

## RAM DAS SEN LIBRARY: AN INDIGENOUS AGENCY OF NINETEENTH CENTURY BENGAL RENAISSANCE

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### ABSTRACT

*It was in the second half of nineteenth century that a number of personalities gathered in Berhampur, who added new dimension to the Bengal Renaissance. They enriched Bengal with their wisdom and scholarly activities over the century. Many mysteries regarding social, cultural and political aspects of the past of the country have been revealed with their tireless efforts. It can be said that renaissance does not take place in any particular region all of a sudden; a suitable background helps it to take place. Some famous libraries played an important role to create that intellectual ferment in Murshidabad. Ram Das Sen Library was one of them. The persons like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Akshay Chandra Sarkar, Gurudas Bandopadhyay, Pandit Ramgati Nyayaratna, Taraprasad Chottopadhyay, Dinonath Gangopadhyay and various eminent persons used this legendary library to enrich their writings. The library and the exceptional collection of Dr. Sen still exist in the mind of literature lovers and scholars of history.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Orientalist, Intelligentsia, Renaissance, Annotated, Classical*

### INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth Century Bengal witnessed many a historical events, aspects, and idealism in which historians and scholars were involved. It became subject matter of scholarly debate. The Bengal Renaissance is one of them. A number of scholars have put forward their opinion about the nature of the Bengal Renaissance. The renaissance, as a cultural movement has been accepted by some historians as an established fact in the history of Murshidabad.<sup>1</sup> It can be said that renaissance does not take place in any particular region all of a sudden; a suitable background helps it to take place. Some famous libraries played an important role to create that intellectual ferment in Murshidabad. Ram Das Sen's library was one of them. The Intellectual ferment in Berhampur was rather strong during the second half of nineteenth century. Berhampur Court, Berhampur College, Collectorate of Berhampur, and the Estate of the Nawab (Lalbag) opened an opportunity for jobs for the educated people. In this atmosphere, a number of scholars gathered in Berhampur and they enriched Bengal with their wisdom over the century. Among those some remarkable were Pandit Madan Mohan Tarkalanker (1817-1858), Sris Chandra Vidya Rantna (1835-62), Bhudeb Mukhapadhyay (1827-1894), Prof. Revd. Lal Bihari De (1824-94), Akshay Chandra Sarkar (1846-1917), Baikuntha Nath Sen, Tara Prasad Chattopadhyay, Rajkrishna Mukhapadhyay(1845-86), Ramgati Nayaratna(1831-1894), Ganga Dhar Kabiraj(1798-1885), Girish Chandra Basu,(1853-1939) Prasanna Kumar Sarbadhikari(1825-86), Radhika charan Sen(1843-1899), Guru Das Bondopadhyay(1844-1918), Pandit Kalibar Vedanta Bagish (1842-1911), Dinabandhu Mitra(1830-1873), Acharya Brojendra Nath Seal(1864-1938), Bankim Chandra Chottopadhyay(1838-1894), Ramesh Chandra Dutt (1848-1909), Sasadhar Tarkachuramoni(1850-1928) and as well as

Ram Das Sen(1845–1887).<sup>2</sup> Akshay Chandra Sarkar compared the presence of such luminaries with that of the Court of ‘Vikramaditya’ where ‘nine-gems’ were presented.<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, most of them had good contact with Ram Das Sen’s Library. Needless to say that the contributions of Sen’s library in the nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance has hardly become a subject matter of scholarly study. In this present context the chief objective of my present works is focus how this legendary library was created intellectual ferment and brings revolution in classical revival?

After the establishment of Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, the interest grew up among the scholars of Europe and Bengal about the past of the country. They paid most importance in revealing the history of ancient as well as India. As a result a huge mass of literature has developed over the years, written mostly in philosophical and historical perspectives. Many mysteries regarding social, cultural and political aspects of the past of the country have been revealed with tireless efforts of such antiquarians in nineteenth century Bengal. Dr. Ram Das Sen was an antiquarian and orientalist scholar who was born in the distinguished Sen’s family of Berhampur in the district of Murshidabad, West Bengal. This literary zaminder was one of the central scholars and prominent member of the intelligentsia of that time there. This celebrated antiquarian received the title ‘Doctor’ from the Oriental Academy of Florence, Italy in recognition of his Sanskrit literature, antiquities writings and research activities.<sup>4</sup>

The necessity of library for creating the favorable circumstance of the study habit will be felt in curious mind of Ram Das–this is natural. The information which we have got from the writing of Sris Chandra Chattopadhyaya is that Ram Das’s father had an ancestral library.<sup>5</sup> The library became more prosperous due to his quest. In his lifetime the library got so prosperity, that it was considered as a special place. Ram Das Sen’s library was a noteworthy place for intellectual interaction and it also certified by Murshidabad Hitaishi, a famous contemporary magazine of Murshidabad.<sup>6</sup> In keeping with the similarities of the historical places of Murshidabad, his legendary library was also mentioned by the visitors to the district.

‘Hazarduari Lachmipath Babur Bagan Bari

Nasipur Raj Bari ar Ramdas Sener Library’<sup>7</sup>

The library of Sen became legendary. The persons like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Akshay Chandra Sarkar, Gurudas Bandopadhyay, Pandit Ramgati Nyayaratna, Taraprasad Chottopadhyay, Dinonath Gangopadhyay and various eminent persons used his library.<sup>8</sup> Nikhil Nath Roy, an eminent historian and son-in-law of Sen consulted this library while writing history of Murshidabad.<sup>9</sup> When Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya came to Berhampur as Deputy Magistrate in the year 1869, distinguished scholars associated with Sens’ library created an atmosphere of literary activities there.<sup>10</sup> The place of their intellectuals exercise was Ram Das Sen’s library at Berhampur. So, there developed a friendship between Bankim Chandra Chottopadhyaya and Ram Das Sen. Within a very short time, Bankim became a central scholar of this intellectual group. Sens’ library was one of the most favorite places of Bankim. In 19<sup>th</sup> January 1873 a letter was written by Bankim to Sambhunath Mukhapadhyay, the Editor of Mukherjee Magazine is worth mentioning–‘There are three good libraries in Berhampur, and I have got the books I wanted, but have seen unable to make the use of them I intended from (want) of time.’<sup>11</sup> Most obviously Ram Das Sen’s library was one of them. Bankin Chandra made the plan for publication of the famous journal Bangadarshan at Dr Sen’s library.<sup>12</sup> Bankim and Bangadarshan groups used Sens’ library at different time to enrich their writings. Nikhil Nath Roy mentioned in his book that there are three rooms in Sen’s library and one was reserved for archeological remains.<sup>13</sup> Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar wrote a letter to Ram Das expressing him heart-felt gratitude for diverse collection of his library.<sup>14</sup>

In 1951 Anuttam Sen, the successor of Sen handed over collections of about 3500 volumes which belonged to the late Dr. Sen of Berhampur, to the National Library, Calcutta. Presently these are well protected in the galleries of gift and exchange department of the library.<sup>15</sup> So many basic books of nineteenth century on Literature, History, Philosophy, Religion, etc are available in this collection. Many rare books in Sanskrit had enriched the collection considerably. Such rare items, as Renell's Bengal Atlas (1770), nineteenth century Bengali works on Literature, Essay, Religion, etc are also available. There were also about 75 Bengali and Sanskrit manuscripts, it included that of Uvvata's 'Mantra Bhasya' which was five hundred years old and the manuscript of 'Supti Karnamrta' of Shridhar Das, the court poet of Lakshman Sen, written about seven hundred years ago. On 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1887; The Amritabazer Patrika published the death news of Ram Das along with his brief life history. His legendary library was also mentioned here as follow: 'He has left a library the like of which is perhaps not to be seen in whole Bengal.'<sup>16</sup>

Murshidabad however witnessed a Renaissance (in its classical/traditional definition) that is revival of classical text and the generation of the new ideas and innovations. Revival of classical texts denoted the fact that those were reread, re-edited, and annotated, re-explained and its basic spirits were adopted. The Sen's library played a vital role for this classical revival. It definitely added a new dimension in classical past of the Country. Thus it became an important intellectual agency of the Bengal Renaissance in nineteenth century. But in present day, this legendary library's name has gone into oblivion. A proper focus on the collections of Sen's library would bring out an idea about the role of the library in nineteenth century Bengal Renaissance.

The library and the exceptional collection of Dr. Sen still exist in the mind of literature lovers and scholars of history. In this regard the comment made by Professor Dr. Srikumar Bondapadhyay in the 100<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Dr. Ram Das Sen in the University of Calcutta is worth mentioning:

Ram Das Sen, a local zaminder, kindled the torch of antiquarian research as one of the earliest pioneers of the subject and his famous library, with its rich collection of books on Indian antiquities, provided an opportunity to young, aspiring scholars to carry on the work of original investigation started by him'<sup>17</sup>

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