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Rural Life and Folkloric Context in the Literature of Jatindramohan Bagchi and Contemporaries: A Comparative Studies

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Abstract

It must be acknowledged that the history of folk-life and traditional practices in Bengali Literature is very glorious. Higher level research can be carried out individually on the chronological history of Folklore and Folk-life. Previously, different researchers have worked on this topic separately. To give an overall outline of this aspect, work on the topic can be done to give greater credit to the achievements of those who have consistently worked on the subject. This aspect is captured in the writings of the pioneer of Bengali literature, Rabindranath Tagore. His expression is more elevated compared to others. Many have expressed their opinion that there is no one near him. We will discuss his followers in this essay. However, Jatindramohan Bagchi has been placed in the center.

It must be acknowledged that the history of folk-life and traditional practices in Bengali Literature is very glorious. Higher level research can be carried out individually on the chronological history of Folklore and Folk life. Previously, different researchers have worked on this topic separately. To give an overall outline of this aspect, work on the topic can be done to give greater credit to the achievements of those who have consistently worked on the subject. This aspect is captured in the writings of the pioneer of Bengali literature, Rabindranath Tagore. His expression is more elevated compared to others. Many have expressed their opinion that there is no one near him. We will discuss his followers in this essay. However, Jatindramohan Bagchi has been placed in the center. Kumudaranjan Mallick (1878-1970), Karunanidhan Bandyopadhyay (1877-1955), Bande Ali Mia (1906-1979) and Jatindramohan Bagchi (1878-1948) who shed light on the related issues and continued their efforts.

The common factor is that rural love can be observed more or less in each one of them. And this has become possible because of the congenital rural love and affection. Apart from

that, another important aspect is that they envisioned the liberation of the soul by seeking liberation from Rabindranath's totalitarian literary world (Choudhury, 2012: 90). But Tagore's poetry was a deadly deception. They did not get rid of the charming form. Buddhadev Bose has discussed this aspect in detail in his essay 'Rabindranath and Uttarsadhak'. By reading the article we will know more about this aspect. He mentioned in the article that the first two decades of the 20th century were very critical for Bengali poets. The poets of this phase are *Jatindramohan Bagchi*, *Karunanidhan Bandyopadhyay*, *Kumudaranjan Mallick*, *Satyendranath Dutta* and others. According to the essayist, only Satyendranath survived as the 'Magician of Rhythm'. He also mentions that the pitiful poems that were composed at that time have been obliterated by the gracious refinement of time (Bose, 1366: 80). In this case our perspective is that this statement is not universally true, but partially is. As a reader of *Jatindramohan Bagchi*, we can confirm that *Jatindramohan Bagchi* has been surviving and will continue to exist in the future through his works. His rural spirit gave him this achievement. The circle of discussion about him is very limited; he is out of the boundary of thoughts of people today due to the lack of evaluation and in different attitude towards publicity .

However, all of them appeared in the first decade of the 20th century. *Jatindramohan Bagchi's* first poem was published in 1906 AD ('Lekha' book of poems). *Karunanidhan Bandyopadhyay's* first poem 'Bangamangal' was written in the context of the National movement which was published in 1901. On the other hand, *Kumudaranjan Mallick's* first book of poems 'Ujani' was published in 1911. The youngest among them is *Kalidas Roy*, whose first published book of poetry is 'Kunda' (1907). Even though the rural landscape is alive in everyone's poetry, their thoughts, feelings, verses, and poetic philosophies are all unique and that is why they are still alive today, with the deserved dignity in their respective areas.

Rural life and a comparative discussion of the aspects of folklore accompaniment in the literature of *Jatindramohan Bagchi's* contemporaries will be discussed with reference to various critics and bibliographers about *Jatindramohan Bagchi*, *Karunanidhan Bandyopadhyay*, *Kumudaranjan Mallick* and *Kalidas Roy* etc. After that our own opinions will be given place in this episode.

Referring to the poetry of *Sri Sreekumar Bandyopadhyay*, *Kumudaranjan Mallick* and *Kalidas Ray*, the eminent critic *Sri Sreekumar Bandyopadhyay* says (Bandyopadhyay, 1959: 192):

"In Kumudaranjan's poetry, Pallipreeti, Vaishavarasvabukta and nirabaran and sometimes nirabran poetic language are simple ethical tendencies and in Kalidasa's poetry, the opening of the sovereign human essence of the ancient ideology and the tribute to the past glory in words rich in words, rhetorical language is felt as the main tone. Their poetry, filled with devotion, will be exalted in a

pathetic glory beyond the Kaba Veda as the last refuge of rural culture in the past.”

He also mentions about the affective aspects and variations of subject-ideas in the poetry of Jatindramohan Bagchir again (Bandyopadhyay, 1959: 191):

“Although echoes of Rabindranath and Dwijendralal can be heard in many of Jatindramohan’s poems, there was a strong individuality in his style of writing, so even though his imagination lacked the adventure of transcendence and it was limited to the familiar environment, the failure of failed imitation and empty swelling are not seen in his poetry. His subject has resorted to the gentle virtues of ordinary domestic life like affection-compassion-love etc. But the directness of his expression and the coherence and naturalness of his expression are the reasons for the excellence of his poetry.”

— If we summarize the main ideas from the above quotation, it can be seen that:

- Although Jatindramohan’s poetry is influenced by Rabindranath and Dwijendralal, a strong individuality can be seen in his style of writing.
- Jatindramohan’s poetry focuses mainly on simple domestic life.
- ‘The directness of his expression and the coherence and naturalness of his expression are the causes of the excellence of his poetry.’
- Kumudaranjan’s poems are full of rural affection and Vaishnava-thoughts. The application of simple poetic language has elevated the minds of the readers.
- Kalidasa’s poetry shows a sense of loyalty to ancient traditions and ideologies. He paid tributes to past glories in rich rhetorical language.
- “Their poetry is the last refuge of the devotional and memorable indigenous culture and will be resplendent in glory beyond itself.

Incidentally, noted critic *Pramathanath Bishi* has identified *Karunanidhan Bandyopadhyay, Jatindramohan Bagchi, Kumudaranjan Mallick and Kalidas Roy* as the great quartet of poets. He said regarding the relevance of the poetry of these people that (Bishi, 1367: 183):

- i. If we discuss the poetry, it will be seen that there are many things in them which can be preserved in the creative memory of the readers.
- ii. Their poetry carried on a trend which was about to disappear. This trend is not new in Bengali literature, it is very ancient and they were trying to keep this genre alive as much as possible. Their poetry didn’t let the gap get worse between ancient and modern poetry in Bengali. And this reason alone is enough for Bengali readers to be grateful to them.

He presents an insightful discussion about this contemporary quartet of poets. In this context the critic says, (Bishi, 1367: 186-188):

- i. Jatindramohan and Karunanidhan were born in Nadia district. Kalidas Roy and Kumudranjan Mallick were born in Burdwan district. Except for Kumudranjan, they spent most of their lives in the city.

- ii. All of them are more or less educated in English. Everyone's poetry was more or less influenced by Rabindranath. He commented that this influence was more in the case of Jatindramohan Bagchi.
- iii. In the case of four persons, the influence of the rural environment has been most powerful and fruitful. They all more or less lived in the village for a long time before staying in cities. That perspective and ingredients have been used in poetry.
- iv. Karunanidhan, Jatindramohan and Kalidas Roy were countrymen from the heart, but until the last day of life, Kumudaranjan felt comfortable in the village.
- v. Their poetry is simple and lucid because the source of these ingredients was the rural environment of the village.
- vi. Despite the simplicity and luminosity of these poetry, the poets were unappreciated by the readers as a result of the absence of love in poetry.
- vii. Another reason for the lack of appreciation of their poetry is the lack of love in poetry in general. The love that develops through conjugal conventions is abundant in their poetry. But love that doesn't conform to social criterion, the relationship in which one creates one's own rules, which is outside the social norm and order, which the so-called society does not look favorably on, that kind of love cannot be seen developed or accomplished in their poetry. Occasional glimpses of this love have been observed in the works of Jatindramohan and Karunanidhan Bandyopadhyay, but they have disappeared like distant meteorites, illuminating a little spark. These characters clearly state that they are out of the mundane world, they appear for a while and fade away again. Kalidas Roy and Kumudranjan Mallick's poetry do not carry this love but endless devotion. They want to fulfill this love with devotional assistance.
- viii. These discussed poets are a quadruple of Minor Poets, neither poetaster nor prosaic. That's why only they survive in the field of imperishable poetry. While many of the famous contemporary poets and their poems will be disoriented because of their incongruousness and strangeness, then the poems of happiness, sorrow, hope, desire, and joy of indigenous life will prevail. From this point of view, their debt is not very small.

Pramathanath Bishi's views on Karunanidhan Bandyopadhyay, Jatindramohan Bagchi, Kumudaranjan Mallick and Kalidas Roy etc. are of particular significance.

Neelaratn Sen, in his discussion of Kumudranjan Mallick, mentioned the main features of Tagore Contemporary poet society (Sen, 1970: 20):

"The main features of his poetry are — reliance on the love of a merciful God, simple and generous patriotism, love of humanity and nature, avoidance of all complications of life, a fondness for Bengali and ancient traditions of India. Genuine simplicity in their expressions is noticed."

The main themes of Neelaratn Sen's are:

- The poets are very dependent on the love of the merciful God.
- Liberal patriotism, sense of nationalism is revealed in a simple way.
- Love of humanity and love of nature is the sign of uniqueness.
- Their primary goal is to avoid all the complications and highlight the hassle-free life.
- They were devoted to the restoration of the ancient traditions of Bengal and India.
- There was a touch of genuine simplicity in the expression of his poems.

Critic Abdul Aziz has referred to various contemporary poets in the discussion of poet Kumudranjan Mallick. Referring to Kumudranjan Mallick about Jatindramohan Bagchi, he said (Aman, 1376: 155):

“Many of Jatindramohan Bagchi’s poems show the gentle beauty of the countryside, but there is a clear line of distinction between the countryside and the poet. There is a great lack of identical unity compared to Kumudarranjan. A few lines of the poem ‘Janmabhoomi’ from his book of poetry ‘Rekha’ are quoted below:

*“The knot that is visible in the middle of ‘Iri’ field-
Edges of which are darkened with green Keya sedges,
The eastern side is surrounded by orchards of mango and jackfruit,
Tangle beneath which the shepherd boys
That is my village, my paradise,
My heart has been stolen right there!”*

The ‘heart-stealing’ thing here is purely verbal recognition.”

Abdul Aziz, wandered into the mind of Kumudranjan Mallick and Jatindramohan Bagchi and tried to see their mental state. Incidentally, there is a tendency to generalize in such criticisms. When a critic proceeds to discuss a contemporary poet of Jatindramohan Bagchi, in most of the cases they seem to try to show him in three ways a little higher than others. Sometimes it is right, but has been in the place of being blamed for wrong decision-making. Abdul Aziz also said (Aman, 1376: 155-156):

“Kumudaranjan’s basic tone of rural love and traditional love is particularly noticeable in contemporary poet Kalidas Roy’s poem. Yet the difference in attitude is obvious. Kalidas Roy’s love for villages is oriented to past memories. He had left the countryside for a long time and became a complete resident of the city. Any poem he writes about the countryside while sitting in the illuminated electric light of the room is bound to be based on memories. The rare joy of returning to the bosom of the natural countryside after spending so many days in the cruel embrace of the metropolitan is brimming with the heart-rending memories.”

In support of this statement, Abdul Aziz raised the subject of the poem 'Pratyabartan'. He mentioned the distance between the poet's soul and the countryside (Aman, 1376: 156). He also mentioned that some poets worship the rural goddess by using the accumulated experience of the inhabitants from their memory. But there was an exception to this in the case of Kumudaranjan (Aman, 1376: 156).

While talking about poets contemporary of Rabindranath, Sri Kshetrugupta mainly focused on four poets. They are Kalidas Roy, Jatindramohan Bagchi, Karunanidhan Bandyopadhyay and Kumudaranjan Mallick.

He notes (Kshetrugupta, 1358:203-204) that a striking similarity can be observed between their expressions and speech. They have revolved around the sensational imaginative ecstatic divinity of Rabindranath's works. Spiritual devotion, contemplation is a major part of his poetry. He also mentions that anti-urban thinking on one hand, rural love and religion, theism, belief in the conventional notions of beauty on the other, skepticism in the youth consciousness as a group attempt to avoid disappointment and rebellion.

Asitkumar Bandyopadhyay's statement about Karunanidhana, brought for the topic of his comparison with Satyendranath Dutta (Bandyopadhyay, 1369: 274-275): In his book History of Modern Bengali Literature, he said:

"Karunanidhan has visualized life by coloring it with the juice of pure love. The spontaneous gracefulness of language and rhythm, the breathlessness of the main rhythm and the realistic romantic poetry are not often found in Satyendranath. However, the influence of Satyendranath will be more noticeable in his rhythm and rhetoric. No philosophical theory, religious thought or various social problems could pull the dreamy poet's far-reaching vision into the everyday world but could not hold him in the chaotic chaos of daily problems. Karunanidhana recognized the real world and turned it into an innocuous paradise."

In reference to the inspiration of these poet's poetry, Bhudev Chowdhury said that the main idea in Rabindranath's 'Sonar Tari' or 'Chitra' is the way in which rural nature entered as an ideal way of life. These were transmitted to later poets. Most of which was romantic in nature. The followers of Rabindranath were obsessed to follow him for the thoughts and passionate affection towards rural and romantic love of life (Choudhury, 1957: (290).

Vishwanath Chattopadhyay in his essay Karunanidhan: 'Ekla Pather Jatri' (Chattopadhyay, 1960: 64) states:

"As the child of India, the inheritor of the eternal tradition, Karunanidhana possesses invincible power and this power supports him through his journey. In the poem 'Mangal-Giti' he has sung the spiritual glory of Punyabhoomi Bharatvarsha. His contemporary poet Kumudranjan Mallick was inspired by repeated recollections of the glorious words of this past tradition; "In the new construction

Views of various people about these four poets are expressed herewith. Keeping everyone's statement in front, we can compare this time the multidimensional settings of their poetry.

In proceeding to a comparative discussion among poets contemporary to Jatindramohan, we basically have put forward a few aspects as 'parameters'. Namely, from the point of view of the source field of literature, the mode of thinking and style of literature, the underlying ideas of literature, different sources of intimacy with the countryside and the unique aspects of rural orientation, the different aspects of the traditionalists, religious thinking in the context of cultural practices: various aspects in life and literature. These are not the only aspects for this type of comparative studies but these aspects have been put forward to facilitate the discussion.

• **Literary Source Area:** Jatindramohan Bagchi's literary focus or source area of his poetry is indigenous people of villages and pure rural environment. We got to know about the traditions, customs of rural lifestyle, and the diversion of human society. The image of poverty-stricken countryside is captured in many of his poems. The melancholy of rural Bengal is afflicted by doubts about the predominance of pragmatism or disbelief. All these are included in his work. On the other hand, in Kumudaranjan Mallick's work, the life-struggle of the ordinary people of the present life has been expressed in very simple language. Rural nature and its people are the subjects of his works. In the context of Karunanidhana, we can refer to Asitkumar Bandyopadhyay's statement (Bandyopadhyay, 1369: 274 275). According to him Karunanidhan experienced and philosophized life in attachment with pure love; and expressed effortlessly with spontaneous use of simple language and rhythm. No philosophical theory, religious thought or various complex social problems could interrupt the poet's vision in the ever-problematic chaos. Regarding Kalidas Roy, we can highlight the statement of a letter written by Rabindranath (to Kalidas Roy) (Ray, 2016: 15): "Your poetry is as soft and green as the soil of Bangladesh. Your heart is filled to the brim with deep affection towards Bangladesh and your poetry has become embellished in the exuberant flow of that love. When I read these poems of yours, I remember 'Tulsi Mancha' and 'Madhavi Kunj' inside the shady and cool courtyard of Bengal. So the main idea of all poetry is rooted in rural Bengal. Sometimes they go the other way but the main source was caught in the landscape of rural countryside.

• **Literary mode of thought:** In terms of the literary mode of thought, it can be said that these poets have developed a world of thought by relying on trivial things where the natural beauty of rural Bengal is expressed in simple expressions and the inner voice of the common indigenous people is heard. All of them worked tirelessly to express in literature the folk-life, nature, traditions and culture of undivided Bengal. Thoughts and self consciousness of the common people has been revealed in the style, theme, language and word-weaving of each of their poems. In Saratchandra's words, the children of the village, who are neglected and oppressed in the society yet are everything of it, the diversity of the beautiful village environment has been embodied in their works.

• **Literary Ideology:** The underlying ethos of their literature is love for the Most Merciful God and true devotion towards his blessings, generous patriotism, loyalty to patriotic thoughts, love towards humanity and nature, fondness of ancient traditions, always eager to restore the traditions, living life avoiding complications and the impression of that spirit can be seen in the expression of these literary collections. That is why they have expressed their thoughts in simple language.

• **Sources of Intimacy with the countryside:** If we notice, the fruitful influence of the rural environment can be seen in the works of Karunanidhan, Jatindramohan, Kumudaranjan and Kalidas. Karunanidhan, Jatindramohan and Kalidas lived in villages for a limited span of time before settling in cities. They have become famous by widely using that impression and interpretations in poetry. Karunanidhan, Jatindramohan and Kalidas Roy were villagers at heart, and till the end of his life Kumudaranjan felt comfortable staying in the village. They collected ingredients for poetry from rural environment. We have already mentioned that they believed in a carefree life that's why their writings are without the touch of the atrocities of society. However, Karunanidhan and Jatindramohan Bagchi have to be specially remembered in the context of the Swadeshi movement. Both of them wrote poems with a sense to instill patriotism. Jatindramohan Bagchi has directly participated in various discussions and meetings related to the Swadeshi movement.

• **Different directions of the traditionalist:** While Rabindranath's traditionalism has transcended national boundaries and captured the wealth of the world, Kumudranjan's traditionalism was limited within Bengal. His love towards own tradition is a reflection of his passion for Bengali culture (Aman, 1365: 162).

Karunanidhan's poetry shows extreme adherence to Indian tradition. We have already highlighted Critic Bishwanath Chatterjee's opinion on this topic. According to him (Chattopadhyay, 1960: 64):

- As a child of India, Karunanidhan was the inheritor of the everlasting traditional heritage.
- This invincible power supports him on his journey.
- He sang the spiritual glory of India in the poem 'Mangal-Giti'.
- His contemporary poet Kumudaranjan Mallick also glorifies this past tradition and witnessed the eternal pursuit of the soul with several constructions of the Somnath-temple.
- Karunanidhan got inspiration to move forward from India's religion and cultural heritage. His journey went on from paths to pilgrimages; from Kurukshetra, to Gaya, Ganga, Varanasi, or Pushkar." One aspect of his literary pursuits was clothed in religious garb, but his religious sentiments never corrupted his literature, and he was never consumed by prejudice against other religions.

Mohitlal Majumdar's words about Kalidas Ray in one of his letters acknowledge the traditional style of poetry. Mohitlal mentioned (Ray, 2016: 77-78):

"The style of ancient culture that continues to this day in your poetry, the very simple and easy consonance of meaning, is not found in anyone else's poetry; ancient Sanskrit and medieval Bengali; art of the one and soul of the other – perfectly amalgamated in your poetry."

Sri Mohitlal, in the discussed quotation, highlights the significance of Kalidas Ray's works in creating chronological history. The role of his poetry amid the transition is unique. These are the ones that have preserved the connection among different ages.

On the other hand, Jatindramohan Bagchi's works contain more traditional ideas. In his various writings, descriptions of traditional worships and rituals, local festivals and fairs can be noticed (Bagchi, 1312 year: 109). In this regard, we may recall what Gora Singharai says about the context of the Puran of Jatindramohan Bagchi (Singharai, 2001: 11). According to him, the love of tradition and devotion to life is Jatindramohan's distinctive feature. He beautifully dramatizes mythological stories. The story of Indian mythology has come to life in the hands of Jatindramohan. He adopted various stories of Karna, Duryodhana, Baba Bholanath, Kauravas, Srihari, Srikrishna, Draupadi, Pandaldal from Ramayana-Mahabharata. Various characters are reborn in his hands. He has composed several poems based on these mythological stories. For example, 'Karna', 'Duryodhana', 'Bhima', 'Sabarir Pratiksha', 'Basavadatta' etc. in the epic verse 'Mahabharata'. He also used the context of myths and legends in all of his poetry books. From such issues the multi-dimensional aspect of rural culture is captured.

• **Religion in Cultural practices: In life and literature:** We have already mentioned that various texts of Jatindramohan Bagchi can be widely discussed in term of inter-religious text. During the construction of rural history, he has highlighted various religions in the description of rural villages. Along with that, the multiple communities have also been given a place. As his work mentions the Brahmin family of Shikarpur, there is also mention of a Brahmin family in Dhonradah (Chaudhuri zamindar dynasty). They have a traditional ancient temple. Moreover, we must talk about Maitra and Bagh of Sundalpur. The ancient village of Arabpur also had a large number of Brahmins. It was their initiative that the practice of Sanskrit language started in that area. The poet is Hindu by religion. Despite this, his sympathy towards Muslims and Christians can be observed. We have mentioned several times before that various elements of Muslim and Christian religions have been used in his various works. He is more interested in the cultural scope than the religious scope of different religions. In this type of introduction, we can assume that the main purpose of the poet's thinking was to highlight the cultural aspect rather than the religion. Whether it comes consciously or unconsciously into the poet's work, the poet's consciousness was a culturally synthetic. We have already discussed that aspect through Jatindramohan Bagchi's secular consciousness.

On the other hand, Kalidas Roy's literary life shows a trend of evolution. Although the first fifty years of his life he was a poet, but in the later stages we find him turning his hand to prose. With the help of various friends, there was a change in his literary world. In this context, Alok Roy highlighted the speech of Kalidas (Alok Roy, 2016: 18). According to Kalidas, Surendranath Dasgupta, Jatindramohan Bagchi, Jatindranath Sengupta, Vishwapati Chowdhury were released from Satyendranath's spiritual realm. Before that, he wrote several long poems based on the ancient culture of India. At the request of subject-glory, the language of these poems shows various glimpses of the multifaceted objects of Veda-Puranic literature (Ray, 2016: 18). He then published the Gita, Gita Govinda's Kabanuvada in the second edition of 'Rasakadamba'. Religious ideas have also been expressed in various poems of 'Baikali' (Ray, 2016 : 19). He inherited religious ideas from both his father and mother. He was motivated by the inherited philosophies (Ray, 2016: 33). It influenced his literary creativity. He was a lover of modesty, sacrifice, diligence and modesty. This aspect is also caught in his poetry.

In Kumudarranjan's poetry, the royal dominance of various mythological events can be observed (Aman, 1365: 163). The reference to Puranas can be seen in his poetry as a source of traditional consciousness. However, the use of Purana in the context of this traditional consciousness did not directly transmit momentum to his poetry. It is caught by the formula of relevance (Aman, 1365: 160-161). Critic Abdul Aziz cites the context of the poem 'Chhotar Daabi' as an example. According to him, this poem contains the Srikshetra of the events mentioned in the Puranas (Aman, 1365: 163). In view of the overall discussion, we can make a few statements about them:

- The simple spirit of rural life can be common to their poems.
- All of them help in infiltrating the almost neglected rural life into the literary arena.
- All of them believed in *sanatan* consciousness.
- All have successfully portrayed various aspects of village-life using tradition with importance.
- We find humanitarian perspective in all of them. They mainly use echoes of human life in creating poetry.
- 'They appeared in the Bengali poetry-world along the lines of Rabindra tradition' (Ganguly, 2007: 37).
- All of them tried to 'pass the phenyl crisis and spiritual despair of civic life, sometimes they became vocal in the worship of Bengal's rural nature, sometimes they anointed the soft Kant words of folk life, folk culture or boishnab-shakta literature with the essence of their own poetic thought' (Ganguly). , 2007 : 37).
- *Sri Sreekumar Bandyopadhyay* A sense of subservience can be observed in the depiction of rural-Bengali nature.
- The influence of Swadeshi style-thinking-consciousness is particularly noticeable in the poetry, which is bound up with a strong determination to preserve the ancient tradition and restore the tradition.

- The colorful characterization of rural Bengal and multi-layered mentality of Lokayat society is noticeable and they have used simple, all-intelligible and rural language to express them.

All of them were rural and human lovers. At the same time nature is also there, takes place, sometimes in human form, and sometimes nature to express its own glory. Karunanidhan, Kumudaranjan, Jatindramohan or Kalidas Roy are contemporary writers, although the subject-thoughts are sometimes the same, they are not the same, but all of them have left a mark of individuality in their works. All of them have a unique poetic talent in their respective fields and have greatly helped in the creation of contemporary history of Bengali literature.

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