, the important

archaeological antiquities remained negligently scattered in the various districts of Varendra and there was every possibility of their mutilation and disfigurement.<sup>8</sup>

However, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the historical research on the basis of archaeological evidences got initiated at Varendra region, with the assistance and encouragement of the British officials. David Kolf through his analysis has shown that the officials of the East Indian Company, particularly the more elite among them, came from the intellectual-cultural milieu of the eighteenth century European Enlightenment.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the eighteenth century Enlightenment, there was the influence of European Romanticism which contributed to a new interest, not only in distant races, societies and civilizations, but in distant history of epochs.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, for administrative obligations, the company-officials had to be acquainted with the local language and culture of the people.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the archaeological research in Varendra region got accelerated with Charles Wilkins's unveiling of the Badal Inscription in November, 1780. In this regard it must be acknowledged that with the discovery of the Badal inscription, Indian epigraphy got initiated. Subsequently, at Amgachhi in Dinajpur, the copper plate of Vignrahapal III was unearthed, and was deciphered by Colebrook. In this respect, significant contribution has been made by Dr Buchanan Hamilton.<sup>12</sup> In the beginning of the nineteenth century Dr Hamilton made a general survey, in course of which some of the places (Dinajpur and Bogura districts) of archaeological interest were outwardly examined. After Buchanan, Alexander Cunningham's name is worth mentioning. However, he could spare time only for a flying visit to some of the sites. Yet it was under his supervision (1879-80) that the detailed descriptions and maps of the archaeological sites like Gaur and Pandua got published. Besides these personalities, personal curiosity induced by Umesh Chandra Batbal, Creighton, Ravenshaw and Westmacott resulted in the scrutinizing of some of the relics of the antiquity. Ravenshaw in his work *Gaur, Its Ruins & Inscriptions*, published in 1878 has given generous description of Gaur. Westmacott

with the publication of his *Indian Antiquary* got himself engaged with the then ongoing debate regarding the identification of Pundravardhana and he spotted Vardhanakot of Dinajpur as Pundravardhana. Yet, due to paucity of time, none of them could make an uninterrupted exploration extensively. Additional restraints were put up by the land owners with their reservations in trespassing their terrain and also by the limitations drawn by Treasure Trove Act.

Nevertheless, it has to be recognized that the various archaeological evidences like stone-inscriptions, copper plates, archaeological sites, sculptures, pillars etc that got extracted from various parts of Varendra region had definitely enhanced the significance of this area as the hub of one of the most ancient civilizations of Bengal. For, every relics of antiquity is a monument of the past, capable of disclosing a story, which is the story of culture of its locality in bygone epochs of its history.<sup>13</sup> All these findings and the various archaeological evidences lying scattered round this region had certainly motivated the people, committed to history—like A.K. Maitra, S.K. Roy and Ramaprasad Chanda—to collect and preserve the ingredients for a methodical and systematic writing of the history of Varendra vis-à-vis Bengal.

The next factor that might have directly or indirectly influenced the founders of Varendra Research Society has been the historical contemplations and discontentment expressed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore. Actually the absence of an authentically documented as well as scripted history of Bengal cum Bengalees even during the 80s of the nineteenth century had annoyed both Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Rabindranath Tagore. Bengalees did not have a history—this misconception had turned into a maxim.<sup>14</sup> The lack of interest among the Bengalees regarding historical practices had augmented their frustration. For these reasons we can find that Bankim Chandra chattopadhyay had not only pleaded for historical studies but also

emphasized upon the importance of writing of history through his various essays like Muscle power of the Bengalees ('*Bangaleer Bahubal*'), The Disgrace of India ('*Bharatkalanka*'), A Few Words Regarding the History of Bengal ('*Banglar Itihash Sammondhe koekti Katha*'), and many others.

Out of his frustration from the unavailability of any written history of Bengal, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay had lamented that the history of Greenland has been written; even that of Mawri people is on page; however, the land that was constituted of the places like Gour –Tamralipta -Saptagram etc, that land has no documented history in writing. According to him, the reason behind this is not scarcity of the components of writing history, but rather, the lack of any investigation.

In 1881, the editor of *Bangadarshan* had tried to inspire his readers by stating that it is the obligation of a race to write down its history. Inspiring the people to fulfill this responsibility, Bankim Chandra wrote:

“There is no accessible history of Bengal, whatsoever is there is not history, rather fictions—only some narratives of the alien, invaders of Bengal and their biographies. We claim for the history of Bengal, else Bengal will be short of conviction. Who will write?

You will write, I will write, all of us will be writing it. ....»<sup>15</sup>

Rabindranath has called it an appetite for history.<sup>16</sup> After the death of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in 1894, the cause was taken up by Rabindranath. Under his editorial, the Bengali journal entitled *Sadhana*, started publishing essays related to the history of Bengal. In the preface to the first volume of *Aitihashik Chitra*, Tagore wrote:

“.....in memorizing entirely the history written by others, one might become a scholar or might score high marks in the examination, however, the impetus that is required in indigenous writing of history by collecting the native historical ingredients, that results not into eruditeness alone. That will create current in the stagnant pool of our mindscape. That instigation, that endeavor will enliven us.”<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the commencement of the writing of the history of Bengalees by the Bengalee themselves, Tagore wrote: “There is no harm in taking assistance from others so far as collection is concerned, but we should strengthen ourselves in our resourcefulness.”<sup>18</sup>

In reality, in response to Bankim’s clarion call, the successful lawyer like Akshaya Kumar Maitra has taken up the nurturing of history through the collection of historical components, as his vocation. This sentiment has shared by many scholars of our time, for examples someone opines “that Akshaya Kumar had realized the genuineness of Bankim Chandra’s disappointment and thereby got motivated in his aspirations.”<sup>19</sup> In this context, one may recall Maitra’s outstanding works namely *Golam Hossain*. In *Golam Hossain* Akshaya Kumar has himself written: “Due to the dearth of our indigenous history, we have become the object of ridicule by the foreigners... we don’t write our history; don’t show deserving respect to someone who is writing history; whether it is ancient or modern, we are equally indifferent to all. Presently in the newly awakened world of Bengali literature, fictions are acclaimed more day by day. On the other hand, due to people’s apathy, history of our land is getting dormant. Whatever is flourishing in the name of history is in majority, a mere derivation of the conclusions drawn by the foreign writers.”<sup>20</sup>

The fact that Akshaya Kumar Maitra has got stimulated by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, gets further support from the writing of Akshaya Kumar’s follower, Rajendralal Acharya: “I do remember—we the school and college students had congregated

together to condole on Bankim Chandra's demise....the entire hall was packed up. Akshaya Kumar's self-composed essay got read out in front of the multitudes by his own sweet voice. ...Intense reverence for Bankim Chandra got expressed in Akshaya Kumar's speech."<sup>21</sup>

However, Bankim Chandra could not see the activities of his follower. Because, he expired (1894) few months before the publication of Akshaya Kumar's highly acclaimed book, *Sirajaudullah. Aitihashik Chitra* got published after a lapse of five years. Rabindranath happened to be Akshaya Kumar's friend. On account of Tagore's profound interest, Akshaya Kumar had started publishing his quarterly historical journal *Aitihashik Chitra*.<sup>22</sup>

Ramaprasad Chanda was so very much influenced by reading Bankim Chandra's essays related to history that he could not stop himself from meeting Bankim Chandra. In that interaction with Bankim Chandra he had expressed of his preparation of writing an authentic history of Bengal. Having motivated him, Bankim Chandra recommended him to go for an effortful collection of evidences.<sup>23</sup> Ramaprasad Chanda confessed of Bankim Chandra's influence upon him in his writing entitled *Bankim Chandra O Banglar Itihash* where he wrote:

"- - - having going through this touching episode, many Bengalee Youth aspiring to be poets had got inclined towards history. Having invited to play the leading role in the discourse of historical criticism, I feel honoured and whatever hard work I have undertaken, seems to be successful."<sup>24</sup>

The cultural and majestic, Sarat Kumar Roy too was stimulated by the works of Bankim Chandra, which gets evident by his own statements:

“- - - how is it possible that the land with places like Gour, Tamralipta, Saptagram, does not poses a history? It is unfortunate that till date, no one could have apprehended the element of grievance that was implicit in this prophetic interrogation of Bankim Chandra.”<sup>25</sup>

At this juncture, question might arise that, despite the fact that Bankim Chandra and Rabindranath had personally inspired Akshaya Kumar, Sarat Kumar and Ramaprasad, yet what relation does bear with the establishment a society? The answer to this question finds its germination in the following announcement of Bankim Chandra:

“Come let’s work together for investigating the history of the Bengalees. Let them work as per their competence; a little fire flies illuminates far off places. This is not a task for single hand, together we must accomplish it.”<sup>26</sup> The implication is that it is a universal work; a collective responsibility for it is to rescue the history of Bengal vis-à-vis Bengalees.

It is beyond any doubt that the leitmotif behind the establishment of Varendra Research Society is nothing but the genuine submission of Sarat Kumar Ray, Akshaya Kumar Maitra and Ramaprasad Chanda, to history. This trio was greatly interested in history and heritage. Among them Akshaya Kumar right from his student life, got relentlessly attracted to history. He himself has written that, “Like my father I too got so affectionate that whenever I got time I used to get involved with history.”<sup>27</sup> Thus during the free periods of his Entrance-ship, he finished writing up the *Bangabijoy Kavya*. Most of his works written before the establishment of Varendra Research Society – *Sirajudoulah*, *Samarsingha*, *Sitaram*, and *Mirkasim* etc. – were all based on historical accounts. When lord Curzon wished to have some information regarding Gour then under the pleading of Maharaj Suryakanta Acharya Choudhury, Akshaya Kumar Maitra had written *Gaura under the Hindus* in 1902 for the

fulfillment of Lord Curzon's demands.<sup>28</sup> Actually long before the foundation of Varendra Research Society Akshaya Kumar Maitra had established himself as the pioneer of the modern, scientific and systematic research of the history of Bengal.<sup>29</sup>

Sarat Kumar Ray was at once an academician and archaeologist. It is worth mentioning that he was the third son of the Zamindar of Dighapatiya, Raja Pramathnath Ray. Pramathnath took his education from the famous Bengalee archaeologist, Rajendralal Mitra who was solely responsible in inculcating adoration towards archaeology in the entire family and later it got diffused particularly in Sarat Kumar of the succeeding generation.<sup>30</sup> He was an esteemed member of both the Asiatic Society and Bangiya Sahitya Parisad. After the completion of his master degree (1900) in physics from Calcutta University his intense involvement with archaeology instigated him to visit Europe in 1900 in order to inspect Pompeii, Thibi and other ancient sites. Sarat Kumar's enthralment at witnessing such extensive sites of archaeological importance can find parallel only in his later experiences of observing the archaeological treasures of Bhagalpur.

Ramaprasad Chanda's deep interest in history finds evidence in his writing of *Hindu Jatir Adhoptoner Karon* ('Reason for the deterioration of the Hindu Race') which he had taken to show Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Amidst acute economic crisis and joblessness, he continued publishing a few of his essays in *Dawn* magazine, the foremost of which was *Some Forgotten Chapters of Early Indian History*, published in 1900 in the august volume of the *Dawn*. In the year of 1901 when Ramaprasad joined Hindu School as an assistant teacher, H. H. Risley's highly controversial census report got published where Risley had commented about the absence of the Aryan blood among the Indians, particularly the Bengalees. To Ramaprasad, however, it seemed that Risley's views were arbitrary and based on inadequate data and accordingly he made up his mind to make more systematic study on the issue.

Consequently in 1907 he published his essay entitled *Origin of the Races of Bengal in East and West Journal* by pointing out the futility of Risley's notion.<sup>31</sup>

So it is now clear that A.K. Maitra, S.K. Ray and Ramaprasad Chanda came close to one another in order to form a society by virtue of their common interest in research and antiquarian studies.

The establishment of Varendra Research Society played a vital role in safeguarding the history of Bengal cum India from distortion by the endeavour of writing the authentic history of Bengal. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar rightly pointed out that “the study of Indian history by the Indians started almost as a reaction against the writings of European scholars, who often depicted a prejudice and distorted version of Indian history and culture.”<sup>32</sup>

It has been already stated before that following the path paved by the Asiatic society, many English writers and historian, later on, got involved into the investigation and research related to Indian history. Unfortunately quite a bulk of misinformation got juxtaposed along with the truth in the writings of many of these renowned historians. Particularly, as the administrator of the East India Company these English writers failed to perceive the demerits of colonial rule in this country. Accordingly their main objective of writing the history of India was centered round the fortification of English colonial power through expansion. Racial pride and superiority complex over the natives formed the characteristic of their writing. By portraying a declining India those English historians were trying to justify the rationale behind the British imperialism in India through self propaganda as saviors.

This motivated writing also holds true regarding the regional history, specifically that of the history of Bengal. Both Charles Stuart (1813) and Marshman (1831) wrote two separate books with the similar title of *History of Bengal*. None of these were history in the

real sense of the term. Critiquing these sorts of writing, Bankim Chandra, in *Banga Darshan* commented:

“The English Sahebs had produced innumerable books regarding the history of Bengal. The book by Stuart saheb is so heavy that, if thrown, it can injure even a young fellow; and Marshman, Lethbridge and many others had effortlessly composed books on the history of Bengal with the motive of earning essay money.”<sup>33</sup>

Bankim Chandra, Rabindra Nath Tagore followed by Akshaya Kumar, Sarat Kumar and Ramaprasad had all suffered from the distortion of history of India in general and Bengal in particular. The writers like Bankimchandra and Rabindranath, by their pointed writing had tried to inspire the educated Bengalees to be historically engaged in preserving the history of Bengal from deformation. It is likely that the later group of scholaras like A. K. Maitra, Ramprasad and others were motivated by the inspiration provided by the formers, organized themselves in gathering the ingredients of history of Bengal and nurture it scientifically for the sake of cleansing out the true and unbiased history of Bengal.

The last but not the least factor which contributed to form a historical research society in and around Rajsahi, was the favourable educational and cultural atmosphere that developed in the Town. However, far from being the educational and cultural hub, Rajsahi itself would not have developed as a town if Natore, the then administrative headquarter would not have suffered from problems like water-logging, malaria, unavailability of navigable rivers etc.<sup>34</sup> In fact, till 1824 there was hardly any existence of a town called Rajsahi. In the place of present Rajsahi town, there were two villages called Rampur and Bolyaliya. Due to the above mentioned difficulties Amherst in 1825 had shifted the administrative centre to Rampur-Boyaliya.<sup>35</sup> Along with geographical and other favourable conditions, in no time Rampur-Boyaliya flourished as the administrative hub and soon

expanded through transformation into the present Rajsahi town. With governmental and non-governmental support, schools, Madrashas and colleges were established for western as well as indigenous education. Within a short time Rajsahi town became the major attraction for Zaminders, landlords, lawyers, teachers, doctors, clerks and other educationists. Consequently, various institutions aimed at social welfare and cultivation of education-literature-culture was founded. Following the trend, Rajsahi Association was inaugurated in 1872 by the support provided by Promothnath Ray Bahadur, the Zaminder of Dighapatiya.<sup>36</sup> This association, one hand had upgraded Rajsahi College into a Degree college, opened Rajsahi Agricultural institute and hospital, and on the other it played pivotal role in spreading of culture and literature.

With the formation of Rajsahi Association the social life of Rajsahi gained a new pace and in 1279 B.S., under the inspiration of the ideologies propagated by *Banga Darshan* Of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, a monthly journal called *Gyanankur* started publishing from Rajsahi which in turn, buoyanced up the literary arena of Rajsahi resulting in the publications of many other literary journals. In 1304 B.S. the literary magazine titled *Utshaho* started issuing from Rajsahi. In 1305 B.S. (1899), with the goal of scientific and systematic writing of history, Akshaya Kumar Maitra as the editor brought out *Aitihashik Chitra*. Apart from magazines Akshaya Kumar's *Sirajudaulah*, a well researched historical work also came out during this time, in 1898. For all this literary happenings, Fajlul Haque in his book entitled *Rajsahir Sanskritic Aitijhya (1825-1952)* [*The Cultural Heritage of Rajsahi (1825-1952)*], has leveled this period as the golden era of the cultural –literary history of Rajsahi. This golden era continued till thirties of the twentieth century. Within this period many other educational institutes along with a public library (1884) was established.

The above reasons are evident enough to assert that by the end of nineteenth century Rajsahi had evolved into a centre for the pursuits of higher knowledge and cultural activities.

It is needless to state that these hospitable ambiances had favoured in the formation of Varendra Research Society.

For all the above discussed factors and circumstances during the first decade of twentieth century, when situation seemed to be ripe enough for the establishment of a historical research centre in and around Rajshahi, at that very juncture the session for Bangiya Sahitya Sammelon(Literary Conference of Bengal) was held in Bhagolpur in February 1910. It is noteworthy that, various centers were established in places like Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dacca, Kumilla, Guwahati etc. in order to relate the rural and suburban Bengal with the activities recommended in the Bengal Literary Conference. In the Bhagolpur conference Sarat Kumar Ray, Akshaya Kumar Maitra and Ramapraprsad Chanda went as delegates from Rajshahi branch and at the end of the conference they went for an inspection cum collection evidences at the nearby archaeological site, accompanied by Rakhadas Banerjee, the assistant curator of Indian Museum and Naresh Chandra Das, a renowned lawyer of Bhagolpur. Sarat Kumar Ray became highly impressed by the magnificent archaeological evidences.<sup>37</sup> observing the enriched archaeological resources, at Bhagolpur itself, the representatives from Rajshahi, started thinking seriously about the ancient archaeological resources available around the Varendra region. They recalled of Vijaya Sen's inscription that was traced at village called Deopara, close to Rajshahi town. On their way back Akshaya Kumar opined that, regular exploration at Varendra region would result in the collection of various ingredients for the history of ancient Bengal.<sup>38</sup> While travelling itself they planned for an archaeological trip to Gour, near Malda, which later on was cancelled in favour of the places under Godagari police station. The logic was that Godagari is much near to Rajshahi compare to Gour, and it was from Deopara village situated within Godagari police station that C.T. Metcalfe(1865) had discovered an inscription of Vijaya Sen. Obviously as the tracing spot of the ancient inscription, Deopara provoked the trio to emerge into a thorough investigation in and around

the spot.<sup>39</sup> However prior to that, returning back to Rajsahi, Sarat Kumar Ray, Akshaya Kumar Maitra and Ramaprasad Chanda realized about the urgency of organizing an investigatory group and accordingly they organized themselves into a research and exploration team.<sup>40</sup> Invited by this investigatory team, Rakhaldas Banerjee of Indian Museum and Ramkaml Singha of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad met the foremost exploration at the areas surrounding Godagari police station. At their very first attempt they could explore, after inspecting various places in and around Godagari police station, thirty two antiquities which is indeed a significant collection. However complications aroused with Rakhaldas Banerjee and Ramkamal Singha's proposal of taking the collected materials to the Indian Museum and Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. Their argument was that the proper preservation of this gathered antics along with the proper propagation of their artistic merit could not meet adequately from Rajsahi. Ramaprasad Chanda protested against that and he pleaded before Sarat Kumar Ray, the leader of the exploration team to retain those ancient evidences to Rajsahi so that through regular investigation and collection, the task of researching about the ancient history of Varendra region could be accelerated. The eminent inhabitants of Rajsahi like Bhubon Mohan Maitra and Sashadhar Ray strongly supported Chanda's appeal.<sup>41</sup> Manirul Haque in his "Varendra Research Society and Museum : a Review in the New Millennium" has remarked that Akshaya Kumar Maitra has maintained silence regarding this issue.<sup>42</sup> However there is hardly any truth in this observation. For, Akshaya kumar was the only personality who had been pursuing about the investigation and preservation of historical evidences in North Bengal long before the formation of this investigatory team. In this context the presidential speech delivered by Akshaya kumar Maitra in the opening session of Uttar Banga Sahitya Sammelan (Literary Conference of North Bengal) is worth mentioning.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, while staying at Rajendralal Acharya's house in Bagura during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of Uttarbanga Sahitya Sammelan, Akshaya Kumar had often expressed his anxiety regarding

this issue during his personal communications with Rajendralal. Based on that interaction Rajendralal had written:

“ . . . on account of the conference, when he resided at Bagura as my guest the only issue Akshaya kumar had kept on emphasizing was that of assembling all the historical evidences of the entire North Bengal and to preserve them together at one particular place.”<sup>44</sup>

Finally, decision was taken to retain the antiquities in Rajsahi with the agenda of a regular exploration of the area. As a part of this agenda Khanjanpur region of Bagura district has been selected as the primary spot for the beginning of the recurrent explorations. It is worth reminding that in the exploratory camp at Khanjanpur, the final resolution regarding the foundation of a full-fledged investigation cum research centre has been taken up (June 1910) although informally Varendra Research Society seem to have already emerged out right from the formation of investigatory team. However there is hardly any disagreement about the fact that the hunt for archaeological evidences was its only preoccupation. Ultimately, in the very year the Varendra Research Society got officially commenced from 27<sup>th</sup> September, 1910.

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 notion that “museum has originated from the urge of collecting and exhibiting of ancient artistic evidences, archaeological evidences and heritage”<sup>45</sup> finds its fullest manifestation in the museum of Varendra Research Society.

In the recent times a debate has got centered round the issue that among the museum and society, which one was formulated earlier. This controversy got actually initiated by an article written by Mukhlesur Rahman, the former curator (1966-1986), which stated:

‘it is thus abundantly clear that with the sculptures collected during their first tour by the Kumar and his associates, the Varendra Research Museum was born in April 1910 and the decision to form a society (the Varendra Research Society) was not taken till the month of June of the same year.’<sup>46</sup> Based on this information of Rahman Saheb, Manirul Haque in 2004 <sup>47</sup> and Muhammad Rajjakul Islam in 2007 <sup>48</sup> had also consented to the fact that the Museum precedes the Society.

The erudite scholar like Mukhlesur Rahman must not have been motivatedly given birth to this controversy. Rather in most of his writings prior to this, he had mentioned of the Varendra Research Society as the parent body. It seems that later on he got little bit confused with the word ‘research’ that is visible in the very name of Varendra Research Society. Another probable reason of his view might be the dates of government recognition of the museum (1913) of the VRS and the VRS as a society (1914). Henceforth, Rahman Saheb has written, “As its name indicates the society was set up for research and for promoting the cause of its advancements.”<sup>49</sup> But research was not used by the founders of Varendra Research Society to denote only enquiry or study. They had also connoted it in order to indicate investigation or search. The research works obviously did not begin before June 1910. But, Varendra Research Society originated definitely as an investigatory body. In his presidential address Sarat kumar has categorically stated that:

“Inspired by Akshaya Kumar’s enthusiastic spirit, I and my respected friend Ramaprasad Chanda have founded this Society at a small scale and at the very first opportunity we have visited in and around Rajsahi for exploring some of the places of Varendra Region. On our invitation, our respected friend Rakhhal Babu came from Calcutta in order to join with us.”<sup>50</sup> Respected Rahman Saheb has projected the incident of retaining 32 antiquities that got collected from the first exploration to Rajsahi, as the formation of the museum itself. However the stepping stone towards

an idea is not same as the concrete manifestation of that idea. Moreover, how can the courtyard of Pramadanath Ray's house, where those thirty two antiquities were placed, be termed as a museum? Definitely be cannot. Providing a modern definition of museum would further clarify it. According to the modern conception,

Museum=                      M—Man  
  
    U—Utilization  
  
    S—Surrounding  
  
    E—Exhibition  
  
    U—Understanding  
  
    M—Mankind

In other terms museum is that institution established to make the mankind conscious about the value of our animate and inanimate surroundings through the exhibition of the evidences originated from the creative and cognizant man.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately the collected antiquities could not be placed for exhibition before transporting them to the public library. Moreover, is it possible to segregate the official establishment of Varendra Research Museum from that of Varendra Research Society? Obviously be not. If we do so we have to push back the establishment of the Museum for quite a few years back, that is 1916, for the founders had never viewed them separately(at least till 1937) or never established them differently. They have established the one and all as the Varendra Research Society.<sup>52</sup> In reality, Varendra Research Museum is a significant and integral part of the Varendra Research Society itself. For all these reasons in the old annual reports of the Museum<sup>53</sup> or even in the notification no-3227mis, dated the 6<sup>th</sup> November 1937, issued by the Bengal Government<sup>54</sup>,

Varendra Research Society has been specifically mentioned to be the founder of Varendra Research Museum.

## Notes & References

1. Akshya Kumar Maitra (edited by Kshitish Chandra Sarkar), *The Ancient Monuments of Varendra (Monographs No- 7)*, VRS, 1949, p.5.
2. Nanigopal Majumdar (ed.), *Inscriptions of Bengal, Volume- III*, VRS, 1929, p. 104.
3. Sandhyakar Nandi, *Ramacaritam*, edited with Sanskrit commentaries and English translation by R. C. Majumdar, R. G. Basak & Nanigopal Banerjee, VRS, Rajshahi, 1939, pages.10, 24 & 111.
4. Nihar Ranjan Ray, *Bangaleer Itihash*, Calcutta, Desaj Sanskaran, 1403 B. S., p. 116.
5. Amitabha Bhattacharyya, *Historical Geography of Ancient and Early Medieval Bengal*, Calcutta, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1977, p. 45.
6. Abu Imam, 'Varendra Bhumir Pratna Charchar Itihash', in *Varendra Anchaler Itihash*, Varendra Anchaler Itihash grantha Pranayan committee, Gatidhara, Dacca, 1998, p. 493.
7. A. K.Maitra, *Uttarbanger Puratatta Sangraha*, in *Uttarbanger purtatta: Sankhipta Itihash*, University of North Bengal, 2005, p. 7.
8. *Annual Report for the year 1925- 26*.
9. E. Sreedharan, *A Textbook of Historiography*, orient longman, New Delhi, 2000, p. 388.
10. *Ibid*.

11. Charles Wilkins, *An Inscription on a pillar near Buddal*, in *Asiatic Researches* , Volume-1, 1788, pp. 131- 132.
12. S. K.Ray, *Presidential Address*, 1319 B. S.
13. Akshya Kumar Maitra (edited by Kshitish Chandra Sarkar), op. cit., p. 3.
14. Sarat Kumar Ray, *Presidential Address*, 1319 B. S.
15. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, 'Banglar Itihash Samondhe kaoyekti Katha', in *Bankim Rachanabalee*, editet by Yogesh Chandra Bagal, Calcutta, Sahitya Samsad, 2<sup>nd</sup> part, 1401, p. 291.
16. *Aitihashik Chitra*, *Rabindra Rachanabalee*, 5<sup>th</sup> part, Satyanarayan Prakashani, Calcutta, 2003 p. 599.
17. Rabindra Nath Tagore, Suchana, *Aitihashik Chitra* (edited by A. K. Maitra), First part, Rajshahi, 1899. P. ii.
18. *Aitihashik Chitra*, *Rabindra Rachanabalee*, op. cit., p. 601.
19. Saiffuddin Chowdhury and Tasikul Islam (ed.), *Rajshahi Pratibha*, Rajshahi Association, 2000, p. 18.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Bharatbarsa*, 1344 B. S., Magh, p. 282.
22. Dilwar Hossain, 'Akshaya Kumar Maitra and Bangla Sahitya', in the *Journal of the Varendra Research Museum*, No- 7, University of Rajshahi, 1985, p. 16.

23. Ramaprasad Chanda, *Itihase Bangali*(Collection of Essays of Ramaprasad Chanda), K. P. Bagchi & Company, Calcutta, 1981(1997), See Preface by Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, p. vii.
24. *Ibid*, p. 46.
25. Rabindra Nath Tagore, *op. cit.* Suchana(Introduction).
26. Bankim Chandra, Chattopadhyya, *op. cit.* 291.
27. Dilwar Hossain, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
28. Manobendu Bandopadhyaya, 'Nibedan(Preface),' in A. K. Maitra's *Gaudalekhamala*(Reprint), Sankrit Pustak Bhandar, Calcutta, 2004.
29. D. C.Sircar, 'Innaugural Address', *Early Historical Perspective of North Bengal*, edited by B. N. Mukherjee & P. K. Bhattacharyya, University of North Bengal, 1987, p. 10.
30. Ramaprasad Chanda, *Gaudarajamala*, VRS, 1912, republished by Nababharat publishers, Calcutta, 1975, See Utsargo (dedication).
31. N. N.Bhattacharyya, 'Ramaprasad Chanda' in the *Journal of the Varendra Research Museum*, Volume- 7, University of Rajshahi, p. 197.
32. R. C.Majumdar, *Nationalist Historians in Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, edited by C. H. Philips, Oxford University Press, London, 1961, p. 416.
33. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyya, *op. cit.*, p. 336.
34. Saiffuddin Chowdhury and Tasikul Islam (ed.), *Rajshahi Pratibha*, Rajshahi Association, 2000, p. 13.

35. Kazi Muhamad Michher, *Rajshahir Itihash* ( First & Second part), Gatidhara, Dacca, 2007, p. 88.
- 36.S. M. Abdul Latif, ‘Satabdir Aitihiyabadi Sangathan: Rajshahi Association’, in *Rajshahi Association Patrika*, First Part, 1987, p. 1.
- 37.Sarat Kunar Ray, *Presidential Address*, 1930.
- 38., Sarat Kumar Ray, *Presidential Address*, 1319 B.S.
39. Mukhlesur Rahman, ‘The Varendra Research Society and Museum Rajshahi’ in *Studies in Modern Bengal*, edited by S. A. Akanda, The Institute of Bangladesh Studies, Rajshahi University, 1981, p.283.
- 40., S. K. Ray, *Presidential Address*, 1319 B. S.
41. *Bangiya Shahitya Parisad Panjika*, 1320 B. S., p. 201.
42. Manirul Haque, ‘The Varendra Research Society and Museum: A Review in the New Millenium’ in the *Journal of the Varendra Research Museum*, Volume- IX, University of Rajshahi, 2004, p. 154.
43. Uttarbanga Shahitya Sammelan, the *Minutes* of the first session, pp. 38- 55.
- 44., *Bharatbarsa* 1344 B. S., Magh, p. 284.
- 45.Muhamad Sirajul Islam, *Banglar Museum Banglar Lokashilpa*, Biswa Shahitya Bhaban, Dacca, 2001, p. 12.
46. Mukhlesur Rahman, *op. cit.*, p. 248.
47. Manirul Haque, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

48. Muhammad Rajjakul Islam, 'Satobarse Varendra Gabesona Jadugar' in *Bangladesher Sanskritik Aitiya O Onyanya*, edited by Muhammad Sadique, Shikor, Dacca, 2007, p. 169.

49. Mukhlesur Rahman, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

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

51. Muhammad Sirajul Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

52. *Annual Report for the year 1935- 36*, See also *Annual Report for the year, 1949*.

53. *Annual Report for the year 1938- 39*.

54. *Annual Report for the year 1936- 37 & 1937- 38*.

\*\*\*