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Raja Sarat Chandra Roy (1865-1946): A Socio-Cultural Figure In Malda

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Abstract

After Permanent Settlement in Bengal (1793) the zamindar got the ownership of land. They had to pay revenue instead of the ownership within a certain period of time. The zamindars performed their duties as local administrator and judged the local disputes. In the nineteenth century Bengal various steps were taken to spread the education on behalf of company administration and personal efforts. The zamindars in personal efforts established some schools in their zamindari area. In the 19th and the 20th century Bengal there was a zamindar Raja Sarat Chandra Roy who was fond of education, in Malda. He set up several schools in his zamindari area for development of education. Apart from that he took some social program for the betterment of raiyats. In this paper the different educational and social works of Sarat Chandra Roy have been discussed.

Key-Word

Zamindar, social worker, Malda, Raja Sarat Chandra Roy, school set up.

Introduction

Early British East India Company government did not eager to the field of Indian education. But in the 19th century the zamindars of Bengal tried to spread the education. The permanent settlement of 1793 created a new zamindar community¹. Some of them were very eager about the education of their raiyats. In spite of zamindar's tyranny, coercion, imposition of new taxes. The benevolent zamindars always kept attention towards raiyat's happiness and easiness. Even they were eager about their education. Such a kind of zamindar was at the Chanchal Estate of Malda. His name was Sarat Chandra Roy².

After getting dominant position in India the East India Company started to take different steps in education sector. Warren Hastings established Calcutta Madrasah in 1781 to know the Muslim laws and related matters³. On the other hand Jonathan Duncan set up Sanskrit College in Varanashi in 1791⁴. There was taught religious and cultural matters of Hinduism.

The role of Christian Missionaries in education in India was very commendable. In Charter Act of 1813 the monopoly right of The Company was banned and the Christian Missionaries were allowed in India for social work⁵. It was also said in that act that the Company should expend Rs. one lac per annum for the spread of education in India. But the stipulated money was not found up to 1823. It was a debate that in which education system the estimated money would be expended, either in western education or eastern. That was a big question. T.B. Macaulay, the President of the General Committee of Public Instruction opined that the eastern learning was inferior to European learning and the Indian languages were not developed properly at that time. That's why the British administration decided to accept the western education system⁶. Macaulay told in his Minutes, *Who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in colour and blood, but English in taste in opinion, in morals and intellect.*⁷ With the minute the debate was vanished.

Governor General Lord Auckland in his minute concluded the eastern-western debate on 24th November, 1839. It was said in the minute that the learning process would be bilingual, vernacular and English language. The learners could choose the own choice. Lord Hardinge had decided to employ those persons who were English educated in 1844 A.D. Governor General Dalhousie also was eager to spread education for the profit of British imperialism. At his time the President of Board of Control Charles Wood made a suggestion for education, called Wood's Despatch (1854, 19 July)⁸. In his report he recommended some suggestion for primary to university education. The medium of learning should be English and indigenous language. By these governmental efforts the Indian education system was running.

There was a remarkable missionary activity in Indian education in 19th century. Different European Christian Missionaries were working to spread education among Indian people⁹. The cultural renaissance of Bengal started by Englishmen in the nineteenth century with the Orientalist, the Anglosist, and the Christian missionaries's efforts. Their activities were the main reasons of cultural development. Cultural change in the mind of people creates intelligentsia community. The zamindars were within that group. The core activities of zamindars were revenue collection, development of agriculture and maintain local administration. Besides the revenue collection some zamindars were connected with social work and spread of education in Bengal. The famous zamindari families in Bengal were Burdwan Estate, Midnapore, Koochbehar, Dinajpur, in Malda Chanchal Estate, Bulbulchandi Estate etc were remarkable.¹⁰

The zamindars of Uttarbanga were related with different people oriented program in their areas. They established schools, tol, chatuspathi, maktab, madrasah, hospitals etc. Besides these they helped to college, dramatic club, library, literary organization, local festival committee etc. At the time of natural calamities such as drought, flood, famine the zamindars would help for the affected people giving shelter and food. They also founded mandir, masjid, pagoda and constructed road, canal; sink tube wells etc. So the zamindars had positive mind for the raiyats. They were willful for education in 1882 -1902¹¹.

Study Region

The study region of this paper is the zamindari area of Chanchal estate of Malda district of West Bengal. The zamindar of the estate was Raja Sarat Chandra Roy. His educational activities have been discussed here.

Objectives

The objective of this paper is to discuss the social activities of zamindar Sarat Chandra Roy of Chanchal estate of Malda district.

Methodology

This study is based on primary data which was collected from different Malda district gazetteers which were written at that time. The secondary data also used to discuss the topic.

Discussion

There were many zamindari estates in Malda district. Among those Chanchal estate, Harishchandrapur estate, Birua estate etc were so called.¹² The zamindar of Chanchal estate was Sarat Chandra Roy. He was benevolent to his raiyats. During the time of Mughal Emperor Akbar there were 66 parganas in Bengal. In 1848 the Chanchal estate was come in existence taking Gourhand, Hatinda and Rokanpur parganas.¹³ Earlier zamindar of the estate was Ishwar Chandra Roy. Rokanpur pargana was included later in 1850 A.D.¹⁴ The fame of Ishwar Chandra was memorable in the zamindari history of Malda. He married with Siddhewari Devi of Jangipur of Murshidabad. She was educated and intellectual woman. But she was childless. So zamindar Ishwar Chandra got married with Bhuteshwari Devi of Darjipara of Kolkata. She had three daughters.

Earlier a Brahmin of Jessore Ramchandra Roy bought the Gourhand pargana from the zamindar of 24 parganas by paying Rs. 9100 Pound. The area of the pargana was 24916 acre or 38.93 square miles. Later Hatinda pargana was included with Chanchal estate. Its area was 3239 acre or 5.03 sq. miles. The Rokanpur pargana was bought by Ishwar Chandra in the name his bararani Siddheshwari Devi. Its area was 40853 acre or 76.33 sq. miles. So a large area of North Malda district was under Chanchal zamindari estate.¹⁵

People knew about the benevolence of Ishwar Chandra Roy. The wage of tiller or salary of worker of Chanchal estate was greater than other estate of the district. Kept in mind about the happiness of raiyats zamindar babu dug ponds at every village and wells for drinking water. He constructed roads for the development communication. After 1865 zamindar Ishwar Chandra Roy died.¹⁶

Siddheshwari Devi was a clever and intelligent woman. After the death of zamindar Ishwar Chandra Roy, she supervised the zamindari from 1866 A.D. to 1870 A.D. She was in the peak of fame among the women zamindars in the district. She had many virtues. She left great impact in the field of social service. She had interest in educational development. She donated 10 bigha land for the development of chatushpathi and tol. Naya Ratan Chatushpathi of Kaligram of Chanchal was set up by the financial assistance of her.¹⁷

Earlier it was mention that Maharani Siddheshwari Devi was childless. So getting permission of London Privy Council she took an adopted son who was a son of an honest Brahmin Madhusudan Roy of Nimita of Murshidabad. The name of adopted son was Sarat Chandra Roy of five years. She appealed to Malda Court for Court of Ward who would be the caretaker of her zamindari in favour of immature son. On November, 1870 a brilliant and educated Englishman H.R.Raly was appointed as a caretaker of Chanchal estate.¹⁸ Mr. Raly had been working with great ability. When Sarat Chandra became the age of 16, the

zamindari was transferred to him from the Court of Ward (1881A.D). In 1903(1310 in Bengali year) Siddheshwari Devi died.¹⁹

Sarat Chandra Roy took the charge of Chanchal estate at the age of sixteen years. At that time the boundary of estate was expanded up to Gourhand, Hatinda, and Rokanpur parganas. Under his zamindari the income of estate was being increased day by day. He came in the good look of the British government. He was conferred the title 'Raja' in 1911 A.D. Later when Laskarpur pargana was in bid according to sunset act, he bought the pargana by paying Rs. 71000 in the name of his wife Dakshayani Devi. The land of that pargana was 831 acre or 1.29 sq. miles.

Raja Sarat Chandra Roy was a shining star in the zamindari history of Malda. He was very careful about the happiness the comfort ability of his raiyats .He was very energetic person It is known that zamindar means only the rent collection from raiyats, Oppression on raiyats , intimidation, hooliganism, collection of abwabs forcibly. Besides these oppressive actions they have another phenomenon. They worked for the development of people of the district. They gave help to the needy families and helped for the patient.They also looked after for education. They established some educational institutes for learning purposes for the children of their zamindari estate. Such social activities of zamindari will be discussed here.

Raja Sarat Chandra was a great patron of learning. He established a school in memory of his mother's birth day on 16th August,1888. The name of school is Chanchal Siddheshwari Institution which was familiar earlier Chanchal High school. J.C. Sengupta, a civilian made this remark about Seddheswari Institution.²⁰

"The Chanchal Siddhewari Institution was established in August 1888 as a High school by Raja Sarat Chandra Roy Chowdhury Bahadur of Chanchal in memory of his mother, Rani Siddheshwari Debi Chaudhurani. The entire capital and recurring costs for the school used to be borne by the Raj estate of Chanchal and grants are still regularly received from the estate funds. The school was the recognized by the Calcutta University in the year 1899. It was granted permission to teach science in 1947. It was up graded into a higher secondary school with humanities, science and technical courses from 1959.

The institution was being run properly by the financial help of Raja Sarat Chandra. It was up graded in 1901 as a madhyamik vidyalaya. Raja Sarat Chandra appointed Kamakhya Charan Nag as a head master giving him salary of Rs 200 per month for good result. Earlier Kamakhya Babu was a principal of Daulatpur College ²¹. By the guideline of Mr. Nag the institution was developed so much. He wanted that the institution should be changed into a college.

Siddheshwari institute is an important educational institution in the district. Its good- will is spreading in the field of district education. Even today Rs 600 is gotten from Official Trustee Board of West Bengal Government per year to this institute for improvement of school after the abolition of zamindari system (1953). Zamindars of Chanchal estate were very eager to spread education. The father of Raja Sarat Chandra, Iswar Chandra Roy Chowdhury was also same spirit. Before 1813 the creation of Malda district there was no school for English education in government effort even in Purnea or Rajshahi in between 1765 to 1810.²² In1860 an English school was set up in the district first. Excluding the town there only means of education was rural pathshala or Sanskrit toll or *chatuspathi*. In the middle of 18th century William Marshman and Haliday with the assistance of zamindar Iswar Chandra established a Sanskrit toll in a *shib mandir* (which is later named as shibpada *chapashathi*).²³ The renowned pandit Shree Bidhu Shekhar Shastri was appointed as a guru in the toll.

The guru went to Shantiniketan later as he got an appointment for teaching there where he kept close contact with Rabindranath Tagore.

In the 19th century Raja Sarat Chandra took the responsibilities of the toll after his father's death. He bore all the expenses of the toll. The gurus of the toll belonged to upper caste Hindu Brahman.²⁴ They were given salary of Rs 11 per month or £13 4s 0d a year. A rent free land also was given to the gurus for their maintenance by the zamindar. The gurus took care very well for the students. They taught them Sanskrit, arithmetic and arithmetic had two part agriculture and business. The Raja planted some famous and precious trees for the beautification of Sanskrit toll.²⁵

Raja Sarat Chandra had mind in public health and welfare of his raiyats. He set up a charitable hospital in Chanchal. He had sympathy for distressed persons. In his father's memory he established a hospital which was 'Ishwar Chandra Charitable Hospital'.²⁶ The people of his zamindari estate got medical assistance from this hospital. Under them a doctor and another compounder also would work.. For the serious patients there were twelve beds. In spite of these facilities in this charitable hospital, it was run by a private effort and it was the second largest hospital in the district at that time. The equipments of the operation theatre would come from London.²⁷ He built up some other health centres in his zamindari areas. These were in Sambalpur, Samsi, Shree Chandrapur, Gohila, Koklamari, Kharba thana area. In these health centres a doctor and a compounder were deputed.²⁸ With the help of Raja Sarat Chandra Roy these health centres run very well.

In 1911 the East India Company conferred him the '*Raja*' title for welfare work for his raiyats in health and in education.²⁹ The other social work of Raja has been mentioned here.

His charitable activities were not confined within his estates only, but also to other parts of the district as well as North Bengal. He gave a donation of Rs 500 in the library of English Bazar and got lifetime membership of library in 1937. Another important and very old educational institution in Malda district is Nagaria High School. It is at Nagaria village of Ratua police station. It is famous for its educational development. Only education is not commendable, but sports, culture etc are well flourished in this school. It has name in the field of district sports. Chanchal zamindar Sarat Babu donated so many financial assistance for the development of this institution in the first half of twentieth century.³⁰ He had contribution for the needs and destitute persons. They got assistance from the Chanchal estate. Such instance is mentioned here. There was a person whose name was Krishna Pandit in Kaligram. The pandit would run a school in his area. But unfortunately that school was burnt. Seeing this event and for educational development Raja Bahadur contributed one lakh burnt bricks and other building materials to construct the *pakka* school building³¹. So that next time such burning would not be happened.

Two other important works of Raja Sarat Babu were establishment of Shibpada library and Rani Dakshayani girl's school. The Kumar Shibpara Library was set up in 1937 in memory of his only son's immature abnormal death in 1925. In his name 'Kumar Shibpada Memorial Institute was established on two acres land. Besides the library there is a large hall room with a stage which is familiar for drama and cultural program. There are about 3810 books. The readers are allowed to take the book in their home. After the death of Raja (10th April, 1946)

5000 rare books had been handed over to the library. The readers can read these books to seat in the library. In this library there is a big reading room where 25 or 30 readers can read together at a time.³² This library is situated in the heart of the town. On the other hand Rani Dakshayani Girls School was set up in 1943, 23 February on the land which was donated by Raja Sarat Chandra. The area of donated land was 0.87 acre (about 3 bighas) in mouza singhia Dag No. 68. To establish the school the Raja was assisted by various learned persons of that time. Siddeshari Institute was set up in 1888 but it was co-ed school. There was no girls' school in Chanchal. So Raja Babu was eager to establish a school for girls' education in this zamindari estate. Dakshayani, the Rani maa was the beloved wife of Raja Bahadur. This girl's school was up graded latter in Madhyamik and higher secondary³³. It has great contribution to spread girl's education in the district women education system.

Conclusion

It was thought that the zamindars were very oppressive and ruthless. There was no goodness in their mind. But it is noted from the above paper that the zamindar of Chanchal estate of Malda Raja Sarat Chandra Roy was a liberal minded and pro-raiyat zamindar in the first half of the twentieth century. He established many educational institutions for the learning of his zamindari area. Those schools were premier in the field of education in the district at that time. Chanchal Siddheswari Institute was his great work. It has great impact in the educational history of the district. The another important school which was set up by Sarat Chandra was Rani Dakshayani Girls' High School. The Rajababu was also conscious about women education.

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