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## **Editor's Note**

*A note from the editor's desk is a routine practice in an academic exercise of this kind. Hence a few words. The Department of History of North Bengal University, is happy to publish the second volume of the journal 'Karatoya'. I take the occasion to express my gratitude to our Honourable Vice-chancellor, Professor A. Basumajumdar for extending the help necessary for its publication. I am indebted to the Departmental Head, Smt. A. Bagchi for the enthusiasm and keen interest she took in every stage of its publication.*

*I am grateful to all my colleagues for their valuable contributions to this journal. My special thanks to my ex-colleagues Prof. M. Mukhopadhyay and Prof. M. Bhattacharya for enhancing and enriching it through their articles.*

*I extend my thanks to Sri Somnath Choudhury and the staff of North Bengal University Press for printing it. Thanks also to Dr. D. K. Sarkar, Registrar of North Bengal University for publishing it and to Sri P. K. Ghosh, Finance Officer of the University for his kind cooperation. Thanks to Sri A. Saha of Suvam Printer, Siliguri too.*

*A wide range of themes, from the ancient to modern Indian history, spans the content of this journal. Keeping in mind the rich Indian heritage of art and paintings Prof. M. Mukherjee has given a vivid account of some aspects of manuscript paintings of Eastern India. The illustration have enhanced the cultural content of the essay. Dr. B. Sarkar's article covers an interesting detail of Sunga art highlighting some terracotta specimens from Bengal. Prof. M. Bhattacharya's reading and analysis of a stone plaque discovered from Gangarampur, South Dinajpur is revealing in the light of its association with a common and popular folk tale from the Panchatantra.*

*Sri. A. Bagchi's essay on 'Hastishastra' analyses one of the many branches of science in ancient India. She points out the importance of this animal in Indian history and stresses on the scientific study that revolved round its behaviour. Colourful replicas of paintings, used as sources, have added to the beauty of the essay.*

*Moving on to the modern period we come across Prof. R. Roy Sanyal's writing on the historiography of 1857. She gives a graphic view of the volumes of literature that have been published on this great event.*

*Prof. C. Chakraborty's article draws our attention to North Bengal. It focuses on the attempts made by the British government to culturally penetrate the native state through education. Higher education was just a part of the whole story.*

*The essay by Kaushik Bandopadhyaya, to quote his own words "is a critical yet realistic appraisal of Gandhi's role in politics and society of South Africa". This thought provoking article reveals certain limitations of Gandhi's South African policy serving the interest of the Indians only and that too of the upper class; The Black did not figure in his politics.*

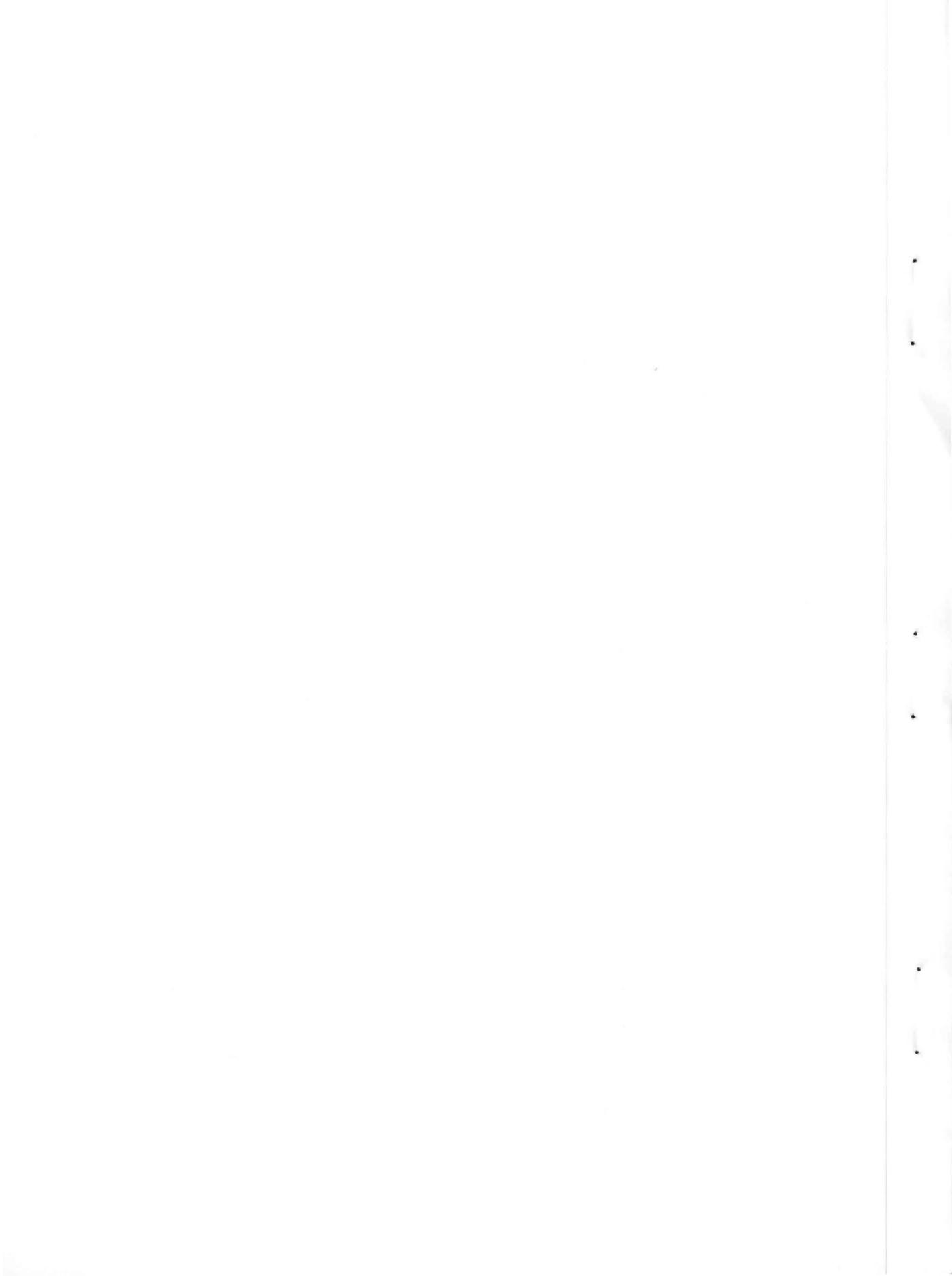
*The partition of Midnapur by S. Das, highlights an important but almost forgotten chapter in the history of the district.*

*Any lapse inadvertently made is regretted.*



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## **Sunga Art and Contemporary Terracotta**

Sun-images from Bengal

**Bijoy Kumar Sarkar**

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The advent of the Sunga rule in India ushered in an important phase in the domain of Indian art. The period saw a remarkable growth in purely Indian art and thus a remarkable development in Indian form of sculpture. The Sunga style of art, unlike the Mauryans, was not mainly the result of a single centralized patronage. The artistic activity during this period has to be viewed as a part of the process of the civilization that emerged in the Gangetic valley and central India.<sup>1</sup> Sunga art pieces can be classified into stone sculptures and terracotta. Sculptures of this age represent one of the most important epochs of the ancient Indian civilization.

Stone sculptures mainly belong to the Buddhist *stupa* railings from places like Sâncî (Stupa II), Bhârhut, Mathurâ, Kausâmbî, Bodhgayâ, Patna etc. The chief monuments of the Sunga period are the stone railings and sculptures of the Buddhist shrines at Sâncî, Bhârhut and Bodhgayâ. Apart from the *stupa* railing, there are many *yaksa* and *yaksî* images as also sculptures belonging to other cults around Mathurâ, Vidiâ, Kausâmbî, Patna etc. They are all dated, mainly on stylistic grounds, between the beginnings of the 2nd Century B.C. and the mid 1st Century B.C.

In order to have a better understanding of the importance of the Sunga art, a comparison of some of its remarkable features with those of the Maurya art as noticed by the art historians may be made.<sup>1a</sup> Maurya art is the product of the imperial court and personal will of the Maurya monarchs. The Sunga art aims at collective expression of the ideas and ideologies of the people of the *Madhyadesa* and eastern India and reflects their tastes and preferences. It is richer in social content and in the social components of its appeal and patronage. Its direction is more collective than individual and its motive more narrative and representational than suggestiveness and symbolical. Sunga religious and cultural ideology as evidenced in the sculptures of Bhârhut was more popular in character and more collective in its aim and origin.

The art of the Sunga period reflects more of the mind, tradition and culture-ideology of the larger sections of the people than Maurya art was capable of. Sunga art symbolizes the assertion of the tribal and primitive elements or a culture against the demonstration of Maurya dynasty and court largely under the influence of a foreign culture-complex, or more correctly speaking, within the orbit of an international West-Asiatic culture-complex. The art of the Sunga period reflects a stage when an art of folk and tribal origin and affiliation came to attain, for obvious reasons, recognitions in the hands of a widening religious brotherhood patronized mostly by the landed and commercial middle classes and partly by the nobility and the rich mercantile classes of *Madhyadesa*. Unlike Maurya court art, which, as seen in the Sâncî and Sarnath lions, is pre-Aryan, but not wholly indigenous, the art of the time of the Sungas is born of India's own seed with deep and intimate ethnic and local roots. The horizontal and vertical panel arrangement of scenes in continuous narration at Bhârhut and later on at Bodhgayâ, Sâncî and elsewhere was directly adopted from scroll-paintings or popular and tribal tradition.

The human form is conspicuous by its absence in the hitherto known examples of Mauryan art while in the art of the Sungas, the human form plays an important role; but it is accepted and treated merely as one of the many components of nature. While Maurya art is conventional, conscious, courtly and sophisticated, Sunga art is shy, modest, naive, popular and perhaps also primitive in a way. The general tone of the Sunga art of Bhârhut is modest, sober and restrained which is an important characteristic of the art. It is observed that Maurya art is symbolic and monumental while Sunga art is narrative and representational in small segments and minor key. The Maurya art is expressive of a mind highly urban, sophisticated and international in outlook, while the Sunga art reflects a national outlook and popular character. It is for the first time that a traditional art is carved. The art of the Sungas as evidenced at Bhârhut is nothing but the fixation of the basically tribal and primitive art of the people in permanent material. i.e. stone. A simple awareness of life enlivens and illumines the art of the Sungas; a consciousness of earthly power, dignity and grandeur impart to the art of the Mauryas its monumental strength and heavy compactness. These essential differences reflect two different culture-ideologies.

Asoka had pronounced himself not only against *samâjas*, but also against all kinds of popular religious demonstrations. He preferred representation in art of royal or religious or

auspicious symbols and thus his method precluded any opportunity for the display of the arts and art-tradition of the people. Under the Sunga rule, the artist depicted the life in its true form and reality. The reliefs of Bhârhut provide glimpses of the contemporary Indian life and attitude towards life. These do not exclude *samâjas* or festive gatherings. Ceremonial religious procession as a method or popular religious education was not abandoned. The stories were carved exhaustively, and no single important detail was left out. Sunga art invariably reflects the current popular tastes, ideas, preferences and traditions of the various grades of the ordinary folk. With the artists of the Maurya court the third dimension was not a problem they had ever to grapple with. Whether in reliefs or in large-size independent figures, there is, in Bhârhut, evidence of a conflict and a resultant compromise between two dimensional flat surface on the one hand and three dimensional vision on the other. This explains much of the shyness, the modesty and the hesitancy that one notices in these reliefs. Maurya naturalism relies essentially on the outer aspect of things. Sunga naturalism, on the other hand, does not ignore the outer aspect of things but links it in an inherent connectedness with a pre--existent situation. This view of the visible world gives to Sunga Art its lively and fluid character.

An important characteristic of the Sunga sculpture is the flowing linear rhythm that binds all isolated objects in one continuous stream of life. A fluid linear rhythm remained the keynote of the Bhârhut style. The Indian artist during the Sungas did not observe the laws of perspective and horizon. A number of figures in a composition were placed side by side and not behind each other. The figures are not shown in such sizes and proportions as may optically be suggested by their nearness and distance. On the contrary, they are big or small according to their meaning in the story represented. It is said that some figure-sculptures at Bhârhut are very primitive. But the art cannot in any sense be called 'primitive' or 'folk' as the artists of Bhârhut and Bodhgayâ had carved figures in a large variety of attitudes. Sunga art is practically a negation of all that Maurya art stands for. Maurya art reflects the exhaustion of a tradition born outside of its own people. Sunga art reflects the lively enfoldment of a tradition born of the blood and flesh of the people to whom it belongs. It is different in motive and direction, in their form, technique and significance. Sunga art is the first organized and integrated art activity of the Indian people as a whole and stands directly counterpoised to the court-art of the Mauryas. It reflects for the first time the results of the ethnic, social and religious fusion and integration that had been evolved through centuries on the Indian soil, more particularly in the *Madhyadewa*.

The Sunga period is also marked by the emergence of mould-made terracotta plaques in the cities of the Gangetic valley. Stella Kramrisch has divided early historic terracotta into 'ageless' and 'time-bound'.<sup>2</sup> The time-bound ones are low relief plaques cast in moulds, bearing a close resemblance to the contemporary stone sculpture in style. And again they undergo stylistic changes too. They mainly depict the cult gods and goddesses, *mithunas* (amorous couples), *dampatis* (husband and wife) and also decorative scenes. They served mainly the religious purpose; however, secular themes were also given importance. The main bulk of such terracotta is from Mathurâ. Ahichchatra, Kausâmbî, Rajghat, Buxar, Patna, Vaisali, Lauriya-Nandangarh, Chandraketugarh and Tamluk. They are dated from the beginning of the 2nd century B.C. to the close of the 1st century B.C.

There are at least three distinct styles in terracotta of the Sunga period:<sup>3</sup> (1) Mathurâ and Kauûambî terracotta are akin in style. Such terracotta is also found in Chandraketugarh and Tamluk. (2) Buxar terracotta (3) Patna terracotta. All the three styles betray their own traditional speciality of rendering human figures. Thus, there were distinct units of sculptural activities to meet with the increasing demand in the region. The socio-economic background for such artistic activities was not one and the same for both stone sculptures and terracotta. Sculptural activity in stone, being costlier, needed organized economic patronage to bear its expenses.

The emergence of terracotta art in time-bound style was closely linked with the early historic urbanization. Mere archaic figurines did not serve this purpose; hence the potter started modeling the cult of gods and goddesses in human garb so as to suit the urban tastes. We are led to a somewhat similar conclusion from the following facts:<sup>4</sup> (i) whatever time-bound terracotta has been recovered till today are all from the urban sites and that too only in the Gangetic valley; (ii) The technique of casting them in mould was necessitated on account of the large scale production. The moulds have been found at many excavated sites, which points to the location of such industries in the urban centers; (iii) Terracotta was even traded from one city to the other. Hence, terracotta typical of a region or site is found in other regions or site; (iv) Another factor inter-linked with the above points is the fact that terracottas were meant for private use. A time-bound terracotta plaque is an extremely decorated piece, flat at the back, sometimes even with holes to hang it on the wall. Even the icons of cult-goddesses and gods

seem to have served the secondary purpose as a decorative piece. Thus, the customers presumably were *nagarakas* (city-dwellers). Since the entire business thrived depending upon the taste of the urban consumers, their taste and choice also controlled the artist's rendering. Thus the artist here was quicker in responding to the changing fashion than the stone sculptor.

The sites in West Bengal supplying terracotta of the Sunga age are Tilda, Harinarayanpur, Tamluk, Farakka, Chandraketugarh, Pokharna, Mangalkot, Bangarh and Haroa. The themes and subjects of the terracotta art of Bengal are remarkable for their variety. They represent the manifold affairs of life that the artists and craftsman could see around them as well as conceive in their imagination. The examples of terracotta art so far recovered from the ancient sites of Bengal may conveniently be classified under the following types with due emphasis on motifs and themes: (i) Divinities and *Vyantara Devatas*; (ii) Toys, animal figures, etc.; (iii) Narrative plaques; (iv) The *mithuna* or the erotic motifs; (v) Motifs of animals, birds and plants appearing on plaques; (vi) Seals and scaling; (vii) Decorations and motifs appearing on pottery.

Most of the terracotta (moulded or hand-made) from Chandraketugarh and Tamluk may be dated, on the stylistic ground, to the period from 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. to 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. when these two port-cities were blessed with the prosperity of the Indo-Roman trade and its resultant deep impact of urbanization.<sup>5</sup> The impact of these two is unmistakable not so much in the form of the terracotta from those places, but in their content. From the occurrence of one hole or more at the top or back of some terracotta plaque it seems that the plaques were used for the decoration of the niches or the walls of the residential houses of the city-dwellers of Chandraketugarh and Tamluk.

Let's now speak of a few terracotta specimens of the Sunga age from Bengal, which depict the Sun-god. A well-preserved terracotta mould (now in the Ashutosh Museum, Kolkata) displaying the deity hails from Tamluk in the district of Midnapore,<sup>6</sup> which is stylistically assignable to the Sunga period. The god is in rigid in *samapadasthanaka* pose on a highly raised platform. He stands in a frontal pose in the Sunga style of art, in which the two straightened legs look like the two solid pillars with the area in between the knee and the feet being thicker in appearance than those of the thigh and middle of thigh.

He is bedecked with round ear-rings as well as a heavy necklace decorated with floral medallions. He is also adorned with armlets and beaded round-shared bracelets arranged in four strands. He is shown with a *sirastraka* slightly tapering to an ornamented top. The god wears a thick waistband studded with small circular flower-like objects and other auspicious symbols like small cylindrical amulets tied up with it. In the middle of the waistband there are knotted *katisutras* in small cylindrical forms. It is also furnished with small tinkling bells. The waist-girdle of the god is slightly different from the ones worn by other figures of the divinity in lower West Bengal. In place of the *katisutra* of three strands the waistband in question is almost made of a single thick strap with the tied knot in the middle being highly projected.

The deity holds long stalks of full-blossomed lotus in each of the two hands that are brought to the level of the loins. One of the lotuses rests on the lower part of the stele near the middle of the right thigh while the other one is found on the left side of the stele beside the left arm. The right hand is bent at the elbow and placed on the upper part of the waist. The left hand is also bent at the elbow and placed on the waistband.

The most interesting feature of the specimen is that wings have been arranged beautifully and artistically on both the corner sides of the stele beside the upper parts of the arms.<sup>7</sup> The association of wings with the image of Sûrya seems to have originated from the Rigvedic concept of the Sun-god. In some of the Rigvedic hymns he has been described as the beautiful winged celestial bird *Garutman*.<sup>8</sup> Two conical-shaped objects in the form of cluster of plantains representing the row of bananas are displayed on either side of the lower part of the stele. One is depicted on the left side below the lotus-stalk while the other one is displayed on the right side of it just above the full-blown lotus. The plantain tree is traditionally connected with the sun-worship. In Bengal there is a solar vow known as *Maghamandala Sûrya-vrata* in which the banana tree is worshipped as the symbolic representation of the Sun god.<sup>9</sup> A pitcher-like auspicious object is displayed near the elbow of the right side of the god on the pericarp of the petalled lotus. There is an ear of corn sprouting forth from it. The stele is artistically so designed that it makes it appear almost like a circular disc if an imaginary line is drawn through the region of the knees of the figure. This sort of stele depicting the figure of male other than the winged ones hardly occurs in the entire terracotta collections from this region.

The winged figure represents the Vedic Sun god at its nascent stage or iconic development.<sup>10</sup> This is definitely a rare and very special type of iconic representation generally not found in the vast mass of terracotta figurines, which, more or less, follows a traditional pattern or mould with a certain degree of indigenous idiom punched in local variations.

Tamluk has yielded another terracotta plaque<sup>11</sup> depicting the bust of a male who is standing frontally in the Sunga style of art. The portion below the breast is missing. He wears a head-dress provided with fillets and chains of beads. He wears tubular ear-ornaments with beaded strings, a torque and a flowing necklace. Moreover he is provided with out-flung wing with floral designs attached to his right arm. The wing on the left is absent due to mutilation. Here the wing, for instance, symbolizes super-human character of the person concerned. In view of the concept of the Sun-bird of the Vedic Aryans,<sup>12</sup> this figure under examination may represent an image of the Sun-god.

It is well-known that Chandraketugarh at Berachampa in the district or 24- Parganas, 23 miles North-East of Calcutta, is rich in early historical materials. The antiquities recovered from there included a large number of Sunga terracotta of striking beauty. Among such terracotta, a unique figure of Sûrya (7.5" x 3") belonging to 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. deserves mention.<sup>13</sup> Here the deity is seated in European style on a beautifully fashioned chariot. The celestial car placed on a raised circular platform and drawn by four galloping horses, two of which are centrally placed and the rest of the two shown in profile.

The god has an oval-shaped face with sharp features. His lips are relaxed and the smile is divine. The eyes are very protruding and round with large double outline; the eye-brows are strongly accentuated and ridged. The nose is straight, though not prominent. The god is adorned with a pair of large round earrings that reach its shoulders. He also wears a round-shaped turbaned crown typical of the period and a garland with a pendant. The turban and jewelry of the figure as well as the sensitive and almost two dimensional modeling of the figures bear clear traces of the plastic art of the early Sunga period.

There is a sacred thread thrown across the right shoulder of the bare-bodied god. It consists of three strands and is very thick in shape unlike the ones comparatively of thinner sizes that is generally found in other terracotta from ancient *Vanga*. Two hands of the god

brought close to the lap are depicted in such a fashion as if the god is holding the reins of the horses. The right palm is placed on the lap with the anguish and the left palm is similarly positioned. It sufficiently indicates the obsession of the indigenous artists at moulding the icons with such iconographic attributes. Behind the head of the deity is found a circular nimbus elegantly rimmed with decorative lines of dotted motifs in two bands.

The god is flanked by two protrusive females ardently clinging to him by the neck. They stand for *Usa* and *Pratyusa*, the celebrated wives of *Sûrya*.<sup>14</sup> *Usa* and *Pratyusa* are bedecked with circular ear-rings and have their coiffure arranged in a stylistic shape of a cape-like head-dress. Between the dangling legs of the god is depicted his charioteer Aruna only in upper bust in a diminutive scale. Aruna wears a small cape--like headdress. On the left corner of the platform mentioned above is found a funny torso of a monstrous demon (the symbol of darkness?) being trampled down under the rolling wheel of the car of Heaven.

The number of horses (.e. four) drawing the chariot of the Sun-god in the Chandraketugarh terracotta is quite interesting. Four horses are also found depicted in the *Sûrya* images on a Mauryan piece of pottery from Patna,<sup>15</sup> from Saptasamudri well (D 46) now in the Mathurâ Museum,<sup>16</sup> on the Bodhgayâ temple-railing (1st century B. C.),<sup>17</sup> on the Buddhist cave of Bhaja near Pune, Western Ghats (1st or 2nd century B.C.),<sup>18</sup> in the relief of Lala Bhagat (Kanpur, U.P.; 2nd century A. D.)<sup>19</sup> and in the *Sûrya* relief of Anantagumpha Jaina cave of Khandagiri (Orissa, 1st century A. D.).<sup>20</sup> Four horses are also found depicted on the railing of *Bhârhut stupa* as drawing the chariot of *Raja Prasenjit* of Kosala on his visit to the *Punyasala* of Buddha.<sup>20a</sup> It is a highly controversial point whether this particular number of the horses of *Sûrya*'s chariot was of purely indigenous tradition or derived from some foreign tradition. According to Cunningham,<sup>21</sup> the four horses and the general execution in the early Sun images largely bear a resemblance to the representation of Helios - the Greek Sun god. J. N. Banerjea, on the other hand, attributed it to the Rigvedic description of *Sûrya* as drawn by one, three, four or seven horses.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, the number of horses of the Sun's chariot in the *Rigveda*<sup>23</sup> is seven and no particular importance is given to number four. Further, iconographic literatures of India make specific mention of seven horses for *Sûrya*'s chariot. On the other hand, the *Avesta* refers to the Iranian Sun god Mithra as traversing the wide firmament in his four-horsed chariot.<sup>24</sup> The Greek Sun god Apollo or Helios is also depicted riding on a chariot

driven by four horses. Mithra is known to have been represented in human form for the first time in the Hellenistic courts in association with Helios. Therefore, it is suggested that the sun-images of the early period came to be evolved under the Hellenistic impact and in this tradition, the Mithraic tradition was already mixed up. However, the influence of the Hellenistic tradition was confined to the four horse-motifs only. The features of the Sun god along with attendants like Usa and Pratyusa and the chariot are very much Indian in character.

A part of the terracotta chariot with remnants of four horses with head plumes and ornamental harnesses discovered from Bhita of the same period<sup>25</sup> is a close parallel of the Chandraketugarh specimen. The symbolism and the design as expressed in this specimen also recall the contemporary similar motif of the cave-sanctuary of Bhaja in the Western Ghats of the 2nd century B.C.<sup>26</sup> However, the Bhaja Sûrya is a part of a unique relief and as such depicted in a spirit more characterized by the narrative instinct of the sculptor than any sort of a pronounced impulse of *bhakti*. The Chandraketugarh Sun-relief, on the other hand, demonstrates the deep-rooted element of the *bhakti* cult that was literally sweeping the country during the pre-Gupta period.

Chandraketugarh has yielded another terracotta plaque (fragmentary) belonging to 1st century B.C.,<sup>27</sup> which depicts the celestial chariot drawn by the fiery running steeds of the sun-god ready to traverse the heaven. This evinces an intimate appreciation of the artist that recalls the famed four-horsed car of the Sun-god at Bodhgayâ and a similar effect created by the same painted theme at Bamian in Afganistan.

Another 1st century B.C. terracotta plaque from Chandraketugarh shows a divine horse-rider and an emblem recognizable as a *chakradhvaja*.<sup>28</sup> The rider is donned with a *dhoti* secured at his waist by a knot in the otherwise bare-body. Another mutilated specimen from Tamluk depicts a winged and prancing caparisoned horse with a rider in princely ornaments.<sup>29</sup> The riders in both the specimens may represent the Sun-god. In the Sun-temple at Konarak (Orissa), a Sûrya figure known by the name of *Haridâsva* appears on a horse in the role of a *pârsvadevatâ* placed on the outside niche of one of the walls of the main shrine.<sup>30</sup>

In view of the above discussion, a few words need to be said. It is well-known that the Sungas were Brâhmanas and greatly encouraged the Brahmanic religion and literature. Religion

exercised a powerful influence on the art of the period, which is reflected in the terracotta that have already been discussed. The terracotta under discussion is akin in style to those from Mathurâ and Kausâmbî and belongs to the time bound one, which generally served the religious purpose and here they depict the solar god Sûrya. The close link of the emergence of the time-bound terracotta with the early historic urbanization, the discovery of the terracotta in question from the port city of Chandraketugarh and Tamruk and their adornment with profuse ornaments indicate that these objects were meant for the private use of the local city-dwellers most probably for the religious purpose or even decorative purpose too. In the sort of civic sophistication and delicate tastefulness that are unmistakable in those terracotta, one can easily see the social ideology of the upper and middle class patrons and donors.

It is evident that the iconographic attributes of Sûrya in Bengal, in most cases, has followed the ones held by the deity elsewhere in the country. However, some of the attributes seems to have been drawn from the existing local belief, faiths, customs and practices of the land. The indigenously lay in the additional attributes like those of the *mangala-ghata* with sprouting leaves, plantain tree, etc. These additional attributes attest to the local socio-economic needs and practices of the society of ancient *Vanga*, which was primarily an agrarian one. Further, the transformation from the archaic representation into the higher plane of iconic representation as found in the Chandraketugarh sun-image points to the fact that an element of *bhakti* cult seems to have weighed very much with the artists of ancient *Vanga*.

### **Notes and References**

1. Hegde, Rajaram, *Sunga Art: Cultural Reflections*, Delhi, 2002. p. xx.
  - a. Ray, Nihar Ranjan, *Maurya and Sunga Art*, Calcutta, 1965, pp. 51-72; Mathur, Vijay Kumar, *Art and Culture under the Āungas*, Delhi, 1996, pp. 41-46; Kramrisch, Stella, *Traditions of Indian Art*, p. 31; Havell, E.B., *Indian Sculpture and Painting*, London, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1928, p. 96.
2. Kramrisch, Stella, *Indian Sculptures*, Calcutta, 1939. pp. 89-110.
3. Hegde, *op. cit.* p. xxv.

4. *Ibid.*
5. Ray, Nihar Ranjan, *Bângâlir Itihâas (Adiparva)*, Reprinted, Calcutta, 1359 B.S., p. 686.
6. Biswas, S.S., *Terracotta Art of Bengal*. Delhi, 1981, p. 79; Basu. Sakti Kali, *Development of Iconography in pre-Gupta Vanga*, Calcutta, 2004, p.74, Fig. 20.
7. The concept of wings for the Sun-god is familiar in Egyptian and Iranian art and religion of yore. In Assyrian art *Ashur*, the eagle-headed winged solar deity, appears with eminence. The tradition of the cult of the winged god of effulgence had achieved a rare sublimity and grandeur in the cult of the Persian god *Ahur Mazda* (see Donald A. Mackenzie, *Myths of Babylonia and Assyria*). Interestingly, two terracottas depicting winged *Apsaras* are reported from Chandraketugarh and a number of terracotta representing winged elephants, rams, horses, etc. hail from Tamruk and Bodhgayâ. The form of the winged creatures is said to have been borrowed from Assyrian source' (vide Grunwedel, *Buddhist art in India*. pp. 16--18).
8. *divyah sa suparna garutman ... Rigveda*, I.164.46.
9. Deb, Chittaranjan, *Vanglar Palligiti*, Calcutta, p. 181.
10. Quite a good number of the above types of winged figures are widely found in different parts of ancient *Vanga*. There are some similar winged figures in the collections of the Ashutosh Museum of Indian Art (Kolkata), which points out their significant relationship with this particular mould from Tamruk. Their Accession Numbers are T6236, T8264 and T8838.
11. Mandal, Prasanta Kumar. *Interpretation of Terracotta from Tamralipta*, Tamruk (Midnapore), 1988, pp. 24-25.
12. Dhavilkar, M.K., *Masterpieces of Indian Terracottas*, Bombay, 1977, p. 54, pl. 33.
13. Dasgupta, P.C., 'Terracottas from Chandraketugarh', *Lalitakala*, No.6, Oct. 1959, p. 46; *Indian Archaeology*, 1955-56, pl. LXXII-B.
14. They are also found along with the sun-image on an upright post of the Bodhgayâ temple of 1st cent. B.C. (vide Coomaraswami, A. K., *History of Indian and Indonesian*

*Art*, Boston, 1927, p. 32).

15. *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. III, No.2, p.125; Singh, Bindheswari Prasad, *Bharatiya Kala Ko Bihar Ki Den*, p. 82.
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18. *Ibid*. p. 25; Saraswati. S. K., *A Survey of Indian Sculptures*, Calcutta, 1957, p. 57.
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27. Biswas, S.S., *Terracotta Art of Bengal*, Delhi, 1981, p. 85, pl. XIb.
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## SOME ASPECTS OF THE EAST INDIAN MANUSCRIPT PAINTINGS

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The three most important sources for the study of the East Indian Manuscript Paintings are : (i) the dated illustrated Manuscript Paintings of the Pala Sena Period (ii) the undated illustrated Manuscript Paintings of the said period & (iii) the dated Nepalese Manuscript Paintings. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century. the corpus of material was first exposed to the scholarly world. Rajendralal Mitra (in his Catalogue of the Library of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1882) and Cecil Bendall (Catalogue of the University Library Cambridge, UK, 1883) compiled and edited the vast mass of palm leaf manuscripts discovered from Bengal-Bihar and Nepal respectively. A number of eminent indologists, thereafter have made substantial and significant contributions in the study of the East Indian Manuscript paintings in their different aspects. In the field of iconographic study it was A. Foucher (*Etude Sur L Iconographie Bouddhique de LInde*, 2 Parts, Paris, 1900 & 1905 ), followed by S.K.Saraswati (*Tantrayana Art An Album*, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1977), D.C. Bhattacharyya and others have made critical work on the subject. In the study on the stylistic issues related to the Manuscript Paintings have been discussed by Stella Kramrisch (*Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, Vol. I, No.2; N.R. Ray (in the *History of Bengal*, Vol I & *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol 1.5, in the relevant Chapters ); SK.Saraswati (*East Indian Miniature Painting*, Chhavi 1, V 01.1, Benaras 1971; Palayuger *Chitrakala* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1978), P.Pal & MeechPekarik (*Buddhist Book Illuminations*, New york, 1988) and others.

The East Indian Mss. Paintings of both the dated and undated ones unfold fascinating subjects of the history and culture of the time. In the Eastern Indian Mss. of Bengal-Bihar such dates are given with reference to the year of one or other Pala ruler apparently to be counted from the year of accession to the throne. But from the Mss. the exact year of accession of none of the Pala rulers can be determined with certainty. Hence, the chronological data provide in the colophons of the Mss. is 'approximate' not conclusive.

The dated murals provide substantial information about the stylistic trend of the East Indian miniature and their chrnological sequences. An examination of their sequence will help to understand that they are evenly distributed over the period and the style of the Mss. Painting

remained active from circa tenth to the fourteenth centuries A.D. The earliest known dated East Indian Manuscript Painting assigned to the year 6 of the reign of Mahipala (1) (c.980 - 1028 A.D.), while the last one is designated to one Madhusena (of the Sena dynasty) of the Saka year 1211 (c. 1289 A.D). The dates mentioned in the colophon of the Mss. are to be taken as the date of copying of the sacred texts concerned. The illustrated Mss. dated in the regnal years of the Palas are : Mahipala (1), Gopala (II), Nayapala (c.1027\28 -43 A.D.), Ramapala (c.1072- 1126 A.D.) and Govindapala (c. 1161 -65 A.D.) and the contemporary ruling dynasties of the Chandras, the Varmans afterwards the Senas of Bengal. In the geneology of the Palas there were two rulers in the name of Mahipala and three rulers bearing the names of Gopala, obviously separated from the other by a pretty long gap of time.

In the proto-medieval period, India and Nepal had close cultural relations for historical and geographical reasons. The Nepalese Mss supply firm dates in an era known as Nepalese samvat ( commenced :&om 879-80 A.D ). Dated Nepalese Mss. are extremely significant at least for two reasons. First, they help to suggest the extension of East Indian style of Mss. Painting, and secondly, for cross-checking the chronological and genealogical issues relating to the East Indian miniatures. The Nepalese Mss. are written in Newari script. The earliest known dated illustrated Nepalese Mss. is in Nepali samvat 135 ( 1015 A.D.), while the last available one is NS 385 (1265 A.D.). At least three Nepalese illustrated Mss. have labels, that describe the subject s depicted in the miniature.

The illustrated East Indian Mss. of the Pala-Sena period and the Nepalese Mss. are immensely valuable for the study of the state of Buddhism of the period in the one hand and the Buddhist art and iconography on the other. Occasionally, the details portrayed in some paintings provide information about some lost types of East Indian medieval architecture as well.

The Mss. are mainly the copies of the sacred Buddhist texts. In the lists of illuminated Mss. Paintings, the majority of them are copies of the sacred *Astahasrika Prajnaparamita*. In terms of numerical position the texts available are : the East Indian dated Mss. 16; in the undated series it is 4; in the list of dated Nepalese Mss. the number is 11. Hence, the total number of the texts known is 31. In addition to that one Ms. of a larger version of the text known as the *Panchavimsati-sahasrika-Prajnaparamita* is also available. The other Mss. in terms of popularity are the copies of the sacred text Pancharaksha. The number of dated illuminated from Eastern India is 7; while the undated one is 3. Nepalese Mss. of the text are yet to be known. The aggregate number of the illuminated *Pancharaksha* Mss. is 10. The remaining Mss. Paintings are the copies of the sacred and Tantric texts viz., the Dharini and others whose total number is about 18.

The approximate number of Paintings found in the Mss. are more than five hundred, if not more. In addition, a substantial number of painted wooden covers have been discovered, whose figure is about fifty or more. It is clear hence, the total number of Paintings in the Mss. and their wooden covers are a commanding one and obviously deserves serious consideration too.

In terms of the theme or subject matter, the Paintings depicted the incidents in the Life of the Master(Buddha), Bodhisattvas in their different manifestations and hosts of Buddhist divinities both male and female, with their unique iconic types and varieties. The very important question that strikes one about the theme or content of the Mss. Paintings is their relevance with the texts. As has been noted above that the greater portions of the painted material belong to the *Prajnaparamita* Mss. It is of interest to note that the basic content in which the text delves, is the virtue of transcendental wisdom, and so to say, is an area of pure metaphysics. This being so they do not suppose to provide any scope for pictorial representations, in the Mss. of such kind of texts. But the paradox is that by far numerically the largest number of paintings of Eastern India and Nepal came from the Mss. of these texts. The representations of the goddess Prajnaparamita the personification and embodiment of transcendental wisdom, which invariably appears among the illustrations might have certain relevance to the texts. The themes widely represented in a schematic and conventional manner are the Eight great incidents in the life of Buddha viz., Nativity; Enlightenment; First Sermon; Offering honey to the Monkey; Miracle at Sravasti ; Taming of the mad elephant Nalagiri; Descent from the *Trayastrimsa* heaven and *Parinirvana*. Frankly speaking, they have hardly any connection with the *Prajnaparamita* text itself. The extensive pantheons of the *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* Buddhism, from which again a large number of themes had been drawn, is also of “no concern of the *Prajnaparamita* text”. The question that has been raised by some scholars is that how can one account for this apparent lack of connection between the illustrations and the text of the Mss. There must have been a conscious motive behind this vast mass of painted material.

The Eastern Indian Mss and their Nepalese counterparts were the reflections of the contemporary popular Buddhism which was perhaps, an assimilation of *Prajnaparamita* and *Tantra*. The Pala monarchs patronized both the Schools of thought and their patronage made this combination possible, leading Buddhism to a creed of esoterism. Edward Conze is right when he says “the ideas represented in these illustrations have grown out of the teachings of the *Prajnaparamita* itself, at least they emanate from the spirit behind it.” As a treatise expounding the virtue of transcendental wisdom it was held to be highly sacred and the Mss. of the texts were always meant to be recited and worshipped. The Pala Mss. bear records of such recitations and evidence of their worship through centuries. The texts categorically

recommends the writing, reading and reciting of the book as a source of religious merit and enjoins the adoration and worship of the text with flowers, wreaths, incense, rows of lamps and other ritualistic items. Hence, the book itself was invested with a magical power perhaps helping in the attainment of the transcendental wisdom. This concept is also reflected in the epigraphic referenc (to the Mss. of religious texts) as dharmaratnas. In the frequently repeated statement of the donors of the Mss. that such acts of merit might enable all beings, beginning with the preceptor, the teacher and the parents, to attain the transcendental wisdom. To this the Mahayana attitude was added the belief propagated by the Tantra that one has extinguished one's individuality in emptiness (*sunyata*) which is the ultimate reality according to the *Prajnaparamita*. Buddhism was gradually transformed, perhaps, into an esoteric creed. The East Indian Paintings, belongs to a period when that creed was showing its optimum vitality. The illustrations then, in whatever Mss. they appear with any theme, were meant as " supports for a meditation which aimed ultimately at the full enlightenment of a Buddha". The underlying concept was the devotion that leads to ultimate reality.

The principal representation in the *Pancharaksha* Mss. (7 dated are known) are the Five Protective goddesses: *Mahapratisara*, *Mahamayuri*, *Mahasahasrapramardini*, *Mahasitavati* and *Mahamantranusarini* of the *Pancharakshamandala* and of the *Dharini* texts. These texts themselves belong to the creed of esoteric Buddhism and the avowed purpose of the illustrations was to "conjure up these divinities in order to help the worshipper in identifying himself with them." In a way, the obvious connection between the illustrations and the texts offer the clue "to a proper comprehension of the import of the illustrations in other Mss., including those of the *Prajnaparamita*" Indeed, they follow a well ordered pattern of thought.

It has been held by art historians that the Pala sculptural art had its foundation on the Gupta Classical idiom. The Pala Paintings in the Eastern School likewise have its beginning in the Indian tradition of Painting of the Gupta Classical epoch, seen in its best in the murals of the Ajanta and Bagh caves. The testimony of Fo-kuo-chi relating to the drawing of pictures, probably miniatures at Tamralipti (modem Tamluk in the Midnapur Dist., W. Bengal) by Fahien, in the early 4th century A.D. followed by the evidence of the Harshacharita (by Banabhatta) about the inclusion of "boxes and painted picture boards and pieces of painted cloth", in the list of presents sent to Harshavardhana by Bhaskarvarman of Kamrupa (Assam) in the early seventh century A.D. indicates a tradition of miniatuire Painting in Eastern India in the Gupta and PostGupta times. As the Eastern School of Painting came into being in the Pala epoch, it had its antecedent in the Classical tradition. The earliest extant examples will strengthen the hypothesis. The East Indian style of Mss. Painting reached its climax in the Pala-Sena period(

c. 750- 1205 A.D.). The Western Indian miniatures started at the same time, the earliest dated one is 1060 A.D.

As opposed to the plastic conception of the 'Classical', the 'medieval trend in its full import emerged in the proto-medieval period, is entirely linear". The lines again are angular and brittle losing much of their modeling capacity". The three dimensional art of sculpture in the proto-medieval period seems to have been little affected by the medieval concept. At least the impact was not so strongly felt in the two-dimensional art of Painting, as the latter was more susceptible to the linear trend of the medieval. The story of proto-medieval Painting, is the story of gradual subversion of the Classical norm by the medieval. Throughout the period, as the visuals of the miniatures testify, there was a swing between the Classical and medieval. The idiom is clearly evident in the early dated Paintings of the Pala period, namely, the Asiatic Society Mss. (No. 4713 ) dated in the year 6 of the reign of Mahipala (I). Here the illumination narrated the Birth of Buddha. With regard to the treatment of colour, they gradually becomes thinner with a corresponding loss of plastic feeling. The modeling capacity of the line, though valid till the end, grows weaker and to a certain extent swayed by the sharp and angular linearism of the medieval trend. The Mss. Painting of the c. eleventh- twelfth century dates, display the swing between the two vital and opposing trend. The medieval elements, as a conscious factor, is known to have made its intrusion in the East Indian Mss. Paintings of the pre-Ramapala (c.1072-1126 A.D.) period, and is clearly evident in the miniature of the *Astahasrika-Prajnaparamita* of the year 5 of Mahipala (II)'s reign.

The colours of the East Indian Mss. Paintings were confined to white, yellow, blue, red, black and green. They were generally derived from minerals, ochres and a few other substances. To ascertain the actual ingredients of the colour of the Paintings generally used, a proper scientific investigation is necessary. In fine it may be stated that the wide range of information available in the different Silpa texts about the Miniature Paintings as a whole, combined with the objective and critical study of the visuals in the illustrated Mss., one may arrive at several significant and interesting findings with a reasonable amount of certainty.

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## **A Stone Plaque from *Gangarampur***

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The story of the flying turtle and the geese is a famous one. Its fame reached almost every corner of the earth. This is a story from *Panchatantra* which had an enormous popular appeal and wide readership. The stories have been classified as fables once preserved in the oral traditions of a people. But their universal appeal knows no borders.

Probably these stories existed in the Indian subcontinent in the early centuries of the Christian era and are still alive in the oral tradition. They were like the stories of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* recited by the *Kathakas* and spread far and wide all over the country. The stories of Panchatantra were carried beyond India to Persia, Arabia, Syria and translated and retold over and over again. They reached Europe through Greece. Tradition recalls the name of one *Vishnusharman* who is said to have composed them. But they were the stories of deep collective experience and insight a society gathers over hundreds of years. Therefore the name of *Vishnusharman* is but a myth.

These stories have several versions. In its north-western version, some of the stories are found in the *Brihat-Katha Manjari* and *Katha –Sarit-Sagara*. There are two versions from Kashmir, the earliest being the *Tantrakhayaka* and two *Jaina* texts. The third is the southern version from which grew the Nepalese *Panchatantra* and the *Hitopadesha*.

In this paper the writer intends to project a stone plaque containing the same story of the geese and the turtle discovered from *Gangarampur, Balurghat* in *South Dinajpur*. This is a chance discovery from a region which is extremely rich in archaeological evidence. Here we have *Bangarh*, the earliest site in the present day North Bengal, excavated by the University of Calcutta in 1943. The site has been identified as the ancient city of *Kotivarsha* or *Devikota*.

The excavation had exposed layers or deposits extending back to the days of the *Mauryas* and the *Sungas*. Thus the earliest settlements may be placed in the third century B.C. The habitation continued in the site and was followed by the period of the *Guptas*. Several *Gupta* inscriptions have been unearthed from the old district of Dinajpur and Gangarampur was a part of the same district. The inscriptions were land grants issued in the name of some Gupta rulers for the benefit of learned *Brahmanas*. In some of these inscriptions the name of *Kotivarsha* appears as an administrative centre and the headquarters of some official. This city remained a centre of administration upto the *Pala-Sena* period i.e. upto the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to its official capacity it also became a religious centre and the name changed to *Devikota*. Such is the antiquity of the site from where the plaque was recovered.



The plaque was discovered from *Gangarampur* and is now preserved in the house of Mr. Asoke Nandi. The state of the plaque is not very good. It measures 24 cm. X 27 cm. It is slightly rectangular in shape with thin edges as borders. The colour of the stone is black. At the bottom there is a large lotus (*padma*) whose lower part is intentionally omitted. The petals are arranged in a uniform style with a straight central petal flanked by four slightly slanted petals on each side. The flower has a bold border at the bottom holding the petals like a cup. The two geese stand face to face on the *padma* with slightly parted beaks. The birds had been drawn in very bold lines giving an illusion of 3D impression. The undulating lines leave us in no doubt about their identity as geese. But the wings and the tails are highly decorated with scrolls and dots. To the uninitiated they look like peacocks' flowery tails. A tiny turtle or tortoise hangs in between the two parted beaks of the birds. Was this turtle called *Kamvugriba* and the geese called *Sankata* and *Vikata*!! Did the stylized *padma*-petals indicate the pond! The twelve

years of drought mentioned in the story is an allusion to the tradition of a *Yuga* according to the *Puranas*. The flowery part of the tail could indicate the clouds floating in the sky. The scene depicted in the plaque is the exact translation of the *Panchatantra* story in stone. The stories are a part of moral teachings (*Niti*) for the people in general.



The plaque, according to the present writer, belongs stylistically to the *Gupta* period of classical art. The grace of the birds' necks and the feathers flowing into unending floral circles recalls the undulating lines present in the paintings of *Ajanta* of the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. The *Gupta* evidence is scanty from *Bangarh*. A small pot may be mentioned here – a partially damaged pot etched with fish-design. The texture of the sherd left no doubt in the mind of the excavator (K. G. Goswami) as to its *Gupta* descent. He had compared it with the *Gupta* period pottery from *Ahichchhatra*. Mention may be made here of a similar pot preserved in the *Balurghat College Museum*.

The present-day North Bengal (WB) has very little *Gupta* evidence excepting the evidence of Gupta copper-plate mentioning the city site of *Kotivarsha* as an administrative headquarters (*Kotivarsha Vishaya*). The *Brahmana* settlements around *Hilli-Balurghat* region are vouchsafed from later inscriptions also (*Silimpur* Inscription).

What was the purpose of the plaque besides preaching moral ethics? It certainly was a decorative piece and must have been attached to some architecture, may be in a temple. We have inscriptional evidence (W. Bengal and Bangladesh) of *Vishnu* temples from *Dinajpur*. The names like *Kokamukhaswamin* and *Svetavarahaswamin* and others appear in *Gupta* inscriptions. But no such temple has survived in *North Bengal*. Some of the *Gupta* temples

are still found in the interiors of *Madhyapradesh* which were decorated with terracotta as well as stone plaques. Mention may be made of *Parvati* temple at *Nachna Kuthara*, *Dasavatara* temple, *Bhitargaon* etc. in this regard.

However the *Buddhist* establishments of Bengal –*Viharas* and *Stupas* of later date i.e. from the 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards have no dearth of decorative terracotta plaques. But stylistically they belong to the rich local folk traditions of *Bengal*. Most of these plaques are with bold borders in contrast to our stone plate under discussion. Most of these terracotta plates display everyday life of ancient *Bengal*. The figures in these plates often stretch out of the plates. One plate has been identified by *R.C. Majumdar* as the story of the mongoose and the snake (*History of Bengal, Dacca, 1943*, pp.527, pl. 133) of *Panchatantra*. But this plate could also be any scene where the two sworn enemies are depicted. Stylistically this plate cannot be compared with the sophisticated plate from *Gangarampur*. A full display of the story is expressed in perfection. The present writer has no doubt that this piece belonged to the *Gupta* period and must have decorated some structure or temple now extinct.

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## **Paintings as Source of Science in the Past: Understanding Indian Elephants**

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The word Hastishastra can be translated into English as Elephantology. The science deals with topics like genealogical, physical, mental and intellectual characteristics of elephants, techniques of tracing and capturing elephants from forests, nourishment for healthy growth and general upkeep, taming and training them for war and work and diagnosis and treatment of their diseases<sup>1</sup>. There are two species of elephants viz African and the Asian, their scientific names are *Loxodonta africana* and *Elephas maximus* respectively<sup>2</sup>. It is obvious that the elephantologists of India in the ancient past must have studied and recorded their observations about the details of the Asian type.

Richly decorated elephants always constituted the attractive and glamorous part of royal processions<sup>3</sup>. The sculptural piece of Dhauli elephant in Orissa is indeed a loud expression of 'His Imperial Majesty King Ashoka presenting himself with quiet dignity before the people of Kalinga. The artist chose this giant animal in a dignified motion to exhibit the majesty and dignity of the Mauryan imperial glory. N.R. Ray's comment on this context may be recalled, 'Indeed, such plastic presentation of bulky volume, such feeling for living flesh rendered with remarkable realism, such knowledge of the physiognomical form of the subject treated and such sense of dignified movement and linear rhythm have no parallel in Mauryan animal sculptures'<sup>4</sup>.

Among the seven elements of state, as enumerated by Kautilya, *Danda* i.e. coercive power mainly in the form of army is mentioned as the sixth element. Elephant army constituted one of the vital components of the *Chaturangini Sena*<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 1).

In the state building process, the importance of elephants and horses can never be missed. Formation of a state and its consequent protection largely depended on these two animals. How imperial dream was connected with the vigour of the giant animal i.e. elephant is revealed in the writing of Quintus Curtius giving a glowing picture of King *Puru*<sup>6</sup>. 'In the center of the line of elephants, on the tallest elephant in the field could be seen the towering figure of Poros nearly seven feet in height<sup>7</sup>'. The picture of vigorous Poros here indeed is blended with the valour of the mighty elephant. Setting it aside, we notice that this huge creature finds its mention repeatedly in the Buddhist literature symbolizing Buddha himself. The magnitude of the animal in its physical and behavioural expression certainly led the authors to select it to indicate the height of the Great Master.

Thus it is no wonder that this specie could draw the curious attention of the royal personage and became the subject matter of empirical study and observation *per-se*. The process of study on different aspects of elephant found expression in the composition as well as compilation of a number of texts from a very early period. In the *Arthashastra* it is explicitly mentioned, 'The victory of kings (in battles) depends mainly upon elephants; for elephants being of large physical frame, are capable not only of destroying the arrayed army of an enemy, his fortifications and encampments, but also of undertaking works that are dangerous to life.

Elephants bred in countries, such as Kalinga, Anga, Karusa, and the East are the best; those of the Dasharna and western countries are of middle quality and those of Saurashtra and Panchajana countries are of low quality. The might and energy of all can, however, be improved by suitable training<sup>8</sup> (Book II. Chap II., 50).

Besides, *Kautilya* makes provision for the post of the Superintendent of Elephants and speaks about the training of elephants<sup>9</sup> (Chapter XXXI and Chapter XXXII, 136-138).

*Varahamihira* holds forth in the verses of the *Brihatsamhita* on the diverse behavioural patterns of the animals that would forebode the victory or defeat of the enemy or triumph of the monarch<sup>10</sup>.

*Hastyaurveda* of Palakappya is an undated ancient work on elephant science. A

copy of this text is preserved in the Raja Serfoji Saraswathi Mahal Library of Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu. Another treatise is known by the name *Matangalila* of Nilakantha.

*Hastyayurveda* of Palakappya consists of over seventy-two chapters dealing systematically with several diseases of elephants, instructions for the healthy growth, upkeep and training of elephant. The sage Palakappya is stated to have taught this science to king Romapada of Anga. The knowledge on this subject formed an essential part of the training of the royal princes. Continuous efforts for gathering new information and knowledge about this gigantic quadruped is noticeable at least up to 19<sup>th</sup> century. New interpretations, modifications as well as additions went on continually. King Serfoji of the Bhosle dynasty of the Marathas composed *Gajashastra* in 1820. This work is preserved in Thanjavur Library and the uniqueness of this text lies in its coloured illustrations. The dry and terse content of the verses has been given a lively expression through the illustrations flanked by the relevant Sanskrit verses on the top and the Marathi version at the bottom. Besides these, *Gajashastra* of Vaisampayana, *Gaja-chikitsa* of Vedavyasa are some other notable works on the subject. The *Visnudharmottara* mentions the names of the Dig-gajas namely: *Airavata*; *Padma* or *Pundalika*, *Puspadanta*, *Vamana*, *Supratika Anjana*, *Nilā* and *Kumuda*. The same work also speaks of the four classes viz. *Bhadra*, the best; *Manda*, the medium; *Mriga*, the worst and *Sankirna* or the mixed breed. The *Agnipurana* seems to mention the eight names as *Kumuda*, *Airavana* (ta), *Padma*, *Puspadanta*, *Vamana*, *Supratika*, *Anjana*, *Homa* for *Nilā* or *Sarvabhauma*.

The number of the *Diggajas* seems to have influenced the ancient Indian writers' classification of the Indian elephants under eight typical groups<sup>11</sup> (Fig.2).

Classification of Indian elephants in the *Manasollasa* of Someshvara III (12<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.) is different from the qualitative classification of the *Arthashastra*. This change in the view between these two texts of two different time periods points to the ongoing cultural and research practices on elephants. Reclassification of elephants in the *Manasollasa* might have been the result of continuous observation and investigation of the experts. The description of *Prachyavana* in the text is particularly relevant to this paper as here in this text, a clear cut extent of the *Prachyavana* has been given<sup>12</sup>.

*Vanam prachyam = iti Proktam Lohita-bdhischa = paschime ||*

It means that the *Prachyavana* extended from *Gangasagara* in the south to the *Himadri* in the north and from *Prayaga* in the west to the *Lohitya* (lower course of the *Brahmaputra*) in the east. The *Hastividyarnava*, which constitutes the main content of this paper, was composed mainly on the basis of investigation and observation on the elephants of the forests of Assam i.e. a major portion of the aforesaid area of *Prachyavana*. The text also tells that the author was quite apprised of the knowledge about elephants, preserved in the earlier books composed in other parts of India.

Shihabuddin Talish who accompanied Mir Jumla in his invasion of Assam during the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century A.D. makes mention of the large number of elephants abounding in the hills and forests of Assam<sup>13</sup>. The eagerness of the Ahom ruler Pratap Sinha (A.D. 1603-1641) to assume the title of *Gajapati* by making himself the owner of one thousand elephants is also indicative of the adoration and esteem in which the elephants were held by the rulers. But his desire was not fulfilled. Elephant catching was a very old practice in Assam and it was not merely a pastime, but was intended for enhancing the prosperity and strength of the rulers. Obviously the scholars versed in the science of elephant behaviour enjoyed considerable indulgence from the kings. This sort of congenial environment no doubt was the breeding ground for the composition of the *Hastividyarnava*, *Sarasamgraha*, a comprehensive manual based on elephant ethology. According to Niko Tinbergen, the first tasks of the study of behaviour are observation and description<sup>14</sup>. In this sense, the root of modern ethology of elephant may be traced to a huge store house of knowledge which have had an indigenous origin. This book is written in Tai-Ahom language<sup>15</sup>.

The illustrated manuscript copy of the *Hastividyarnava* was in the custody of Late Mahidhar Buragohain, the grandson of Purnananda Buragohain, the legendary Prime Minister of Assam (1783-1817). The late pundit H.C. Goswami recovered this manuscript as early as 1912 and the copy of the manuscript was handed over to the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam<sup>16</sup>. The original manuscript had 193 folios out of which 135 still

remain. The folios are of the measurement of 58x16 cm. The folios till 163 deal with the types of elephants and from 164 to the end with their ailment and treatment. From the colophon we come to know that it was composed in Saka 1656 i.e. 1734 A.D. under the order and inspiration of the Ahom King Siva Sinha and his queen Ambika Devi<sup>17</sup>. Sukumar Barkath composed the *Hastividyarnava*<sup>18</sup>. Dilbar and Dosai the two painters painted the pictures therein under the order of the King and Queen<sup>19</sup> (Fig.3). The total number of paintings is 170.

Studies on different aspects of behaviour as well as of the types of elephants constitute the main contents of the *Hastividyarnava Sarasamgraha*. There are chapters like:

1. Types of Elephants
2. The Tuskers: the mode of training
3. Female elephants: mode of the training.
4. Descriptions of the elephant stable measurement of ropes for tying elephants, measurement of doors of stables.
5. Functions of elephants according to Nitisara of Kamandaka.
6. Varieties of elephant as described by Vyasa.
7. Characteristics of different varieties.
8. Characteristics of the bad type.
9. The kind of elephants found in different regions with their characteristics.
10. Mode of training of the newly caught elephants and calves.
11. Measurement of elephants according to age.
12. Treatment to be made to the elephants captured in the aged stage.
13. Instructions for treatment to the elephant newly caught.
14. Medicines for treatment of ailing elephants.
15. Medicines for making elephants rutted and strong.

Most of the medicines mentioned were prepared from the herbal and faunal ingredients

(Fig.4). Near about five hundred herbal and faunal antidotes have been given in the text. The long list of medicinal plants and creepers reminds us of the tales about Jivaka's test at Taxila University. At the end of medical course, Jivaka when wanted to return to his native place, was asked by his celebrated teacher Bhiksu Atreya to find out a single plant in the surroundings of the city that should have no medicinal value. Jivaka went out with a spade but came back empty handed. He informed the teacher that he had found no plant which was devoid of medicinal properties. The teacher was highly pleased with the mastery of the student and rendered permission to start for his home town<sup>20</sup>.

Medicinal Science was intricately associated with Plant Science. Charaka's remark in this respect may be remembered: it is only the man well acquainted with the names and external features of plants and his ability to use them properly according to their properties is to be called an expert physician<sup>21</sup>.

The *Dhanvantari Nigahantu* is more explicit on this point: sometime several vegetables (*bhesajas*) bear one name, sometimes one vegetable bears various names according to its class, external features, colour, potency, function, effects, properties and the rest<sup>22</sup>.

'The physician does well to master *Bhesaja Vidya* by acquainting himself with the various names of plants in Sanskrit and Prakrit consulting all classes of men by personal observations by a careful handling as well as by a careful consideration of its specific characters and sexuality.

The word *bhesaja*, from which *bhisak* denoting physician is derived, etymologically means 'vegetable drugs'<sup>23</sup>.

In the above mentioned quotations we find the use of a technical term *Bhesaja Vidya* signifying a distinct study of the plants and plant life with special reference to there medicinal properties and use.

The huge store-house of knowledge in herbal medicines for the elephants as preserved in the *Hastividya* reveals that as Kamrupa or Assam constitutes the natural habitat of elephants, behavioural study of elephants, was a principal area of interest of the people. Without

the initiative on the part of the ruler accompanied by the involvement of the people, such study and observation on the animals were practically impossible. It required the total involvement of the kings, the pundits, the plant scientists, the physicians and above all the common folk and the riders, familiar with the nature of elephants and also the forest area.

From the content it appears that the author was fully conversant with the features and characteristics of different types of elephants coming from different corners of the Indian sub-continent. Their whole behaviour and method of taming and training have been documented with corresponding paintings in the text (Figs. 5,6).

Medicines have been prescribed for curing diseases like diarrhoea, jaundice, heart disease, loss of appetite, syphilis and others. There is also mention of medicines for cooling the temperament of elephants.

But at the same time, it should be noted that the people of Assam had belief in the efficacy of mantras the reflection of which we find in the depiction of *Mandala* i.e. a sacrificial circle in the text<sup>24</sup>. Ritual beliefs and practices are mingled with empirical knowledge in this book. The paintings in the text show a blending of realism, idealism, ritual beliefs and legends of the region. The warning given to the riders as well as to the rulers against the use of elephants without comprehending their nature is also indicative of thorough knowledge of the author on the subject.

That the art of painting was fully developed in Assam, is proved by the treatise. The paintings cover all the types, nature, training and almost everything about elephants. The painters have not forgotten to illustrate the picture of the author and even those of their own, not to speak of the patron King the most enlightened one Siva Sinha and his equally enlightened Queen Ambika Devi along with the nobles, pundits, courtiers and male and female attendants. Royal processions and recreation performances by the musicians and dancers in different garbs are depicted. Dr. S. K. Chatterjee comments, 'the coloured miniatures ... show a very vigorous school of Hindu painting which flourished in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Assam ... the style is distinctive, and this pictorial art of Assam deserves a worthy place beside Rajasthani, Rajput, Kangra and Mogul Schools ... Apart from their topical and historical value, these miniatures

have an aesthetic charm which makes them a possession for ever, 'which lovers of art cannot ignore'<sup>25</sup>.

From a brief survey of the paintings and the literature of the text a few interesting conclusion may be drawn:

- (i) Elephant was an indispensable part of the state building forces since the ancient period. The ethology of elephants flourished as a distinct subject.
- (ii) The illustrated manuscript of the *Hastividyanava* is an outcome of a fundamental thinking of the King and the Queen concerned. The terse content of the subject has been given a lucid touch by the coloured paintings. In this sense it is an innovative attempt. The illustrated *Gajashastrabhasaprabandha* of King Serfoji Bhonsle was a later work.
- (iii) We get the whole canvas of the royal court of Assamese king.
- (iv) From the point of view of women history paintings are of great value. Equal weightage has been given to both King and the Queen as patrons. Prof. S. Barua finds in it an indication of better position of women in Assam than elsewhere in India<sup>26</sup>.

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Fig. 1. The king on the elephant with the fourfold division of the army



Fig. 2. Different kinds of elephants from different regions of India



Fig. 3. Dilbar and Dosai, the two painters were given order by the King Siva Sinha at the queen Ambika Devi to illustrate the content of the whole text Hastividya-nava-Sarasamgraha.



Fig. 4. Herbal medicines being applied to the sole of the left leg to make elephant steady and quiet.



Fig. 5. An elephant refusing grass in captivity



Fig. 6. Elephant being tamed

## **Hundred and Fifty years of the Revolt of 1857: A Historiographical Construction**

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In the 150<sup>th</sup> years of the revolt of 1857, a good number of seminars have been organized at different parts of the country to commemorate the great event through the lens of hundred and fifty years. Voluminous literature, articles, monographs have been published on the various aspects of the Revolt. A project has been taken by the Indian Council of Historical Research to prepare an exhaustive bibliography of the works on the Revolt of 1857. In the year 2006, the number of collections had exceeded eight hundred. No doubt, the Great Revolt of 1857 is a much discussed event in our history<sup>1</sup>. Even after 150 years, scholars are not unanimous with regard to the nature of the Revolt. There is scarcity of singularity in the interpretation and characterization of the uprising. This is partly because of the hypothetical proverb that “All history is contemporary history” and partly for the information mostly documented in the official records and also for the historian’s analysis of the matter from their own paradigmatic outlook.

After Independence, archival documents, letters, especially Rebel’s Proclamations, newspaper accounts have been published and are now accessible to scholars. Taken all the projections (as far as possible) on the subject, the present discourse will try to make a historiographical construction of the Great Revolt of 1857 in hundred and fifty years perspective.

Imperialist historians have documented the uprising as a ‘Sepoy Mutiny’<sup>2</sup> that was “wholly unpatriotic and selfish... with no native leadership and no popular support”<sup>3</sup>. To the colonial officials and writers, the Mutiny was the outburst of a group of discontented sepoys who were unhappy with the introduction of the new Enfield Rifle which required the bullet to be bitten off before loading. Since the cartridges had to be bitten off before loading, it confirmed

the sepoys' old suspicion about a conspiracy to destroy their religion and caste and convert them to Christianity. Rumours spread among the sepoys that the grease used on the bullets was either from the fat of cow or pig which was prohibited both to the Hindus and Muslims. The cartridge rumour, which was not entirely devoid of truth, spread like wildfire in various army cantonments across the country. Although the production of these cartridges was stopped immediately and various concessions were offered to allay their grievances, the trust that had been breached could never be restored<sup>4</sup>.

On 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1857 Mangal Pandey in Barrackpur near Calcutta fired at a European Officer and his comrades refused to arrest him when ordered by the European superiors. Mangal Pandey was court martialled and hanged. Though there was no direct link between the revolt of Mangal Pandey and the revolt of the sepoys of Merrut, it may be said that the revolt of Mangal Pandey was the signal for the outburst of the discontented sepoys which later took a serious turn. Reports of disobedience, incendiarism and arson were coming from the army cantonments in Ambala, Lucknow and Merrut, until finally the Merrut Sepoys started the Revolt on 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1857. From Merrut the sepoys proceeded to Delhi where they proclaimed the ageing Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah as the Emperor of Hindusthan<sup>5</sup>. From Delhi, the uprising spread to other army centers in the North Western provinces and Awadh and soon took the shape of a civil rebellion. On 19<sup>th</sup> June, Lord Canning wrote, "In Rohilkhand and Doab from Delhi to Cawnpore and Allahabad, the country is not only in rebellion against us, but is utterly lawless"<sup>6</sup>.

Karl Marx traced the outburst of the Revolt and the anger of the people to the hundred years of colonial exploitation of India. Marx and Engels hailed the unity displayed by the different religious communities who opposed British imperialism. According to Marx "the Revolt of 1857 was not a military mutiny but a national revolt"<sup>7</sup>.

Surprisingly enough, the Bengali intelligentsia of the mid-nineteenth century was apathetic towards the Revolt. The pro-British attitude of these leaders and their social background was the basic reasons behind this apathetic attitude. The new middle-classes created under British rule saw no hope in the 1857 revolt<sup>8</sup>. They fully detached themselves from it and during the course of the rebellion exhibited their loyalty to British rule. In fact, as

Asoka Sen has observed that the educated Bengalis were convinced that the rebellion was retrograde in nature and so even secretly they never desired an end to the British rule<sup>9</sup>. The Hindoo Patriot, in a number of issues expressed its stern attitude towards the Revolt though Harish Chandra Mukherjee expressed his sympathy in his writings. In his publications of 21<sup>st</sup> May 1857 he wrote “The recent mutinies in Bengal . . . here from the very beginning have drawn the sympathy of the country . . . The mutineers have been joined and aided by civil population<sup>10</sup>. Sambad Prabhakar, the widely circulated daily also condemned the sepoy revolt<sup>11</sup>. Most of the members of the young Bengal group opposed the 1857 revolt. Mention may be made of Shib Chandra Deb, Kisorichand Mitra, Dakshina Ranjan Mukhopadhyaya, Ram Gopal Ghosh and others. Even Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore himself was indifferent towards the Revolt. Only a fraction of the Bengali intelligentsia tried to uphold the its spirit. Among them Rangalal Bandopadhyaya’s Padmini Upakhyan (1858), Michael Madhu Sudan Datta’s Meghnad Badh Kabya (1861) deserves special mention. Even, the leaders of the Indian National Congress, after its foundation (1885) was against the Revolt of 1857. Rajanikanta Gupta (1848-1900) was the first Bengali who has written the history of the Revolt in Bengali language. (Rajanikanta Gupta, “Sipahi Yuddher Ithihas” – V volumes). In writing the book he had collected his sources mostly from the official records. The book did not get the desired recognition from the historians and scholars.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the 1857 revolt attracted the attention and inspired the first generation of Indian nationalists. Thus it was V.D. Savarkar who was probably the first Indian who described the Revolt of 1857 as the “Indian war of Independence — a war fought for Swadharma and Swaraj”<sup>12</sup>. It has been said that immediately after the Mutiny broke out among several of the Company’s sepoys, it speedily assumed the character of a countrywide patriotic movement in which the Hindus and Muslims fought side by side sinking their differences and undergoing various sacrifices.

Certain facts seem to strengthen this view. The leadership of the movement was almost evenly distributed among Hindus and Muslims. Thus for the Hindu Nana Saheb there was Muslim Ahmad ullah, for the Hindu Lakshmi bai, there was the Begum of Awadh. Active participants in the movement were both Hindus and Muslims.

Proclamation issued by Bahadur Saha and Nana Shah were meant not for their own community respectively, but were clarion calls for the defence of the country and religion which were dear to both Hindus and Muslims.

Post independent Nationalist historians like R.C. Majumdar, S.B. Choudhury, S.N. Sen and others did not accept the view that the Revolt of 1857 was “the First war of Independence” and the debate continued. S.N. Sen in his officially sponsored centennial history of the Revolt observed that the revolt started as a fight for religion but ended as a war of independence because the rebels wanted to get rid of an alien government and wanted to restore the old order<sup>13</sup>.

R.C. Mujumdar’s thoughts are also indetical with Dr. Sen. “What began as a mutiny” he continued” ended in certain areas in an outburst of civil population” which was sometimes organized by self-seeking local leaders and sometimes was only” mob-violence” caused by the breakdown of the administrative machinery. According to Majumdar, in 1857 nationalism in true sense was absent in India. So he concluded that as the revolt did not give birth to any national feeling at that time, it was not a ‘national nor a war of independence’<sup>14</sup>.

S.B. Choudhury, however, differs from Dr. Sen and Dr. Majumdar. He saw in the revolt” the first combined attempt of many classes of people to challenge a foreign power. This is a real, if not remote approach” he thought “to the freedom movement of India of a later age”<sup>15</sup>.

The debate has been going on since then, with a growing consensus gradually emerging that the Revolt of 1857 was not a nationalist movement in the modern sense of the term. In 1965, Thomas Metcalf wrote, “there is a widespread agreement that it was something more than a sepoy Mutiny, but something less than a national Revolt<sup>16</sup>.

Marxist historians’ perception of the Revolt of 1857 although, generally more or less unanimous, but on some occasions they differed. Scholars like M.N. Roy and Abani Mukherjee have explained the 1857 revolt as a struggle between<sup>17</sup> the decaying feudal system and the newly introduced commercial capitalism, that aimed to achieve political supremacy. In contrast, Rajni Palm Dutt characterized the Revolt as a movement of self-seeking feudal forces which

as a whole lacked popular support. "The rising of 1857 was in its essential character and dominant leadership the revolt of the old conservative and feudal forces and dethroned potentates for their rights and privileges which they saw in the process of destruction"<sup>18</sup>. He categorized it as reactionary. To Hirendranath Mukhopadhyaya, the first signs of a national upsurge was visible in the revolt although it was not a national revolt in true sense as the concept of nation was absent in 1857<sup>19</sup>.

The Revolt of 1857 was also characterized by an outburst of peasant insurrections. Though the peasants do not have a history of their own, we cannot ignore the folklore and traditions of resistance associated with the Revolt. A very well-researched article by Talmiz Khaldun in a volume of 1857 edited by P.C. Joshi<sup>20</sup> argues that the Revolt turned into "a peasant war against indigenous landlordism and foreign imperialism, thus it was an anti-feudal and anti-imperialist movement"<sup>21</sup>.

P.C. Joshi, however, did not agree with the unjustified dilution of the anti-colonial character of the movement and the very unrealistic exclusion of the landlord classes from the rank of the rebels. The hundred years of British rule adversely affected all classes of people in India and the contradiction between imperialism and Indian people manifested particularly in those areas, where the Bengal Army Sepoys mostly come from. There was the high rate of land tax and there was always the possibility of forfeiture of the land rights of the zamindars. The annexation of Awadh had taken place in 1856 and the Talukdars, the great land magnates of Awadh were threatened with the imposition of the Mahalwari system that had ruined landed classes in the rest of the province. So both the peasants and the landed classes were the victim of oppression. The Revolt of 1857 was more than an agrarian war. People of cities also joined the rebellion. Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow, Bareilly, Jhansi and other towns became determined centers of resistance.

Eric Stokes, in his two monumental works<sup>22</sup>, has examined the mutifarious issues, social compositions and the role of the peasants, particularly the rich peasants. In his second book, Stokes, however reassesses his position by widening the social basis of the peasants' participation in the Revolt. He highlighted the land revenue policy and high revenue demand as reasons for the misery of the peasants. Rudrangshu Mukherjee in his study brought to light

fascinating complexities of popular militancy, that had hitherto remained ignored. So far as the taluqdars are concerned, it is true that in many areas peasants followed their leaders, because of the existence of a pre-capitalist symbiotic relationship between the two classes. But the role of the taluqdars varied widely from region to region and their participation was also not universal: Some of them remained loyal, some became turncoats, others followed a middle course and some submitted at the sight of the approaching British troops<sup>23</sup>. Tapti Roy also enriches our understanding of the revolt by focusing on the popular level of the Revolt<sup>24</sup>.

Prof. Irfan Habib, in his scholarly articles, recently published<sup>25</sup>, categorised the Revolt of the sepoys of 1857 as the “largest anti-colonial uprising anywhere in the world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century”. He argues that there were “over one hundred and twenty five thousand of Bengal Army Sepoys going into armed Revolt”. Citing a statistics of the numbers of sepoys, Prof. Habib continues that “In terms of the percentage of the people inhabiting the rebellious territory involved, it consisted about thirty percent of the population of the territory of the present union of India”. thus “it was a major event in modern world Hisotry”<sup>26</sup>. Prof. Habib categorically explained the discontent of the Bengal Army during the Revolt. For more than eighteen years before the outbreak of the Revolt these sepoys were constantly engaged in continuous warfare for the British colonial expansion. “It was in the process of this expansion that the Bengal Army seopys were continuously made canon-fodder, to fight and die in battlefields from Crimea to China”<sup>27</sup>. The exhaustion of the Bengal Army in continuous warfare, deprivation in their service and day to day humiliation were the crucial factors for the Revolt of the sepoys. The introduction of the new Enfield Rifle added flame to the fire.

Prof. Rajat Roy has studied the mentality of 1857. In his book<sup>28</sup> Prof. Ray very comprehensively dealt with the mental attitude of the various sections of the rebels; whether sepoys or civilians, they joined the movement forgetting their religious differences which was unique in its character. Both the Hindus and Muslims came together to fight for a common cause against their common enemy — the British.

The historians of the Subaltern School brought to light fascinating complexities of popular militancy that had hitherto remained ignored. While discussing the popular resistance Prof. Ranajit Guha observed that insurgency was a motivated and conscious undertaking on

the part of the rural masses<sup>29</sup>. Echoing the same voice Gautam Bhadra has observed that in all the earlier works on the revolt of 1857 the ordinary rebel, their role, perception of an alien rule and contemporary crisis remained absent. After a thorough discussion about the rebels Prof. Bhadra highlighted that the consciousness with which the rebels fought had been informed through everyday experience<sup>30</sup> Prof. Guha, in one of his major works, discussed the nature and character of the various peasant movements and observed that it is necessary to acknowledge the peasant as the maker of his/her own rebellion because this indicates a consciousness on his/her part<sup>31</sup>.

William Dalrymple in his book "The Last Mughals" high-lighted the role of the Muslims in the Revolt<sup>32</sup>. This is a much discussed book recently written on the Revolt. To Dalrymple, the Revolt was a "jihad" of the Muslim community. Historians like Sabyasachi Bhattacharya raised some pertinent question to call the 1857 Revolt a "jihad" of the Muslims. Prof. Bhattacharya pointed out that during the time of the outbreak of the Revolt, opposition and protest of various communities manifested in various ways, which can not be termed as 'jihad' or religions war of a particular community<sup>33</sup>. In revisiting the Revolt of 1857 we should always keep in mind this historical phenomenon. In a recently published anthology edited by Prof. Bhattachaya<sup>34</sup> these diversified themes on the Revolt have been projected. The contributors in this volume look at the several aspects of 1857 in a different perspective hitherto discussed.

Kaushik Chakraborty, in his recently published book<sup>35</sup> has reassessed the history of 1857 revolt in the light of social deprivation of the people under colonial rule. To Chakraborty, since the beginning, the rebellion had a call of religion. So, to protect their religion the people responded to this call and participated in the rebellion. But the resistance of the people was against the political, economy and administrative system of the colonial state. Popular violence against the state and its political economy established that "in reality the rebellion was a political, progressive and secular movement". Religion gave legitimacy to the secular base of the movement.

From the trends in historiography so far discussed, their emerges three distinct phases. In the first phase we find the domination of the colonial or Imperial school of historians. In the second phase the focus shifted from colonial to Nationalist school and in the third phase we

find the popularity of the Marxist school of historiography. The analysis of the three schools are from different perspectives though the history of the outbreak of the Revolt are not different. The Subaltern school of historians investigated the history of the revolt from the point of view of popular resistance. Recently, gender related issues in 1857 is also getting prominence in historical research. Mention may be made of Charu Datta, Samita Sen and others. In the recently published volume of Indian Historical Review<sup>36</sup> Indrani Sen and Lata Singh have made their contribution in this unexplored area of the Revolt.

Biswamoy Pati, in his well-researched article<sup>37</sup> comments, “the 1857 Revolt represents possibly one of the most powerful and dramatic anti-colonial movements which united the peasants and the landed sections against the ruthless imperial oppression. At the same time, it also questioned the internal exploiters like the money lenders and buniyas”. What have been delineated above illustrates the evolution of the historiography on the 1857 Revolt. Thus historiography has accorded its own interpretation to 1857 — an interpretation that is changing even today-after hundred and fifty years.

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## **Higher Education in Cooch Behar in the Nineteenth Century: The Victoria College**

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### I

Coochbehar in the north-eastern frontier of India, is at present a district of West Bengal. Prior to August 20, 1949 Coochbehar was an Indian state ruled by the Maharaja of Coochbehar, a feudatory prince under the British Raj. On that date Maharaja Jagaddipendranarayan ceded his territory to the Dominion Government of India and on January 1, 1950 it was merged with the state of West Bengal<sup>1</sup>.

The early history of the state is to be sought in the early history of the kingdom of Kamrup of which it formed a part till the middle of the sixteenth century, when it began to have a separate existence of its own. It had many ups and downs during its long chequered history till in the seventies of the eighteenth century, when the country was under the threat of Bhutanese occupation, there took place a dramatic turn in its history. The hereditary Commander-in-chief, at this critical moment, applied for aid to the East India Company. The latter, which had been watching with concern the growing power of Bhutias, close to its border agreed to give aid<sup>2</sup> but under certain conditions. This was the beginning of the process which ultimately led to the treaty of April 1773 between the East India Company and Coochbehar by which the latter became a feudatory state under the control of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal leaving the administration of the state to the Raja. The following years were marked by great disturbances created by factional rivalry in the royal household. Further, Maharaja Narendranarayan's death and the succession of Nripendranarayan to the throne as a minor in 1863 provided opportunities for the East India Company to interfere in the affairs of the state. Setting aside the wishes of the late Maharaja the Company appointed Colonel Haughton as Commissioner of the state

in 1864; he was vested by the Government with full authority of the ruler of the state except in regard to certain specified points<sup>3</sup>.

An enquiry into the condition of education of any state or country becomes meaningful only in the context of a broad socio-economic, cultural and political framework, as well as the composition of the people. The Census Report of 1872, the first of its kind in the country and not very accurate too for several reasons spoke of the existence of 199 villages in Coochbehar<sup>4</sup>. The character of the population was mixed, though the Rajbansis or Coch predominated over the other tribes.

The semi-Hinduised aborigines together with their Mahammedan counterpart made up 93.64% of the total population Migration there was none but immigration from Bengal, Assam and Terai regions had its contribution in rendering the mixed character to the population. Apart from the Hindus and Muslims, who formed 27% of the population, there were a few belonging to other religious communities.

A look into the social pattern in Coochbehar reveals that the bulk of the population was the cultivating class. The Brahmans were few in number, while there were no Kayashas or Vaidyas. To the people in general, thus, education was of little value; they were too poor to get up schools for themselves, or too ignorant to care much about education. Educated men in Coochbehar were few and far between. There was no enlightened middle class that could juxtapose itself between the royal family on the one hand and the agriculturists on the other.

In place of the rajas, zamindars and rich landed aristocrats of Bengal who provided the sources of the private education system there were in Coochbehar the petty jotedars and chuknidars whose income was precariously dependent on the rainfall of the year<sup>5</sup>. Thus Coochbehar presented a stark contrast to Bengal; the new ideas and concepts that the British had introduced in the country had little impact here the nineteenth century characteristics of Bengal had not the faintest trace here.

However, Coochbehar being a native kingdom did have a cultural tradition. But education, prior to the 19th century, was a privilege of the higher classes only, confined to the court

of the Maharaja and to the members of the royal family. Sanskrit learning was patronised by the royal house<sup>6</sup>. But little was done to educate the common people.

## II

In 1864 the year of the appointment of the British Commissioner Lieutenant Colonel Haugton, Coochbehar was launched on a vigorous education programme. The process, which continued unabated throughout the 19th century, brought about fundamental transformation in the state comparable to the neighbouring province Bengal. Education no longer remained the privilege of the few but became accessible to the people at large. Separate assignment from surplus revenue was to be made available for the maintenance of an education establishment suited to the needs of the country<sup>7</sup>.

As elsewhere the British were to use English education as a cultural project of control. It was to serve the purpose of manning the administration, creating an overall climate of change and development and thereby generate a culture of loyalty to the British. The policy of cultural imperialism hand in hand with cultural subversiveness was undertaken in a very subtle manner. The imperial motif was carefully woven into the structure of the cultural identity of the royal family of the state through the introduction of English education and through it, western culture. The result was amazingly pro British orientation of the royal family of Coochbehar.

The period following the memorable Despatch of Sir Charles Wood, President of the Board of Control in 1854 saw the evolution of a comprehensive and co-ordinated system of education by the East India Company. The same pattern was introduced in Coochbehar with the establishment of teaching institutions such as primary schools, high schools and colleges. A regular system of scholarship was instituted to encourage meritorious students to prosecute study. Educational institutions founded by private efforts were to be helped from Governments funds. The Victoria college was an outcome of this policy.

The establishment of the this college on June 15, 1888, in commemoration of the

Diamond Jubilee of the Queen Empress Victoria, by Maharaja Sri Nripendranarayana Bhup Bahadur was a milestone in the history of education of the Coochbehar state. It not only ushered in a period of higher education in the state but brought about fundamental and significant changes in the educational system. Considerable funds had to be found for the college; a sum of Rs. 85,000 was granted as intital expenditure to set up the college. Under the principle that the normal grant for educaion should not be increased a complete reshulfling of the education department was undertaken. The allotments for primary and secondary education had to be heavily curtailed, the post of Superintendent of education was aboslished and the Wards Institution was amalgamated with the Sudder Boarding Establishment. The Principal of the college was also to be in charge of the Jenkin's School and the Boarding Institution. The Inspector of schools, an office created at this time, was to be in charge of primary and secondary education. The superintendent of state was to be incharge of the Department of Public Instruction in the state<sup>8</sup>. Thus, higher education was introduced in Coochbehar but at no little cost of primary and secondary education.

For the first nineteen years the college was entirely maintained at the expense of the Coochbhear state. No fees were charged from the students, irrespective of caste or creed. Ever since its foundation the college enjoyed affiliations upto M. A standard in all subjects prescribed by the Culcutta University at that time. Affiliation for the Bachelor of Law course was also given<sup>9</sup>.

The college opened with 16 students distributed in five classes. By March 1889 the number rose to 68 with daily attendance of 45. By 1890-91 the number rose to 124. A boarding institution was opened for the college students. Steps were taken to encourage native youths to avail themselves of the boarding facilities<sup>10</sup>. Two scholarships of Rs 20, tenable for two years were offered to those students who were successful at the F.A. examination and two of Rs. 30 tenable for one year to graduates who intended to appear for the M. A. examiantion<sup>11</sup>.

Interesting details about the faculty members of the college their academic qualifications and the salary they drew are to be found in the available records.

Table - I

Sl. No.	Name	Qualification	Scale of Pay
1.	J. C. Godley	B.A. Principal	500-50-700
2.	Joy Kisen Sen	M. A. professor of English	150-30-300
3.	Rajmohan Sen	M.A. Professor of Mathematics	150-20-250
4.	Gobinda Chandra Das	M.A. Professor of Science	150-20-200
5.	Jogendra K. Das Sinha	M.A. Professor of Philosophy	100-20-200
6.	Sarat Chandra Gupta	M.A. Professor of Sanskrit	100-10-150
7.	Law Lecture	-----	50-----
8.	Clerk & Librarian	-----	25-----
9.	Duftry	-----	10-----

*Source : Annual Administrative Report Coochbehar 1888-89-P43*

An analysis of the table above show the importance to English and Science when compared to other subjects like Philosophy and Sanskrit. English obviously enjoyed a very special position. Again the discrepancy in the salary of the European Principal and the “native” professors despite the higher academic attainments of the latter was an example of the discretionary policy pursued by the government.

The first principal left in December 1889 and was succeeded by W. H. Wood, B.A., F. C.S. The gentleman by his high scholastic attainments and exceptional personal qualities of sympathy and kindness became very popular. The Maharaja took keen interest in the institution and in 1889-90 a grant of Rs. 6000 was followed by another grant of Rs. 2000 for equipping the college with apparatus, books and furnitures. Annual grant, as pointed out by the Principal, was essential for upkeep of the laboratory and library<sup>12</sup>. Towards this end a regular state partonage of a handsome amount of Rs. 1000 for books and scientific apparatus was made from the state exchequer. The library was not so well represented in history, philosophy, law and science as it was in English literature, but it possessed the most standard

works of reference. One could get an idea of the library and the laboratory from the figures given below for the year 1898-99.

Table - II

New books	-	Rs. 642-13-0
Scientific apparatus	-	Rs. 216-12-0
Librarians Pay	-	Rs. 60-0-0
Book Binding	-	Rs. 62-0-0

*Source : Annual Administrative Report, Coochbehar 1898-99 P-60*

Considering the price index more than hundred years ago the interest taken by the Mahraja was indeed commendable. This was further revealed in the expenditure incurred by the state on this institution and the cost it had to bear for educating each student.

Table - III

Year	Total Expenditure	Income from fees and f	Cost of educating each pupil per annum
1888-89	15,592-5-0	-	-
1892-3	-	-	206-9-0
1893-94	17,477-8-6	119-5-0	156-6-1
1893-94	17,503-3-7	24-0-0	138-11-6
1898-99	20,806-0-0	141-0-0	131-3-4
1901-02	23,041-9-8	-	101-0-0

*Source : Annual Administrative Reports (Coochbehar) of the respective years mentioned above.*

As the above table show the need of the college annually increased but the aggregate

allotment for the purpose of education remained stationary. To meet the increasing requirement of the college the grant for primary and secondary education had to be annually reduced. The Superintendent of State realized that if this diversion to higher education be carried too far the result would be the sacrifice of the former to the latter. Major Evan Gordon, the Superintendent of Education therefore wanted that all fees be placed at the disposal of the Education Department instead of being credited to the state.

The question of imposition of fees assumed importance. At times it ceased to be free and at other times it was imposed. In 1894-95, for instance the Principal Della Fosse, spoke of reimposition of fees. A large portion of the students who came from districts where opportunity for higher education prevailed, joined this college for two reasons. Having failed to qualify from colleges in their own districts they tried their luck here once more; more so because it was non remunerative. This practice had been increasing over the years<sup>14</sup>. Both on account of limited accomodation and in the interest of efficient teaching it was desirable that the number on the roll be limited. Besides, the future of the institution as an affiliated one was dependent entirely on the Government Resolution with regard to the recommendation of the University Commission. This was pointed out in 1903-04. It was essential that the college should comply with all the standards on which affiliation with the Calcutta University was possible. Overcrowding of students was a vital issue in this respect<sup>15</sup>. Considering all these points imposition of fees was in every way justified and the Maharaja was requested to give a serious thought to it.

As already mentioned above the entire expenditure of the college was borne by the State exchequer. Again, the cost of educating each student per annum was considerably lower than the average cost in the Government Colleges in Bengal; in 1901-02 it was Rs. 101, whereas it was Rs. 177-5-10 in 1899-1900 in the Government colleges in Bengal. Ever since its establishment in 1888 the enrolment of students gradually increased from 16 in 1888 to 212 in 1910-11<sup>16</sup>. Natural calamity did affect the rolls, for instance in 1896-97 and 1897-98 due to famine followed by earthquake which affected communication between Coochbehar and Bengal, and cholera epidemic in Dinahata and Mekhliganj in 1892-93. Increased cost of living in Coochbehar in 1892-93 made a section of students leave the state. When situations devel-

oped the other way round, e.g. plague in Calcutta in 1899, students were driven to join the mofussil college.

It is interesting to note the performance of the college on the basis of various public examiantions. The college sent its first batch of candidates for F.A. and B.A. examiantion in 1889 the following fitures give the year and the percentage of pass in F.A., B.A. and M.A. examination from the available records .

Table - IV

Year	FA Examination	BA Examination	MA Examination
	Percentage of Pass	Percentage of Pass	Percentage of Pass
1888-89	60%	70.6%	--
1889-90	60%	70.6%	--
1891-92	52.2%	11.1%	100%
1893-94	56.5%	20%	100%
1894-95	66.6%	42.2%	100%
1897-98	72%	--	Incomplete information
1898-99	52.6%	34%	Incomplete information
1899-100	55%	--	Incomplete information
1900-1901	84%	--	--
1901-1902	44%	27%	40%
1902-1903	55%	--	--
1903-1904	44%	21%	Incomplete information
1910-1911	--	75%	--

Source : Annual Adm. Reports (Coochbehar) of the respective years mentioned above.

The number of candidates appearing for the FA examination from 1888-89 to 1903-04

ranged between 23 and 44. The number of candidates taking the BA examination increased from 17 in 1888-89 to 71 in 1903-04. Fluctuations in the number were there e.g. in 1910-11 only 16 candidates appeared. So far as any examinations were concerned students appearing for it ranged between 1 and 5.

Intermediate Arts and Intermediate Science examinations were introduced by 1910-11. 54 appeared in the I.A. and 17 in the ISc examination. 31 passed in the former with 15 in first division and 11 in the latter with 3 in first division<sup>17</sup>.

A careful scrutiny of the figures above will reveal that no candidates appeared in any of the examinations, F.A., B.A. or M.A in 1895-96 and 1896 - 97 for those were the years of disaster for Coochbehar. The state suffered from famine first and then experienced earthquake as already stated.

The Law Department of the college began in 1888-89 with 26 pupils. Education here, as in the general department, was free. The Principal, J. C. Godley felt that the existence of free law classes was undoubtedly an incentive to attract students but as the instruction was technical and unconnected with the college course, the imposition of fees in future years was inevitable. The very next year i.e. in 1889-90 a fee of Rs. 2/- was charged from the students to be increased to Rs. 3/- in 1897-98<sup>18</sup>. One of the leading pleaders of Coochbehar, Jadunath Banerjee was appointed law lecturer with a monthly salary of Rs. 50<sup>19</sup>. The expenditure of the college was borne partly by the state and partly from fees and fines. Between 1891 and 1894 the total amount was Rs. 600, the state grant being the major share. This amount shot up to more than Rs. 900 in the years between 1894 and 1899. Later the state grant was decreased from 1894 onward till in 1898-99 the department became self-supporting<sup>20</sup>. It sent up candidate for the Bachelor of Law examination; 3 in 1893-94, 1 in 1894-95, 8 and 8 in 1897-98, 1898-99 respectively. Except for 1894-95 when the one and only solitary candidate failed to qualify for the examination, the result was 2 out of 3 in 1893-94, 3 out of 8 in 1897-98 and 5 out of 8 in 1898-99<sup>21</sup>.

#### IV

The Victoria College was well served by a band of good professors and European Principals who were distinguished educationists. Maharaja Nripendra Narayan was careful to appoint efficient and scholarly persons in the post of lecturers. Among the teachers were eminent professors like Joygopal Banerjee, Shyama charan Chakraborty, Tarapada Mukherjee, Monorathdhan Dey, Upendra Narayan Sinha and others. Commenting on the conduct of the professors, the Principal D. Fosse wrote in 1893-94 that they had discharged their duties with zeal and ability. The success obtained by the pupils in the examination of the Master's degree in science was indeed praiseworthy considering the difficulty of working in a defective laboratory. Due credit had to be given to the professor of science<sup>22</sup>. Shyama Charan Chakraborty, the professor of Philosophy, appointed in September 1894 proved himself to be a very sincere and devoted teacher. The Principal of the college seemed always to have a word of praise of his staff as the Reports of 1897-98 prove. But the college suffered owing to the small initial pay given to the teachers. This was pointed out by W. H. Wood the Principal in 1891-92 who felt that the minimum initial pay should be Rs. 150.00; as already mentioned the professors of history, philosophy and Sanskrit were all drawing salaries below this amount. Really competent men, he felt, were unlikely to continue if the conditions of services were not improved. In fact in 1891-92 the college lost the services of three valuable teachers as mentioned in the Annual Report of that year. Under most trying circumstances caused by earthquake in 1897-98 they did everything possible to maintain the reputation of the college. The Principal W. H. Wood, himself took the greatest interest in the welfare of the college and the wellbeing of the students. The institution was fortunate in having the great scholar Brojendra Nath Seal as its Principal in 1896. The Maharaja was so impressed by his scholarship and erudition that at the earliest opportunity he secured his services by giving him direct appointment without even consulting the State Council members.

The college developed a good tradition of athletics and sports. This was not so at the beginning. Only a few patronised the cricket, football and gymnastics. A taste for these were yet to develop. Coochbehar in fact was somewhat behind in the matter of physical education when compared with Bengal. Most of the colleges in Bengal (e.g. Presidency Division, Hooghly,

Krishnanagar, Rajsahi and Dacca) were properly equipped with gymnasium where the students were trained under proper supervision. However in Coochbehar neither the college nor the Jenkin's school possess a gymnasium, nor was there any person attached to the education staff competent to act as a gymnastic instructor. Unlike several colleges of Bengal drill too was not compulsory. Gradually things began to improve; more and more students began to take interest in games and sports. A cricket club was established along with a gymnastic club under the able supervision of the Superintendent of the Boarding Institution. The taste for these outdoor sports like cricket and football increased among students. The gymnastic club became popular among students; by 1876-97 it had 95 members including students from Jenkin's<sup>23</sup>. Annual donations were given by the Maharaja for encouraging gymnastics and games like football and cricket, specially the latter. A clear indication of the British influence on the Maharaja is discernible here.

The moral training of the college pupils received sufficient consideration at the hands of the Principal. The conduct of the students on the whole was satisfactory. There were however occasions when boys were expelled from the institution for "gross in subordination" as in 1897-98 and for irregularities during annual examination in 1910-11<sup>24</sup>.

In conclusion it may be said that the Victoria College gradually rose in strength and efficiency. In 1900 there were 168 pupils. In the next ten years the number rose to 204. Between 1891 and 1900 it turned out 199 under graduates, 73 graduates, 4 M.A's and 19 B.L's. Under the guidance of Dr. B. N. Seal who served the college for long sixteen years the institution continued to prosper. The Acharya's distinguished academic attainments, intimate acquaintance with the working of the Calcutta University and extensive experience of the needs and conditions of Indian education the college succeeded in attaining the position of one of the most ably conducted and highly efficient first grade colleges of the Calcutta University. The college had to go through trying circumstances like the earthquake of 1897 which crippled its resources. It also had to face the severe strain of the new University Regulation requirements. However all obstacles were overcome by the unsparing devotion and sincerity of Brojendranath Seal.

Having delieniated the details about the college a big question remains, and that is how far was the interests of the inhabitants of Coochbehar served ? The year of the establishment of the college was June 15, 1887. By March 1889 the student strength was 68. Out of this only 3 were from Coochbehar. By 1890-91 number rose to 124 of whom 6 were Coochbehars.

The religious and caste composition of the college students would reveal that very few of them really belonged to the state. The percentage of Muslim students going in for higher education too was was extremely poor. The table below is an indicator of the statement made above.

Table - V

	1888-89	91-92	93-94	94-95	97-98	1899
Brahmans	26	48	55	52	49	69
Baidyas	7	10	11	16	09	13
Kayastha	26	49	35	49	47	59
Brahmo	-	01	-	-	01	02
Rajharsi	02	03	02	01	02	08
*Rajgan	-	-	03	04	01	01
Muslim	05	04	03	03	02	02
Christians	01	-	-	-	-	-
Other Caste	01	03	02	01	-	-
Kaibarta	-	-	-	-	-	02
Barui	-	-	-	-	-	02
Banik	-	-	-	-	-	01

Source : Annual Aministrative Reports Coochbehar 1888-89, 91-92, 93-94, 94-95, 97-98, 98-99.

\*Rajgans were the poor members of the royal family who were too poor to afford lodging in Coochbehar proper to pursue studies. The promiscuous habits of the rajas were the reasons behind their increasing number. Maharaja Nripendra Narayan wanted to establish a boarding school to facilitate the education of these Rajgans. But before he could implement this plan he died. Later in 1864, Colonel Haughton, founded this boarding school to feed, clothe and educate a certain number of selected Rajgans. At least a few if not all could thus become respectful members of the society.

Turning to the performance of the natives in the different public examinations it appears that 1889-90 was a year to be remembered for, in that year, two natives of Coochbehar became the states first graduates. Earlier in 1888-89 two native candidates have appeared for the B.A. examination but failed to qualify.

In 1891-92 three natives were sent for the M.A. Examination. Of them two were Rajgan boarders; none were successful. Of the two candidates sent up for M. A. examination in 1894-95 both were Rajgans. one passed in the II class standing 5th in the list of successful candidates and the other in the III class standing 4th in the list.

In 1898-99, 20, out of the 38 candidates sent up for F.A examination, passed; two out this 20 had passed in second division, one belonged to Coochbehar. The results of I.A and ISc. examinations the 1910-11 show that 6 natives (5 in I.A and 1 in ISc.) had passed of the total number of 31 in I.A and 11 in ISc. The above figure prove that in higher education a very few percentage of students belonging to Coochbehar could be found.

To what extent then were the natives of the state benefitted by higher education ? Of the 168 boys in 1900; nine only were the natives of Coochbehar. This very question was raised in the Annual administrative Report of 1898-99. Out of the average number of 144 boys on the roll annually between 1895 and 1898 only 7 to 8 each year belonged to Coochbehar state. The average annual cost of the maintenance of the college between 1896 and 1899 had been Rs. 19,830-6-3 and Rs. 139-13-2 annually for each boy. The actual total expenditure during 1895 to 1898 for education on behalf of the natives of Coochbehar had been Rs. 3125-14-10 whi Rs. 49,843-3-3 was spent at the same time in educating boys from Dacca, Pabna, Jessore, 24 Parganas and other districts of bengal. Students from these places had no claim whatsoever to free education at Coochbehar. They all flocked here because here education could be obtained at a cheaper rate than the college afforded by the Government at their own home towns. There was no point in incurring such heavy expenditure for people who should have had no claim on the liberality of the Maharaja. Many urgent requirements in the state under several heads were being unduly starved for want of funds. It is to be remembered that a large percentage of fund from primary and secondary education had been diverted to higher

education from which the natives of Coochbehar hardly reaped any benefit. In fact it was felt that the cause of education was very adequately served in the state without the final course of collegiate education. The Maharaja was therefore requested to consider whether instead of maintaining the college a few scholarships in medicine, law and engineering be granted to the Coochebhari students to enable them to pursue their studies in the different colleges of Bengal. In this way the object for which the college had been established would be better served and the requirements of the states Collegiate education would be fully met. The argument seemed convincing indeed but the college was not done away with. It had to remain , no other alternative was there for it was a part of the policy of hegemonization that the British government had introduced in the state. This was destined to under mine the traditional pattern . As things turned out the successive rulers of Coochbehar from 1847 onward, trained, educated and oriented in European culture became very loyal to the British. The superlative values of white civilization was fully accepted without a murmur even in the dynamics of every day life in the royal household. The question of ‘mimicry’ and ‘authenticity’ the dominant theme with reference to which the assertive authenticity of the colonized challenged British policy of subversion elsewhere in India did not have any echo in the state of Coochbehar. British cultural did succeed in establishing its hold over the native state !

The college still stands today bearing the name of its erstwhile erudite and scholar Principal.

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## **‘Coolie Indians’, ‘Black Kaffirs’ and A Young Indian Barrister: A Nuanced Look at Gandhi’s Politics in South Africa**

**Kausik Bandyopdhyay<sup>1</sup>**

### **I**

Mahatma Gandhi occupies a pinnacle as an organizer and inspirer of Indian political movement in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> He was commissioned to Pretoria by a great Indian businessman of Durban called Dada nuance Abdullah to fight a lawsuit on his behalf in 1893. Just on his arrival Gandhi was assaulted at the hands railway authorities of Pietermaritzburg. But completely ignoring his insult, he decided to stay in South Africa to give his Indian brethrens and sisters there a lead in their crusade against the white man’s colour prejudice and anti-Indian policy. However, it would be sheer over-enthusiasm to say that ‘it was in the waiting room of the Pietermaritzburg Railway Station ... that Gandhi conceived the idea of passive resistance or Satyagraha’.<sup>2</sup> No doubt Gandhi did a lot for the Indians in South Africa. But his reservations and the problems his policy bequeathed to them should not be overlooked either. It was Natal or Transvaal, which became the first political laboratory for testing the efficacy of his globally acclaimed strategy of ‘non-violent Satyagraha’. That is why one of his biographers said that, ‘What Gandhi did to South Africa was less important than what South Africa did to him.’<sup>3</sup> This essay attempts a critical yet realistic appraisal of Gandhi’s role in politics and society of South Africa.

### **II**

In the course of the first few days of his stay in South Africa Gandhi could easily realize that the entire Indian community there suffered in the estimation of the European settlers. This unequal treatment certainly injured his emotions as an Indian. Moreover, Gandhi himself came to be known not as an Indian barrister, but as a ‘coolie barrister’. ‘The original meaning of the word “coolie” was thus forgotten’, admitted Gandhi in his autobiography, ‘and it became a common appellation for all Indians.’<sup>4</sup> Dada Abdullah’s case being over, Gandhi began to make

preparations for sailing back to India in June 1894. But destiny chose to do otherwise. At a farewell party Gandhi was attracted by a *Natal Mercury* article entitled 'Indian Franchise', which dwelt on a Natal Government Bill disenfranchising Asiatic settlers there. The perusal of the article made Gandhi extremely upset and angry. He immediately abandoned the plan of returning to India but resolved to stay on in Natal to prevent the pernicious bill from being enacted. He organized a strong opposition to it through a series of petitions. He prevented the Franchise Bill from being passed in its original form. Gandhi's leadership created a stir in the Indian community of Natal and taught them not to submit to injustice in a lying-down spirit but to protest against it unitedly.

In 1894 Gandhi had helped the Natal Indians set up the Natal Indian congress to fight against the anti-Indian legislation of the Natal Government. Its first president was Abdullah Haji Adam. As then defined, the objects of the Congress actually reflected the demands raised by Gandhi for the betterment of Indians: to promote concord and harmony between Indians and Europeans residing in the colony, to acquaint the English in South Africa and England and the people in India with the real state of things in Natal by writing in newspapers, publishing pamphlets and delivering lectures, to induce the Hindustanis, particularly the colonial-born Indians, to study Indian history and literature, to enquire into the conditions of the Indians and to take proper steps to remove their hardships and sufferings, to help the poor and the helpless in every reasonable way, and to do such work as would tend to improve the moral, social and political conditions of the Indians. Besides, Gandhi himself wrote two pamphlets to give publicity to the plight of the Indians in Natal and to the injustice done to them. In all his action, however, Gandhi was totally silent on the deplorable conditions of the Black Africans. While Indian ethnicity became a major contributing element in Gandhi's basic ideas, Blacks did not figure in his mental map.

Gandhi's major involvement in South African politics centred round the franchise question during the late 1890s. During his short stay in India in 1896, Gandhi published a pamphlet, known as the Green Pamphlet, on the grievances of the British Indians in South Africa. In this pamphlet, and in fact throughout his career in South Africa, as Maureen Swan has argued, Gandhi was more or less concerned with the interest of upper class Indians. Pointing to the ill treatment of Indians at the hands of the police authority, Gandhi wrote:

There are, again, the Christian-educated youths – a most sensitive class – who do not wear robes. They are constantly molested. ... An Indian lady, a teacher, the wife of the Indian Interpreter at Ladysmith, was, a short time ago, on her return from the church on Sunday evening, arrested by two Kaffir policemen and roughly handled so much so that her dress was soiled, not to speak of all sorts of bad names she was called.<sup>5</sup>

The Green Pamphlet served its purpose admirably. It made the Government of India aware of its responsibilities towards their Indian subjects in South Africa. Moreover, it stressed the policy of non-violence for the Indian settlers to follow in their struggle against White discrimination. However, the Europeans in South Africa became extremely enraged, and in 1897 a white mob nearly lynched him in the streets of Durban. Yet, Gandhi urged the Indians in South Africa to espouse the cause of Britain during the Boer War to prove their loyalty to the British Government. Once the War had broken out, he organized the Indian Ambulance Corps to nurse the wounded British soldiers. Gandhi had his own arguments in favour of the Indians supporting the British Government during the Boer War:

Our existence in South Africa is only our capacity as British subjects. In every memorial we have presented we have asserted our rights as such. We have been proud of our British citizenship, or have given our rulers and the world to believe that we are so proud. Our rulers profess to safeguard our rights because we are British subjects, and what little rights we still retain, we retain because we are British subjects.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, until 1906 the striking feature of his ideology was ‘not merely his reliance upon Western examples and values but his dependence on them to the exclusion of anything Indian’.<sup>7</sup> Gandhi therefore began his career as what Denis Dalton calls ‘a loyalist, totally committed to the values and institutions of the British empire’.<sup>8</sup>

### III

The Asiatic Law Amendment Act 1907 of the Transvaal Government marked the launch of the passive resistance movement under Gandhi’s leadership. The Act required all Asians of Transvaal to be compulsorily registered by 31st July 1907, and to carry certificates marked with their fingerprints. Gandhi formed the passive Resistance Association and began to wage

Satyagraha. By January 1908 Gandhi along with many passive resisters was arrested and sent to the Johannesburg jail. After his release, his next move was to resist another attempt of the same government to make a fresh inroad on the rights of Indians by passing the Asiatic Registration Amendment act (No. XXXVI) 1908, which prohibited the movement of Indians from Natal into Transvaal. The violation of the Act was organized by Gandhi and his followers with the result that Gandhi and his 'law-breaker' followers were again arrested and put into the jail. His release in December ushered in the beginning of constitutional movement by the Indians in South Africa. From 1909 to 1912 Gandhi mobilized various sections of upper class Indians to wage a series of constitutional agitation against the systematic discrimination of the British Government towards Indians in South Africa.

The Indian Immigrants Regulation Act of 1913 gave a fresh affront to the Indian community and marked the beginning of another Satyagraha movement in October-November 1913. The movement led to the appointment of an enquiry commission under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice W.H. Solomon. The commission was required to enquire into, and report on, the general grievances of the Indians in South Africa. Although Gandhi did not take part in the proceedings of the commission, in a letter to the Secretary to the Minister of the Interior, he drew the Government's attention to the points on which the Indian community sought relief. The points in question included the repeal of the 3-pound tax, the marriage question, the cape-entry question, the Orange Free State question, and an assurance that existing laws specially affecting the Indians would be administered justly and with due regard to vested rights. Especially, Gandhi took a serious view of the 3-pound tax and demanded its immediate abolition. His abhorrence of the tax and his unflinching determination to fight for its abolition are reflected in the letter he wrote on 28th September 1913 to Mr. Georges, Secretary to the Minister of the Interior. 'This step', wrote Gandhi, 'consists in actively, persistently and continuously asking those who are liable to pay the 3-pound tax to decline to do so and to suffer the penalties for non-payment and, what is more important, in asking those, who are now serving indenture and who will, therefore, be liable to pay the 3-pound tax on completion of their indenture, to strike work until the tax is withdrawn.'<sup>9</sup>

The Solomon Commission gave a careful consideration to Gandhi's demands and submitted a report to the Union Parliament on 17th March 1914. It recommended therein

certain measures toward removing the grievances of the Indian community, which provided the basis of the Indians' Relief Act, No.22 of 1914. Gandhi separately discussed certain administrative matters with General Smuts, which were not considered by the Indians' Relief Bill, and an agreement, known as Smuts-Gandhi Agreement, was finally reached between them. It was embodied in the two letters, which passed between Gandhi and Mr. Georges, secretary to general Smuts on 30th June 1914. Gandhi noted in his letter to Mr. Georges that 'my countrymen do not aspire to any political ambition .... I am quite certain that the Indian community throughout the Union will be able to enjoy some measure of peace and never be a source of trouble to the government.'<sup>10</sup>

According to Haraprasad Chatotopadhyay, 'Indians' Relief Act and Smuts-Gandhi Agreement marked a distinct triumph of the Gandhian technique of Satyagraha as applied to the Indian struggle in South Africa till 1914.' On the nature and significance of the settlement affected by the Act and by the Agreement Gandhi observed in a letter:

In my humble opinion the settlement is the Magna Carta of our liberty in this land (South Africa). I give it the historic name not because it gives us rights which we have never enjoyed and which are in themselves new or striking, but because it has come to us after eight years' strenuous suffering that has involved the loss of material possessions and of precious lives. I call it our Magna Carta because it marks a change in the policy of the Government towards us and establishes our right not only to be consulted in matters affecting us but to have our reasonable wishes respected.<sup>11</sup>

The Act and the Agreement, though described by Gandhi as the Magna Carta of the Indian community, failed to impress upon a large section of Indians, especially the Indian Muslims living in South Africa, who thought that the settlement of 1914 did not effect any substantial improvement in their condition. The Muslim community, in fact, resented the way in which the marriage question was settled keeping them disaffected. The secretary, Hamidia Islamic Society, which claimed to be the only representative society of the Muslims in South Africa, wrote to the Colonial Secretary on 30th July 1914:

We as a community are entirely dissatisfied with the Relief Bill. There are questions such as the marriage question, the colonial born question and others that were completely ignored

by the Trasvaal Government, and Mr. Gandhi who being a Hindu and not the authorized representative of our community and coreligionists did not try to get the necessary redress for us. We wish to strongly protest against any credit which might be given to Mr. Gandhi for any alleged settlement of the Indian grievances in South Africa, and I am directed to ask you kindly to put on record that, so far as Muhamedans are concerned (and they are the most educated and influential Indians in South Africa), the so-called Indians' Relief Bill is a complete farce and that we wish to dissociate ourselves entirely from Mr. Gandhi and his fellow-followers whose methods of passive resistance, strikes and violence do not appeal to us.<sup>12</sup>

The Secretary of All India Muslim League too strongly criticized Gandhi and the settlement:

The largest section of Indians in South Africa are dissatisfied with him. He has posed, while here, as the representative of all Indians, whilst all the time he was only the authorized representative of his own few followers. Gandhi is a Hindoo, and it is absolutely ridiculous to suppose for a moment that the Muhammedan community would trust him to settle their grievances for them. What Gandhi has done is by no means with the approval of the vast majority of leading Indians. He is mistrusted by us in all matters. He has failed to render an account of large sums of money which he was supposed to have used in the interest of all Indians and for the purpose of getting redress for them. He has been repeatedly asked by different societies to postpone his departure and first call a public meeting for the purpose of cleaning himself of all suspicions and charges which are directed against him, but he has refused. The Government imagine that by entering into agreements with Gandhi and afterwards giving him dinners and fine speeches they have settled the Indian question, but the Government have yet to learn that our grievances are far too real and serious to be settled in such an off-handed manner, and Gandhi will find that he is not the great hero that the Government and his few followers wish to make the world believe he is .... The marriage disabilities and one or two other points will have to receive the serious consideration of the Government before they can make up their minds that there is going to be a final settlement.<sup>13</sup>

#### IV

Gandhi's contribution to the Indian movement in South Africa was great indeed. Given the heavy odds Gandhi had to fight against, he had to evolve a strategy to suit the situation

facing him in South Africa. 'If the black population did not figure in Gandhi's campaign', argues B.R. Nanda, 'it was partly because it did not suffer from the specific disabilities against which Indians were protesting.'<sup>14</sup> In some ways, he goes on to argue, 'such as the eligibility of the ownership of land, the natives of Africa were indeed better off than the Indians.'<sup>15</sup> Nanda also expresses doubts whether at the turn of the century the black population in South Africa would have readily accepted a young Indian barrister as its leader. He therefore appreciates the sound instinct which guided the young Gandhi to wage a battle against racialism on a limited front.

But his role should not be over-dramatized as some nationalist Indians do under the impact of the story of Tolstoy Farm and later, of media culture. First of all, Gandhian movement was more or less concerned with the interests of the upper class Indians. When the issue of the Natal Indian workers was brought into focus in 1913, Gandhi was about to leave South Africa. More importantly, Gandhi played little part in black politics in South Africa since he was least concerned with the interests of the black Africans. True, Gandhi appreciated the bravery of the Kaffirs for their denial to pay taxes, and hoped that this would inspire the Indians there.<sup>16</sup> But he, in his subconscious, committed himself to a derogatory assessment of the black Africans. Just as the whites in South Africa used the terms 'Coolie', 'Girmitiya' or 'Sami' deliberately to insult or ridicule the Indians, they called the blacks 'Negro' or 'Kaffir' with the same purpose. Yet, Gandhi, while objecting strongly to the use of pejorative connotations towards the Indians, never tried to criticize the same in case of the black Africans. Rather, he quite often used the same objectionable terms while describing the blacks there. As he stated in his Green Pamphlet: 'if any of the Indian High Court Judges came to South Africa, ... I am almost positive that he will have to travel from Charlestown to Pretoria in a *Kaffir* compartment, unless he is dressed in European clothing from top to toe.'<sup>17</sup> This remark clearly reveals that the young Gandhi, in his subconscious, considered Indians as racially superior to the black Africans, and consequently attributed the latter a lower social status. Gandhi's inherent belief in social/racial hierarchy became more apparent when he complained in 1904 that Indians were compelled to live with the black *Kaffirs* in certain shanty towns. In 1906 Gandhi favoured the proposal to reserve seats for 'Indians' and 'Coloured' on the first floor of electric trams in Johannesburg,<sup>18</sup> keeping absolutely silent on the rights of the blacks. Again, when in 1907, in

the Johannesburg jail the Indian Satyagrahis were given the clothes assigned to the Negro convicts not punished with hard labour he did not seem to be too satisfied.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, throughout his South African career the astute politician in Gandhi was always careful enough to serve only the Indian interests in South Africa. This was probably to assure the British Government of India and South Africa of the Indians' loyalty to them, and in turn ensure their sympathy for the grievances of Indians in South Africa. Nanda also points out, if Gandhi had clashed head-on with the Boer-British combine on the all-embracing issue of racial equality, he would have been bundled out of South Africa. In that event, he feels, the cause of racial equality would have suffered in the long run.<sup>20</sup> But as I have tried to show by citing Gandhi from his own writings, despite the political imperatives of Gandhian movement in South Africa, he accepted the racial hierarchy of society in his subconscious. In fact, the young energetic M.K. Gandhi was then only maturing into a prudent politician, testing his political strategies to a safe, limited concern, far away from becoming an icon in the eyes of Indians all over. He was still to tread all the way to the glory of becoming the 'Bapu' or 'Mahatma'.

Gandhi left South Africa with the hope that Indians would remain loyal subjects of imperial rule. He later wrote in the *Indian Opinion*: 'To my countrymen I ... said: "Nurse the Settlement, see to it that the promises made are being carried out. Attend to development and progress from within."'<sup>21</sup> But the history of twentieth century-South Africa shows that majority of the Indians did not follow the advised path of Gandhi. Large sections of non-mercantile Indians were radicalized, and started identifying themselves with the interests of the Black Africans. The rise and growth of African nationalism, the stroke of the South African communist Party and the ideals of radical Indian leaders like Yusuf Dadu guided the Indians in South Africa to join hands with the Black nationalists. Despite that, only a small section of Durban-based Indian mercantile community retained their adamant loyalty to the White rulers. It was the unhealthy self-interest of this particular group of Indians that created problems in contemporary South Africa.

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## **The Partition Of Midnapur**

a chiaroscuro in Bengal politics.

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The theme of this paper is Midnapur, a southern district of present West Bengal, and the policy of the British Raj to partition it. Time and again the district had drawn the attention of the Government on various grounds, sometimes administrative at other times security; since it is a well known fact that Midnapur played a very positive roll in anti-establishment activities.

To any and every researcher the partition of Midnapur is a very difficult subject. It is difficult to deal with it because of the paucity of sources. Primary sources particularly Government papers are wanting, and whatever there are in the Archives are of no use as they are not in a condition to be handled by the scholars or the researchers. True, there are some local weeklys. Most of the numbers of *Nihar* and *Medini Bandhab* the two local weeklys which were alert about this sensitive issue, are either not available or beyond one's reach. One secondary source of much importance is Dr. Bidyut Chakrabarty's *Local Politics and Indian Nationalism : Midnapur 1919-1944*. Dr. Chakrabarty discusses however one phase i.e. the middle phase (1915-21) of the partition history. Most probably it is for the dearth of records that he could not give a total history of the partition of Midnapur. Birendra Nath Sasmol, the veteran leader of the partition movement, wrote a number of articles in the English daily *Advance*. The articles were collected and published in a booklet named *Midnapur Partition*. It contains no connected history of the partition. In the *Advance* Sasmol has astutely stated the resason as to why the partition was not feasible in this frontier district of Bengal. The *Advance* contains some letters of Sasmol to the British Prime Minister, the Governor - General of India and the Governor of Bengal and also to M. K. Gandhi while he attended the Second Round Table Conference in London 1931. Here again Sasmol in none of his writings has given a connected and phase - wise history of the partition. Under the above mentioned constraints the present writer attempts to make a review of the partion issue; but is unable to present its phase -wise history along with the currents and cross currents.

To write out the history of the Midnapur partition one has to face at the outset a number of puzzling queries which need clarification : the time and reason of the idea of partition, the design and motive of the government behind it, the reason that led the government to proceed methodically for the execution of the carefully chalked out plan several times and then beat retreat, the reaction of the people of Midnapur to the partition plan, the role of B. N. Sasmol in the initial phase of the partition when he defended the idea and vehemently protested against it in the middle and final phases, the attitude of the Bengal Provincial Congress as well as the people of Bengal towards the plan.

The Midnapur partition plan was not an instant hatching. Its genesis had a long pre-history. Since the devastating Orissa Famine of 1867 there generated the idea of reducing the enormous size of the Bengal Presidency and also the province of Bengal so large in size and so over-grown a charge for a Governor. This time the Government of India had been thinking over the creation of Orissa province. <sup>1</sup> But as Orissa had not the required economic sufficiency and soundness to bear the expenses of the provincial administration the idea did not progress much, and it was shelved for the time being. But the government's idea of partitioning Midnapur on the pretext of administrative convenience went on ringing in the minds of the people of Midnapur and also in those adjacent to Orissa. This was so because the government officials in accordance with the decision of the District Administrative Committee were pleading for reducing the size of big Bengal districts like Midnapur and Mymensingh as this would establish better personal contacts between the Collector and his people, and would be of much help for the District Magistrate to take particular care over big districts, specially over districts which were politically disturbed.

It is stated earlier that the history of the partition of Midnapur had an earlier history. Long before the announcement of Mr. Hare, the Divisional Commissioner of Burdwan, in 1907 it was a widespread rumour that the District of Midnapur would be divided into two districts. In his address to the town people of Midnapur, Hare pointed out that Midnapur Main (North) Ghatal and Jhargram would form one district with Midnapur as its headquarters, and that Midnapur south along with Tamluk and Contai would form the other with its headquarters at Higli near Kharagpur. <sup>2</sup> 800 bighas of land were acquired for the proposed Higli district. <sup>3</sup> But it is learnt from the *Nihar* that before this announcement of Hare regarding the partition of Midnapur the people of Midnapur were informed by the district authority that the notables and the zamindars of the district must would have to inform the District Magistrate and the Collector of their opinion about it <sup>4</sup>. It is also stated in the *Nihar* that so large a district with an area of 5,186 square miles and a population of 27,89,114 was too heavy a charge for the administrative authority <sup>5</sup>. That is why the partition of the district would be a satisfactory and wholesome

solution of all their civil and judicial problems. In this connection the *Nihar* writes that the Sub-divisional Magistrate of Contai was directed by the District Collector to acquire 300 bighas of land for the setting up of the new district.<sup>6</sup> Hatabari, a place close to Contai town, might be the suitable spot for the purpose.<sup>7</sup> This caused a sensation and agitation too in different places of the district. Public meetings and assemblages were held to discuss the pros and cons of the governmental design relating to the partition of the district.<sup>8</sup> The general tone of the meetings was that the government would thus inflict an arbitrary and inhuman punishment on the people of Midnapur, and so this vindictive attitude and sinister design of the government had to be protested with all sorts of vehemence.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile the government gained the experience that the anti-Bengal -partition movement though mostly an elite movement in character, had made the people of Bengal politically much sensitive to and mentally furious and uproarious against the government intentions. Probably that is why the plan for the partition of Midnapur was not implemented. In this connection the *Nihar* Writes 'The Government at last has repealed the partition of the district.'<sup>10</sup>

The question of partition came up again after a few years. After the first Midnapur Bomb Case Lt. Governor Lord Carmichael on the recommendations of the District Administrative committee announced after his visit to Contai in 1913 that Midnapur was to be partitioned and that the headquarters of the new district town of Higli would be located at Kharagpur.<sup>11</sup> Narendra Nath Das writes in this connection, "The Government of Bengal was then engaged in working out the scheme in detail behind the scene, while outwardly the costly buildings were begun to be erected on the outskirts of the Kharagpur Railway Settlement."<sup>12</sup> As a result the district roared in protest. Strangely enough the government of Lord Reading and the then Secretary of State dropped the partition scheme without expressing the government's intention.

Later in January 1915 the Bengal government again raised the issue and in accordance with recommendations of the District Administrative Committee took the decision to partition the two districts Midnapur and Mymensingh as an essential part of the government's anti-territorial strategy.<sup>13</sup> The Midnapur partition plan was made public on January 26, 1915.<sup>14</sup> The announcement of the partition provoked widespread resentment among zaminders, lawyers, businessmen and so on.

A critical assessment of the anti-partition movement would reveal that it had no popular basis, and it never became a serious threat to the administration. And it seemed to the government that the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Sasmol-led Anti-Union Board Movement in spite of initial successes would subside. Yet the government could not stick to its

plan of partitioning Midnapur. Only just a year ago the government pleaded that the most appropriate step for the introduction of local-self-government in India was to divide up larger districts. But during the heyday of the Non-Cooperation Movement the Bengal government shelved the partition scheme principally for financial reasons. And since then the district became assured of its territorial integrity and solidarity.<sup>15</sup>

In 1931 the Midnapur partition question presented itself before the people of Midnapur in a newer and stronger form. Now the question was the incorporation of Midnapur with the newly proposed Orissa Province. The question gained much weight and gravity when it was placed before the Federal Structure Committee.<sup>16</sup> Sasmol and other leaders of Midnapur felt the seriousness of the situation. Protest-meetings were held, Sasmol sent protest letters and telegrams to higher authorities of the British Empire and also of the British India in which he pointed out "Midnapur refuses amalgamation with Orissa to a man. There is no cultural and linguistic unity between the two."<sup>17</sup> Besides he prayed in a telegram to the Prime Minister, to see that Midnapur was properly represented in the Boundary Committee.<sup>18</sup> The writings of Sasmol pregnant with facts and figures and logical arguments bore fruit; the policy of incorporating Midnapur with Orissa withered away.

Thus the rebellious spirit of Midnapur i.e. the spirit of fighting against all odds at all phases was crowned with heroic success, and Midnapur as a result remains to day in her old territorial grandeur holding her heroic ballads to future generations.

The partition of Midnapur resembles the partition of Bengal. But in depth and gravity and by nature they were poles apart: because one was a district affair and the other was a provincial political matter. The protesters including lawyers, zamindars, businessmen and others against the Midnapur partition plan were guided by material interests, and the defenders gave weight to the partition plan only for regional interests. Here one may be reminded of Sasmol who at one point of time defended partition thinking that it would allow the people of Contai to enjoy the benefits of a district town.<sup>19</sup> In the case of the partition of Bengal, despite the prevalence of sectarian and separatist attitudes, such a thing was inconceivable. Though weak in character this agitation against partition had definitely certain important bearings which greatly influenced the anti Union Board movement and the breaking of Salt-Law in Midnapur. It is thus evident that the history of anti-partition movement in Midnapur is a history of histories in the chiaroscuro in Bengal politics.

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