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Importance Of *Gaudarajamala* In Reconstructing Early History Of Bengal

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Varendra research Society (Varendra Anusandhan Samiti) was established(1910) in Rajshahi, now in Bangladesh, primarily with the objective of "sequential investigation of evidences in Varendra region".[1] But the Varendra Research Society had not ceased its sense of duty by means of accumulating the evidences of history of Bengal or by making the display of the same in its museum. It is to be highlighted that the Society executed a number of sustaining operations to realize the vision of the reconstruction of early history of history of Bengal. Undeniably, the research and publication was one of the key mission in the line.[2] Accordingly, the skilled scholars of the VRS carried out research scheme from the very beginning with the basis of the stuffs collected by the society, formerly discovered evidences and utilizing its own handy reference library. And thus the Society took in hand the programme of compilation of the upshots of research activities and publish them in a series of work named '*Gaudavivarana'* . Intended for the motive of discussion of different subject matters in different divisions , the VRS divided the '*Gaudavivarana*' into eight sections:[3] i)*Rajamala* (Dynastic History), ii)*Shilpamala*(Art), iii)*Vivaranamala*(Antiquarian Topography), iv)*Lekhamala*(Inscriptions), v)*Granthamala*(Old Sanskrit text), vi)*Jatitattva* (Ethnology), vii)*Shrimurtitattva (*Iconography) and viii)*Upaasak Sampraday* (Religious Sects).

Gaudarajamala, the foremost original work of the Varendra Research Society was put in writing by Ramaprasad Chanda, the then secretary and published in 1912 as the first volume of the first part of *Gaudavivarana*. The intact chronological political account(Dynastic History) of Bengal till the institution of the Muslim regime was integrated in it.

Gaudarajamala was essentially the history of Ancient Bengal composed on the basis of stone inscriptions and copperplates. An additional set of sources like the study of inscriptions discovered in other provinces, historical essence of the old manuscripts and the researches of the earlier investigators in the line were put into effect in writing this invaluable work .[4] However, Ramaprasad Chanda did not show any sort of curiosity on popular fairy stories in letteringit.

It is remarkable that the first volume of the first part of *Gaudavivarana i.e. Gaudarajamala* was written in Bengali in the hope that it would reach like a calendar in the hands of every Bengalees in every corner of Bengal to furnish knowledge conceming the ancient history of their own.[5] The importance of *Gaudarjamala* in the reconstruction of Bengal's past can only be evaluated by taking into account the sort of history that was prevalent before the establishment of this institution.

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It may be asserted that though the scientific documentation of history resulting from its emergence as an independent discipline, although started evolving during the fifteenth-sixteenth century Europe, yet it took more than a few centuries for the Indian sub-continent to reach at the same stage. To be fair enough, the condition of Indian history was dismal enough before the onset of the British Colonial rule, which intern gave birth to the Asiatic Society. Bengal's history was hardly an exception. Moreover even after the commencement of the Asiatic Society, the history of Bengal, particularly the ancient history of Bengal witnessed no major improvements. Hence after the formation of Fort William College in 1800, when a catalogue was prepared for the sake of familiarizing the British officials with the culture and civilization of India, then books like *Rajabali(1808)* , a work by Mrityunjoy Tarkalankar based on Kulasastra or *Pratapaditya Charita(1801)* by Ramram Basu or *Raja Krsnachandra Rahasya Charita*(1805) by Rajiblochan Mukhopadhaya had to be included as the references. William Kerry himself had written a book *Itihashamala*(*A Garland of History* was the sub title of this book in English) in that line. Despite the endevour undertaken by some scholars to project this writers, Mrityunjoy Tarkalankar and Ramram Basu as the precursors who developed a new paradigm of hybridity of the view by amalgamating the old approach with the new in the task of history-writing. Yet the fact cannot be overlooked that whatever new experiments Mrityunjoy Tarkalankar or Ramram Basu or Rajiblochan Mukhopadhaya did, but their works which were loaded with stories and fables can never be leveled as a historical account. This will get thoroughly clarified if we go through the content of one of these works. Let us take, for the sake of illustration, the book written by Mrityunjoy Vidyalankar. The subject matter of the work is the biographical sketches of the kings that started with Yudhisthir[6] and ended with Tipu Sultan. Despite been aware of Raziuddin Aquil & Partha Chatterjee's recently published *History in the Vernacular*[7]((2008) or Romila Thapar(ed.)'s *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*[8](2000) yet without any doubt it can be affirmed that *Rajabali* is not a historical text, rather a work full of illusionary fables. *Pratapaditya Charita* or other contemporary works fall within this same category. Actually the historical study of any part of ancient India cannot realize its full potential on the basis of literary sources alone. Explaining the reason behind this the famous Indian archaeologist Dilip Kumar Chakrabarty has written:

" the sources which have been used beginning with the *Rig-Veda*, were not meant for historical resources and whatever historical information has been gleaned from them is not free from questions(Kalhan's *Rajtarangini*) regarding their chronology, geological applicability and even context."[9] K. A. N. Sastri also rendered his voice of the " utter impossibility of basing any part of the ancient history of India solely, or even primarily upon literary evidences."[10]

Anyway it can be cited that within two years by its publication *Gaudarajamala* has provided the required blow needed to change the conventional notion of history in Bengal. It's very release created profound commotion among the historical circuits. For, the society became beacon bearer who showed the path of writing the ancient history of Bengal on the

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basis of stone and copper inscriptions. It is to be noted that *Gaudarajaramala* has been considered as the path breaking work concerning the ancient history of Bengal, to have been ever written in scientific procedure.

Quite naturally one might develop inquisitive about the reasons that made *Gaudarajamala* one of the most prestigious deeds. As a response to such queries one might visit the introductory preface to *Gaudarajamala* where Askshay Kumar Maitra had extensively discussed the methodology followed in writing the book. Commenting on the context in relation to which Gaudarajamala must be read, Askshay Kumar Maitra has stated

"before the advent of the Muslim rule, Gouda region was under the reign of the rulers who represented the Sena dynasty. Prior to that the Palas dominated over this region. This fact is prevalent even among the most ahistoric among the Bengalees. This facts have got intertwined with many imaginary incidents interpolated by the folk; the fiction writers have exaggerated much by their story telling capabilities. However reality needs to be extracted from the various controversies pertaining to various issues like, under which circumstances and from which exact time the Pala kings gained their power; what conditions and time frame resulted in their surrender before the rulers of the Sena dynasty and how eventually the Senas too lost their domain ; the sort of relationship they maintained with their subjects and so on. All these issues of the history of Bengal that every Bengalee should have been aware of, failed to gained popularity due to the absence of a proper discursive method."[11] *Gaudarajamala* deserves the credit of bridging this gap by highlighting the scientific style of narrating the sequential history of ancient Bengal. This text has carefully omitted the classical legends like Yudhisthir on the one hand and characters like Adisur, whose presents cannot be derived from any historical source but from mere folk etymology.

Guadarajamala is not only a historical treatise of pala and Sena period. For it illustrate chronologically the ups and downs in the Gouda empire.

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

In fact, ages have lapsed after the publication of Gaudarajamala resulting in the discovery of various inscriptions that revealed before us many new incidents as well as information regarding unknown kings and their dynasties which in effect acted in the alterations of some of the old notions, through fresh investigations. D. C. Sircar in his introduction[12] to the 1975 edition of Gaudarajamala published by Nababharat Publishers, pointed out a few of such alterations.

Inspite of that, the review[13] of *Gaudarajamala* given by no other than Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, is worth mentioning here:

"***...*** a few books that were available before this, regarding the history of Bengal were mere compilations of legendaries and ancient myths like that of Rajabali . *Gaudarajamala* is the

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first history book of Bengal written by following the modern scientific methodology. Many new information regarding the ancient history of Bengal got illuminated by this book and many old notions got turned as null and void."

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

Notes & References:

1. Ray, Sarat Kumar, Presidential Address, Varendra Research Society, 1319 B.S. See also Annual Report of Varendra Research Society for the years 1935- 36 & 1949.
2. Annual Report of Varendra Research Society for the years 1925- 26, 1926- 27, 1935- 36 & 1949.
3. Chanda, Ramprasad, *Gaudarajamala* , Varendra Research Society, 1912, republished by Nababharat Publishers , Calcutta, 1975, see Upokramnika.
4. Chanda, op.cit., p.0.21.
5. i.bid.
6. Yudhisthir was not, obviously a historical character. He was the symbol of a honest and pious man which was a character of the great epic *Mahabharata*.
7. In the work, *History in the Vernacular*, the authors have raised question about that there was no history writing in India before colonialism and they suggests that careful readings reveal distinctly indigenous historical narratives. To them, those narratives might be embedded within non-historical literary genres, such as poems, ballads and works within the itihasha- purana tradition, but they are marked by discursive signs that allow them to be recognized as historical.
8. In the work *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History,* Romila Thapar explored the society of the heroes in the epics and the later tradition of venerating the hero through a new viewpoint. Accordingly she gave a new life to the charachter Shakuntala.
9. Chakravarti, Dilip Kumar, *India: An Archaeological History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 1.
10. i. bid.
11. Chanda, op.cit., p. 1.

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12. With the help of the information of Megasthenese in *Indica*, Diodorus jotted down that the river Ganges was flowing through the eastern boundary of the Gangaridoi and finally merged with the sea water.
13. Majumdar, Nanigopal(ed.), *Inscriptions of Bengal*, *Volume- III*, VRS, 1929, p. 60.

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