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Libraries in Bankura District in Colonial Period: a Glimpse to look the Colonial Education under British Raj

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Abstract

Though there were some royal collections of books in early and medieval age in India, there was no library in modern sense before coming of Europeans in India. Bankura is not an exceptional. Though there are findings of many manuscripts from some houses of the villages along with the royal collection of books of Malla royal family in Bankura district, libraries in modern sense were started to build in 19th century in Bankura district. In that time there were some forces behind building libraries in Bankura district like Christian missionaries, progressive zamindars and upper middle class society, revolutionaries and others. Though their interests were different, their efforts took the people of Bankura in contact of books, the source of knowledge. The article covers mainly evolution and growth of libraries in Bankura district in colonial period with emphasizing the primitive condition of libraries in Bankura district before colonial period by patronage of the Malla kings of Bishnupur in the beginning of the article.

Keywords

Malla kings, Christian missionaries, libraries, Bankura, colonial period

Body

During reign of the Malla dynasty of Bishnupur, though we did not find any library in modern sense, the Malla kings had many manuscripts in their collection. In fact Malla kings like Bir Hambir, Gopal Singha, Chaitnya Singha and others wrote some treatises also. There was a royal collection of Vaishnava texts in the royal palace of the Malla kings of Bishnupur. Manohar Das, who later became famous as a saint, was in charge of that collection. So obviously there was the idea of collecting and preserving books in the Malla dynasty of Bishnupur. But perhaps this royal collection or the royal library was restricted for the members of royal family and close associates of the royal family. Common men had not the right to enter there. There have been discoveries of many manuscripts from one or two family of some villages in Bankura district. From the village Chhabra of the district, there have been findings of at least 200 manuscripts including the copies of Hamsaduta, Rasakadamba, Lalitamadhava, Vidagdhamadhava, SamkhiptsaraVyakarana, Brihat Samhita, Surya Samhita and many other texts. From the village Paikpara, there have been findings of 100 manuscripts including copies of Pabandut by Dhoyi, Meghdutam and RituSamharam by Kalidasa, Kavya of Ghatakarpara, Gitagovinda of Joideva and texts on Naya, Vyakarana and Alamkara. There were many manuscripts found from Ajodhya, Maliara, Bhutsahar, Simlapal, Gamidya, Bhetara, Ramsagar, Chilimpur, Janta, Desra, Kudriya, Peno, Chakdaha, Patpur, Kakilya and etc. Almost every manuscript was either written or copied during reign of Malla dynasty of Bishnupur. So it is evident that there was a growth of education in the reign of Malla dynasty of Bishnupur. Though we may not say the findings of almost 100 or over 100 manuscripts from a single family as a library in modern meaning, but there must be many personal collections as well as official collection of books by the Malla kings in the reign of the Malla kings of Bishnupur.

In Bankura district, modern library was the contribution of the British raj in India. In 1876 A.D. William Hunter only knew about a small public library in Bankura district. This library was situated in Bankura town. Perhaps this library was controlled by some government officials of Bankura district. William Hunter did not say anything about how the library went on. In 1908 A.D. O Malley in his district Gazetteer of Bankura tells about only two libraries in Bankura district. One was in Bishnupur and other one is in Kaktiya village. The library in Bishnupur was built in the courtyard of Bishnupur municipality in 1904 A.D. and the library in Kaktiya was built in 1903 A.D. but O Malley did not say about the library of Bankura town. Perhaps that library had stopped its journey. It is also important to say that during first half of twentieth century, the Bishnupur municipality had more enthusiasm to build libraries than Bankura municipality. Till 1925 A.D. there were only seven libraries in Bankura district.

In the second half of 20th century, there was an influx in making and continuing libraries in Bankura district.

In this district, new educated section of the old and new zamindar families, new merchant groups and many educated people of Bankura district took some steps in founding modern libraries in Bankura district. Jogendranath Singhadev, the zamindar of Kuchiakol built the “Basanta library” in Kuchiakol to commemorate memory of his son’s sudden death. It should be noted here that the Kuchiakol zamindar family’s ancestry belonged to the Malla royal family of the Malla kingdom of Bishnupur. From a draft of a will, preserved in the house of Kuchiakol zamindar family, it has been known that he granted one bigha land to establish the library and donated at least twelve hundred rupees for the library. For buying new books and newspapers, the family donated the library a sum of two hundred rupees annually. The responsibility of the library was tied on both the committees of Kuchiakol high school and the dispensary of Kuchiakol. This library was established in the second half of 20th century.

In 1910 A.D. the “Shanbandha Arunodoi library” was built in the Shanbandha village of Bankura district. It was abig library. “Arunodoi Samiti”, a local club led this library. The library began at first in a room of Baramela of the village. Till 1941 A.D. the library was in this room.

During the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, this movement also broke out in Bankura district. Beside establishment of gymnasium clubs and national educational institutions, the Swadeshi people also built new libraries in Bankura district. Ahindranath Ghosh, Mahindranath Ghosh, Manmathnath Mullick and some others young people built the “Sri Ramkrishna library” in Kotulpur for the common people of Kotulpur. Why did they build the library? This library became a place of contacting revolutionaries of the district and other districts of Bengal and other parts of India. Kalikumar Ghosh, father of Ahindranath Ghosh and Mahindranath Ghosh, was the advocate of Kotulpurmunsef court. This court was regular from 1836 A.D. to 1872 A.D. and from 1879 A.D. to 1911 A.D. After 1911 A.D., this court did not go on. After closing of this court, Kalikumar went to Bishnupur with his family. So the library was obviously established before 1911 A.D. In the period from 1917 A.D. to 1920 A.D., there was J.C. Vas as the district magistrate of Bankura district. To get help from government, the people of Kotulpur changed the name of the library from the Sri Ramkrishna library to the name of J.C. Vas. After changing of the name of the library, Manmathnath, a man who loved his country than his life, left the working committee of the library.

Manmathnath also built a library in Ramjibanpur of Bankura district. Main aim of this library was to collect members for the revolutionary groups from the readers of the library who came to this library for reading books and newspapers. Ramkrishna Das, a great revolutionary of the district, writes that in the library of Ramjibanpur, Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, a great revolutionary of Maharashtra met with Manmathnath Mullick when he came to Bankura district for disseminating revolutionary ideas among people of Bankura district.

SushilchandraPalit and Jagadishchandra Palit, members of the great revolutionary Palit family of Betur village of Bankura district, were connected to Avai ashram of Kumilla of eastern Bengal. They set up a branch of Avai ashram in Bankura district. They also built a library of this ashram in Bankura district. The main collection of this library was collection of books on nationalism. People were in different opinions on the fame of this library. Ramkrishna Das writes that this library of Avai ashram had only two broken almirahs and some English and Bengali books. In other side Sanat Bhattacharya writes that JagadishchandraPalit was the founder of library movement in Bankura district. Bireswar Ghosh writes that, within a few days, this library became famous among the students of schools and colleges of Bankura district. Though Avai ashram was influenced by ideals of Mahatma Gandhi, in this library people of both Gandhian movement and the revolutionary movement, came and this library had books on both ideals of Gandhi movement and revolutionary ideas and ideals. Freedom fighters like BibhutibhushanGhatak, Bireswar Ghosh and others came to this library. In fact Reverend Brown, the principal of Bankura Wesleyan College (later Bankura Christian College) also came to this library to read books of the library.

In 1929 A.D. a library was established in Mirjapur village of Joipur p.s. BibhutibhushanGhatak, one of the freedom fighters of Bankura district, built this library. In this time, books written by the famous Bengali writers, were published and sold in low price from BasumatiSahityaMandir of then Calcutta. A doctor of Mirjapur village loved to read these books and bought many books including writings of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya, Hemchandra, RameshchandraDutt and others regularly from the publication house. But once he was in distress and sold all books of his collection in a very few prices. The library, built by Bibhutinhushan Ghatak started its journey with these books. Slowly, with the cooperation of villagers of the village collected over three thousand books for preserving in the library. The library also collected and bought many newspapers including the famous “Hitabadi” and “Bangabasi” from Calcutta. Many people came to this library to read these newspapers. In 1930 A.D. this library became the center of the Civil disobedience movement in Bankura district. In 1932 A.D. Bibhutibhushan Ghatak with some other co-members of the library was arrested by the British police for organizing the Civil disobedience movement in Bankura district. After this, slowly this library was closed due to lack of wealth, adequate leadership, lack of help from government and lack of interest of the villagers to go on the library.

In 1923 A.D., Jogesh Dey, a young student of Bankura Sammilani Medical College, built a library in Rajagram beside Bankura town. The name of the library was “Vivekananda library”. He was involved with the Anushilan Samity, one of the revolutionary groups of Bengal. He came from Chattagram of eastern Bengal to Bankura to set up a branch of Anushilan Samity here. He began the library to disseminate the ideals of Anushilan Samity among the readers of the library. In this library,

many books including the books published from the Saraswati press which were banned by the British government were collected. These books help to influence the young people of Bankura district with ideals of nationalism. In the third decade of 20th century, Anushilan Samity in Bankura district built some more libraries. One of these libraries was the “Sahitya Mandir”. This library was established in a gymnasium in Natunganj of Bankura town. This library was controlled by Niradbaran Dutta and Matiprabha Dutta of Chattagram. Prabhakar Biruni of AnushilanSamiti built four libraries in Bankura district during this time viz. Vivekananda library, Saktisankar library, Tarun library and Gangadhar library.

Mathas and missions also took some steps to build libraries and growth of library movement in Bankura district. Among mathas and missions, situated in Bankura town and rest of the district, Ramkrishna Mission branch of Bankura district was most important. Mainly religious texts were available there. Except religious texts, Bharat, Hindustan, The AmritbajarPatrika, The Hindustan Standard and others daily newspaper; Bakuradarpan. Abhijan, Hindubani, Sonar Bangla, Nabashakti and others weekly newspaper and Udbodhan, Prabasi, Modern Review, Vedanta and the West, Message of the East and others monthly newspapers were come to this library. During the year 1947 A.D. the number of the books in the library of Ramkrishna math branch in Bankura was 2078 books. During the period 1942 A.D. -1947 A.D. this library got 40,038 rupees as the financial help.

In the middle of 20th century, almost every parts of Bankura district saw rise of a large number of libraries. In 1929 A.D. there was a public library in Tiludi village of Saltora p.s. i.e. Manmohini institute. Thereafter there were many public libraries in Bankura district like Banimandir Public library in Harmashra village in 1931 A.D., Khandelwal library in Natunganj of Bankura town by Khandelwal district in same year, Jamjuri public library in 1934 A.D. in Jamjuri village, JatiyaGranthagar by Khitishchandra Chattopadhyay and his two sons in Gelia village in 1938 A.D., KshetrapalSmriti library in Brindabanpur in 1940 A.D., Kalachand Memorial library in Ambikanagar in same year, Ajad Hind Sangha Sangha by Sundarnarayan Tung, then zamindar of Fulkushma, Binapani library in Raotara village in 1944 A.D. by the villagers of Raotara village, Gorabari public library in Gorabari village of Ambikanagar in 1946 A.D., Vivekananda library in Ajodhya in 1947 A.D., Banishiri library in Gopikantapur and Bidyadharpur in 1948 A.D. and Bani library in Mandalkuli village.

In this article, I have mainly dealt with the evolution and growth of libraries in Bankura district in colonial period. I visited some libraries in rural and urban areas of Bankura district and collected materials. I also took help of some distric gazetteers and official sources of colonial period. I have begun the article with showing personal collection of books in house of kings and other rich men of the district to make the reader understand about the tradition of reading and writing literature from early medieval period which took modern shape in late nineteenth or early twentieth century in Bankura

district. Though in beginning of colonial period, libraries started to develop by Christian missionaries and so called “educated class” of Bengal society of 19th century, later the responsibility to disseminate the light of knowledge through making libraries were carried forward by nationalists, extremists, social groups, religious institutions, landlords, schools and the Wesleyan college and in fact joint effort of villagers in some villages of the district. It is true that the interests of building libraries of them were different, but main goal was to reach the light of education to people of Bankura district.

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