



Knowledgeable Research

ISSN 2583-6633

Vol.02, No.07, February, 2024

<http://knowledgeableresearch.com/>

SANSKRIT EDUCATION IN BURDWAN DISTRICT: ANCIENT TIMES TO MODERN PERIOD

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Abstract: From earliest period, Burdwan district had been under the so called civilization. With expansion of the Aryan territory from Saptasindhu area to eastern India and thereafter some parts of southern India, Sanskrit language became a language of people, belonging to rich and upper castes. Chandrabarma's Sanskrit inscription of 4th century A.D. on Susunia hill of Bankura district is the perhaps earliest proof of using Sanskrit in Burdwan region. During the reign of Sena dynasty in Bengal, Burdwan region saw a rise of using Sanskrit language which went on till nineteenth century with a large number of Sanskrit scholars flourished in this region and later by help of the local zamindar family of Burdwan. After independence of India, though Sanskrit language has been included in the syllabus and has been taught in schools, colleges and universities in Burdwan district along with other parts of West Bengal and India, apathy towards Sanskrit language has risen among students.

Keywords: Sanskrit, Education, Mankar, The Zamindars of Burdwan

Body

Burdwan district has never kept its existence aloof from the central politics of India from ancient period. During Sena period, Burdwan was under Sena rule. Later in Sultani period, it went under the rule of Bengal sultans. In this same way, it went under the Mughal rule. The famous Nurjahan was the wife of Sher Kuli Khan in her first life who was in charge of Burdwan during the reign of Jahangir. From latter half of 17th century, there was existence of a zamindari in Burdwan who generally kept them subordinate under the rulers of Bengal whenever who ruled Bengal.

So, from earlier period, we can see flourishing of Sanskrit language in Burdwan district. The Susunia inscription of Chandrabarma, though now located in Burdwan district clearly indicates the usage of Sanskrit in this area. It is to note that many scholars suggest Chandravarman as a king of Puskarana, present Pokharna of Bankura district located in the border of Bankura and Burdwan district, beside Damodar river. Many scholars also suggest The Chandravarman of Allahabad pillar inscription whom

Author Name: RAMYAJIT SARKAR

Received Date: 08.02.2024

Publication Date: 29.02.2024

Harishena claimed to be defeated by Samudragupta was the same Chandravarman of the Susunia inscription. If we accept it, then we can say that in that time the kingdom of Chandravarman obviously extended to a large part of Bengal. So Samudragupta had to defeat him to conquer the region. Burdwan area might also be under his rule in that time.

Sanskrit in inscriptions

A 12th century Copper Plate of Ballala Sena has been found in Naihati. The inscription was written in Sanskrit. Though the name of composer of the inscription has not been found, but perhaps the composer was of Burdwan district. In the beginning of the inscription, there is a prayer to Ardhanariswar. I want to mention some lines from the prayer here:

“Sandhyatandava Sambidhan Bilsannandi Ninadormivi-

Nimarjadarsarnobo Disatu Ba Sreyodhanariswara.

Jassardhe Lalitangaharbalairdhe Cha Bhimodabhatai-

Natyarambharairjaityabhinaydvaidhanu Rodhasrama.” 1 [Bardhisnu Bardhaman],

Another copper plate has been found in Mallasarul of Burdwan. The inscription was of Maharaja Bijoy Sena. The language of the inscription is Sanskrit but it is written in Brahmi script. 2 [Bardhaman Charcha 70], Bhabadev Bhatta, a scholar in Smriti and a minister of the king Harivarmadeva, also belonged to Burdwan district. The king Harivrmadeva reigned during 11th-12th century A.D. Brihadharma upapurana was also composed in Burdwan district, as told by Acharya Jogeschchandra Roy Bidyanidhi. So it is clear that from 12th century, there was a clear tradition of Sanskrit education in Burdwan.

Traces of Sanskrit learning of Burdwan District in Early Medieval period

Bhabadev Bhatta, scholar in smritis and the prime minister of the king Haribarmadev (11th-12th century A.D.) was the resident of Siddhal village of north Rarh area. There is a mention in the eulogy of Bhybaneswar by Bhabadev Bhatta:

“Aryabartabhubang bhusanmiha khatosu sarbagrimo gramo siddhal.”

The village Siddhal was one of the most important villages in ancient time. Some scholars have suggested that present Siddhi village of near Katwa was the ancient Siddhal village. In another side many scholars have suggested that Sital village of Burdwan district was the ancient Siddhal village.

Many historians have suggested that the Brihadharma upapurana was composed in Burdwan district. Acharya Jogeshchandra Roy Bidyanidhi was in assumption that as there is reference of Tribeni in the Brihadharma upapurana, the upapurana was composed in somewhere related to Tribeni. In this upapurana, there have been references of thirty six races who are generally seen in the rarh area especially in Burdwan district. So the assumption may be right that the upapurana was composed in Burdwan district. Acharya Jogeshchandra Roy Bidyanidhi suggested that the upapurana was composed in fourteenth century A.D.

Sanskrit education in late medieval age

Sanskrit education became very much popular in Burdwan district after 16th century A.D. Bidyanagar was one of the important Sanskrit learning centre in Burdwan district. Basudev Sarbovouma, a scholar in Naya and Vedanta, also lived in Bidyanagar and taught there. There have been findings of commentaries of Anumankhanda of the Tattvachintamani and the Adyaita Makaranda from Burdwan district. Rup and Sanatan, two important disciples of Sree Chaitnya Mahaprabhu, were also scholars in Sanskrit. Rup and Sanatan lived in Naihati village near Katwa subdivision of Burdwan district. Rup Goswami's best work is Ujjal Nilmani which is considered as one of the most important Vaishnava literatures. The other works of him were "Uddhab Sandesh", "Gitabali", "Paddabali", "Bhaktirasamritasindhu", "Rupmanjari" and others. Sanatan wrote the "Vaishnav toshini" brihat Vagabata, a commentary on 10 skanda of the Bhagavata, "Tatparja Dipika", a commentary on the Meghdutam of Kalidasa.

Krishnadas Kaviraj, belonged to Jhamatpur village of Burdwan, was another scholar in Sanskrit and also a Vaishnava poet whose famous work is "SreeChaitnyacharitamrita". Though the main text is written in Bengali but Krishnadas Kaviraj composed many Sanskrit slokas himself and included in the text. The "Gobindalilamrita" was one of the most important Sanskrit literatures, composed by him. The text has 23 volumes. He also wrote a commentary on the Krishnakarnamrita.

NarahariDas Sarkar of Sreekhanda of Burdwan was a disciple of Sree Chaitnya Mahaprabhu and was also a scholar in Sanskrit. Some important Sanskrit texts written by him are the

Author Name: RAMYAJIT SARKAR

Received Date: 08.02.2024

Publication Date: 29.02.20204

“Sreekrishnabhajanamrita”, the Bhaktichandrika Patal”, the “Bhaktamrita Astak” etc. Gobindadas Kaviraj, another important Sanskrit scholar and Vaishnava poet, also belonged to Burdwan district. He was born in his maternal uncle’s house at Sreekhanda and thereafter became a villager of Teliabudhua village. He wrote a Sanskrit play titled the “Samgit Madhav” and another Sanskrit text the “Karnamrita”.

Raghunath Siromoni, a great Sanskrit scholar and a contemporary to SreeChaitnya, belonged to Kota village near Mankar of Burdwan district. He was a student of Basudev Sarbovoumo, a great Sanskrit scholar of Nabadwip. It is told that Raghunath Siromoni introduced the “nabyanaya” in Bengal. Raghunath was invited to Mithila in a debate competition where he defeated Pakhadhar Mishra, a resident of Mithila and one of most important Sanskrit scholars of his age, and glory of Bengal in Sanskrit was established in India with Raghunath. Most important Sanskrit texts written by Raghunath Siromoni are the “Prattakhamani Didhiti”, the “ Akhata Pad”, the “Padarthakhandan”, the “Drabya Kiranabali”, the “Prakash Didhiti” the “Gun Krianabali” and others.

Raghunandan Goswami was another scholar of Burdwan district. He lived in Mankar. According to Adam’s report, he wrote thirty five texts in Sanskrit and two texts in Bengali. The “Brihat Ram Rasayan”, based on the stories of the Ramayana is one of the most important texts, written by him. Other important Sanskrit texts, written by him, are the “Sadachar Nirnay”, the “Gobinda Charita”, the “Bhaktamala”, the “Gouranga Champu” etc. He also wrote two texts on medicine titled on the “Rogarnobo Tarini” and the “Oristo Nirupan”. The “Dhatudip” and the “Ounadikosh” are two texts on Vyakarana, written by him.

Traditional Sanskrit education system reflected in different Mangalkavyas

In “Akhetik” part of his Chandimangal, he gave a vivid description of the education system of Sreemanta which was totally in Sanskrit. Here I will be mentioning some lines from there to understand the Sanskrit education system then:

“Poroe Sadhur Bala Ka Kha Atharo kola

Onko Asko Siddha Banan

Guru bakke dia karma Chinil onek borno

Osto Sobdi Sumanta Panin.

Poroe Dutta Sripati Sandhimule Sandhibritti

Ratridin koroe bhabna.

Nibista koria mon likhe pore onukhon

Bidya bina nohe onnomona.

Porilo Vyakaran tika Ganabritti Samapika

Amar Jumar barna nana....”

Ghanaram, one of the important poets of the Dharmamangal, also gives a vivid description of then Sanskrit education system during describing the student life of Laosen:

“Asta dhatu Astasiddhi subanta amar.

Porilo Onker bhed buudhe kori bhor

Dhatu nam sobdo bhed porilo opor.”

Sanskrit education in Burdwan district under Colonial rule in India

In the early age of British East India Company rule in India there was a try among British officers to learn the indigenous languages and culture of India. For this reason, the Asiatic Society was founded in Calcutta in 1784 A.D. Though after introducing of the Macaulay minute in Indian education, introduced by Colonial rulers, English language became prominent in India, indigenous language including Sanskrit did not lose their separate existence.

In this period Sanskrit education was also flourished under patronage of the zamindars of Burdwan. In Bahushastra of Guptipara, Vyutpanna Baneswara Vidyalka was first a student of Nadiaraja Krishnachandra. As a result of a quarrel with the poet Bharatchandra, Baleswar had to come to the meeting of Bardhamanraj Chitrasena. After Chitrasena's death in 1744 AD, he again returned to Krishnachandra's meeting. At the request of Warren Hastings and with the help of ten scholars, Baneswar compiled 'Bibadaras', a treatise on Hindu dispute resolution. Halhed translated this book into English, A Code of Gentoo Law Other books written by Baneswara are Rahyasamrita (epic poem)

Author Name: RAMYAJIT SARKAR

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'Hanuma' 'Sivashatak', 'Tarastotra' (fragmentary poem) 'Chandrabishek (play) 'Kashishatak' and "Chitracha" Buno Ramnath The latter praises King Chitrasena. An illustration of Bargi's Hungama is from this book. Go. Ramnath Tarkasiddhanta, the famous Naiyayik of Nabadwip, popularly known as (18th century), also had his original residence in Samudragarh of Kalna subdivision. Shankar Tarkabagish of Nadia in the latter part of this century was a distinguished scholar and a gifted Lakshman Nyayalanka. He was called Nadar Shankar by the people of scriptures. In contemporary times, he was a resident of Karbala across the Ganges. Durgadasa Nyayaratna, the famous sage of Purvastali, died in 1296 at the age of 75. At the end of the 18th century, a wise woman became famous in Kashi for teaching various scriptures and as a scholar. Hati Vidyalankar, he was born and educated in Swai village of Aushgram police station in Burdwan district. Dulal Tarkabagish of Satgachi was another prominent lawyer of Burdwan district during this period. Daulaliyya' magazine (an essay on the problems raised and its solutions in the conventional texts of Navanyaya) was up to Samadar Kashite. Dulal Tarkabagish's subordinate descendants also kept the scholarly reputation of the clan intact for about four men. Dulal's youngest son Gurucharan Tarkapanchanan composed a Sanskrit play 'Shrikrishnalilambudhi' for the sake of Burdhamanraja Tejachandra, composed in 1753 CE. Bardhaman resident Ramakamal Kavibhushan composed a Sanskrit play based on the biography of Maharaj Tejachandra; In the 18th century, Raghunandan Goswami of Nityananda clan, a resident of Matrigram (Marogram) in Burdwan district, became famous for writing many books in Bengali and Sanskrit. His notable Bengali books are 'Ramarasayan' and Radhamadhoboday. The Sanskrit works written by Raghunandan are 'Sadacharanirnaya', 'Durjanamihirakalanka', 'Goshicharit', 'Dvililamu', 'Govinda Meghodaya', 'Stabbadasva', 'Krishnakelisudhakara', 'Bhaktamala', the well-known Vipulayatana 'Gourangachampu' etc. In this century, Krishnadas rose to fame as the professor of Ramsharan Tarkabhushan Jhalna Chatushpathi of the sovereign dynasty. There is a poem called 'Pahat' written by the Vaishnava poet Bholanath of Gangatikubi. Khuna Mashga Granthkhana was written in this century. Another poem of Dutkavya written by Madhavakabindra Bhattacharya named 'Uddhadrita' has been found in Talit of Burdwan district. This too was probably composed in the late 18th century or early 19th century. The last notable hero was Durgadas Nyayaratna, a student of Gadadhar of Guptipara. Burdwan Raj Chatushpathi was started in 1817 A.D. during the time of Burdwan Raj Tejachandra. Maheshchan Nyayaratna in his report called it "Bharat Prasiddha Chatushpathi". This Vidyatana was established by the efforts of Tejachandra's son Pratapchandra. Pratapchandra's foresight is the proof of establishing a school in the western style while keeping the

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ancient Chatushpathi ideal intact. After the death of Tejachandra, this institution was in trouble for some time, then it was again flourished due to the efforts of Mahatapachandra. Here at that time there was a system of teaching Bengali and Persian along with Vedanta, Smriti, Nyaya, Grammar etc. and conducting examinations. In 1839 A.D., Mahamahopadhyay Umakanta Tarkalanka, a resident of Sonamukhi in Bankura district, was appointed professor of justice here. Tarkalanka died in 1273 and in that year the editor Bhudev Mukhopadhyay himself wrote an article in the 'Shikadarpana' of Aghran month in high praise of Umakanta. Then Ilchobar's famous politician Brajakumar Vidyaratna was appointed to the post. It is said that he was unique among contemporary Naiyayaks. During this time students from different parts of India even from Kashi came to study in Burdwan. Brajakumar retired with his student Adyacharan Nyayaratna- Tarkabhushan as Swapad. Another student of his, Sarvabhaum, also taught for some time.

Apart from the Burdwan Raj Sabha, some notable scholars of Burdwan district of the 19th century were – Kalidas Sarvabhaum of Kalna, Ishwar Nyayaratna of Barabaleun, Krishnamohan Vidyabhushan of Mahata, Radhakanta Bachaspati of Chanak and above all Taranath Tarkabachaspati of Kalna and Premchandra Tarkabagish of Shaknara. Taranath was appointed as a professor of grammar at the Sanskrit College of Calcutta in January 1845 A.D. through the efforts of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and held that post till 1874 A.D.. Taranath supported Vidyasagar in the movement to popularize widow marriage. The great 'Bachspatyavidhan' is Taranath's literary achievement. Apart from this, he wrote and edited many more books.

Due to various changes in zamindari settlement, taxation and collection since the end of the 18th century, the financial base of the Sanskrit education system is gradually weakening and collapsed slowly. No education system can survive on nominal government aid. Moreover, no attempt has been made to change the Chatushpathi-based Sanskrit education system with the times due to various reasons and as a result this education system has become isolated from the entire social life. Today's education system is unable to provide practical knowledge or life skills. This is the reason for lack of students in Chatushpathi and lack of interest in education among those who came to grab a government job. The report of William Adams published in 1837 also shows that only. The number of Chatushpathis in Burdwan district was 190, earlier it must have been more.

Author Name: RAMYAJIT SARKAR

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We have found Ramdulal Tarkabagis, a famous lawyer in Burdwan district whose son Gurucharan Tarkapanchanan wrote a Sanskrit play called the Srikrishnalilambudhi in 1831 A.D. Adam's report shows that there were one hundred and ninety chatuspathis in Burdwan in 1835 A.D. Jagannath Panchanan, Shambhuran Vidyalankar, Madhusudan Bachaspati, Rudranarayan Vidyabagish and Radhakanta Nyayalankar of Burdwan district were invited to Raja Rajaballava's meeting in early half of eighteenth century. In 1835 A.D., Bharat Chatuspathi was established under the supervision of the zamindars of Burdwan. Renowned professors like Umakanta Tarkalongkar, Brajakumar Vidyaratna, Adyacharan Nyayaratna Tarkabhushan, Rashmohan Sarbovoumo, Vireshwar Tarkatirtha, residents of Baidyapur taught in this chatuspathi.

Sanskrit education after independence of India to modern times

After independence when Sanskrit entered into the School, college and university curriculum in wide aspect, large number of students lost attraction to Sanskrit. Slowly many tols have become closed due to admission of a small number of students in these tools. At present the number of Chatuspathis in Burdwan district is not more than 50. Also, there is no such thing as study and teaching in most of the Chatuspathis. Somehow the students of the first or mid-term exams who have combined two or two are keeping the quadruplets in their books, the scholars who are still clinging to this ancient system of education. Most Chatuspathis do not have title class students. At one time in Burdwan, not a single student from India's famous Vijaychatuspathi sat for Nyaya, Vedanta, Smriti etc. title examination, sometimes two students of Kabya and Grammar gave the title examination. The condition of other quadriplegics is more deplorable. But there are five Chatuspathis in the Burdwan city itself. Sometimes, State government of West Bengal also have not given sufficient help to continue these tools. As there are no examinations in the tols due to the Covid pandemic, the number of students has been decreased in the tols in a great number. But we hope for best as there is Sanskrit as a subject in secondary and high secondary level in almost every secondary and high secondary schools of the district. The Colleges and universities of Burdwan district also offer various courses on Sanskrit in graduation and post-graduation level.

So we can conclude that there is a long course of history of Sanskrit education from ancient age to the modern times in Burdwan district. Though the earlier system of Sanskrit education i.e. tol system has now being shrunken down, Sanskrit language has continued its journey through schools, colleges and the University of the District under modern Education system.

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Received Date: 08.02.2024

Publication Date: 29.02.20204

Acknowledgement

I am acknowledged to Mr. Tarasankar Panda for helping me to find out tols in Burdwan district.

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