
Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti: A Case Study on National Education in Maldah (1907-1914)

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Abstract:*The history of education in India is a miscellaneous field yet to be discovered to its highest potential. The educational history and its development in India offer several possibilities for study and research. Especially during the colonial period, many changes can be observed in the education system, such as introducing new education policies and curricula, so there is a huge scope of research about all these changes or new educational policies. Therefore, it is important to research and discuss the 'National Education Policy' during the colonial period in Bengal. The national education policy came into existence in the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement that was started in Bengal against Lord Curzon's partition plan of Bengal in 1905. The swadeshi and boycott movement also impacted the education sector, and a decision was taken to boycott the government universities or schools. As a result, some nationalist thinkers and philosophers of Bengal introduced National Education as an alternative to the government education system. This wave of national education movement also reached Maldah district and the Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti was established. Therefore, in this research paper, a brief discussion about the history of the establishment of Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti, its activities and its contribution to the field of education and society is given.*

Key Words: *Adarsha Vidyalaya, Chatuspathis, Gambhira, Jatiya Shiksha Samiti etc.*

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Introduction

The *Swadeshi* movement was started in 1905 and the wave of *swadeshi* sentiment flowed into the Bengal province. In this environment, the boycott of foreign goods was raised, and the demand to boycott Calcutta University was accepted almost instantly. The first student

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movement was started in Rangpur (October- November 1905). More than a hundred students were ordered to be expelled from the two schools and it was in reply, that the first National School was established in Rangpur (on 8th November 1905).¹ After this event, on 11th March 1906 a non-government university named the 'National Council of Education' was set up in Calcutta to resolve the academic future of the oppressed students. Also, the 'Bengal National College and School' was set up (on 15th August 1906) under the supervision of this council. Satish Chandra Mukherjee was the superintendent and Aurobindo Ghosh was the first principal of this national college.² The National Education Movement extended beyond the confines of Calcutta and reached various regions in Bengal, including the district of Maldah. This article will discuss how the 'Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti' came into being and its actions in Maldah. Further, it will focus on the complete steps taken by Jatiya Shiksha Samiti in the distribution of education and encouraging nationalism in Maldah, etc. It will also highlight the history of endless efforts of some persons who played a remarkable role in developing national education in Maldah and introduced a new type of equivalent education system by combining nationalism with education such as Benoy Kumar Sarkar. In general, this research paper will attempt to meticulously discuss the overall works of the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti and the role of Benoy Kumar in spreading education in Maldah.

During the 20th century, the residents of Maldah initially exhibited their nationalist sentiment and opposition to British rule in response to the events of the 'Partition of Bengal' and the 'Swadeshi movement.' Among the districts in the northern region of Bengal, Maldah experienced the most significant impact from the Swadeshi movement wave. After the announcement of the partition of Bengal on 13th October 1905 '*Rakhi Bandhan*' was celebrated in Maldah with the whole of Bengal as a symbol of unity and solidarity. '*Arandhan*' (non-cooking) day was celebrated on 16th October in Maldah along with other parts of Bengal when the pronouncement of Partition of Bengal came into being force. The common people organised boycotts and political protests against the British high-ranking bureaucrats through *arandhan* day was a new social appearance of public disappointment with the government. Numerous protest conferences were held in Maldah over several weeks against the partition of Bengal and these conferences were organized by mainly Bipin Bihari Ghosh and Radhesh Chandra Seth.³ In September 1905, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Sir Andrew Fraser came to Maldah and spoke in a meeting on the support of the Partition of Bengal, but he did not affect the local people. Students, teachers, lawyers, and

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common masses of the district joined the impulsive movement against the partition of Bengal at that time.⁴

Among the numerous ideologies that grew in the national movement of 1905, the idea of *swadeshi* and boycotts along with national education was prominent. In the 19th century, the educational system presented by the British government in this country had many imperfections. For example, firstly, this education was purely prosaic, education was not connected with real-life lessons. In the Western education system, there was no scope for the pupil to grow their autonomous thinking and imagination, and it was only to pass the exams and get degrees. Secondly, there was no special system of applied or technical teaching. As a result, even after getting a high degree and honour from the university, the students could not find work in real life and for that reason, they had to suffer severe economic hardship. Thirdly, this education did not help the students to teach patriotism or nationalism, rather it created an affection for the British.

The core objective of this education was to make a loyal British clerical class, those who were Indians by colour and caste but British in mind.⁵ As a result, a huge gap was created between the community which was nourished by Western education and the common masses. Some philosophers and scholars in our country kept thinking deeply about these defects of Western education policy and founding another education system, among them Rabindra Nath Tagore, Gurudas Banerjee, Brajendra Nath Sheel, Satish Chandra Mukherjee, Bipin Chandra Pal, Nagendra Nath Ghosh, etc; were notable persons. January-June 1902, when the work of the University Commission of India was in progress, all these notable persons wrote various articles to attract the attention of the University Commission, for example, 'Note on University Reform' by Brajendra Nath Sheel, 'A Note of Dissent' by Gurudas Banerjee, 'An Examination into the Present System of University Education and a Scheme of Reform' by Satish Chandra Mukherjee, and 'The Revised Scheme of Primary Education in Bengal' by Bipin Chandra Pal etc.⁶ Satish Chandra did not bind this idea of 'National Education' in writing, but he instituted the 'Dawn Society' in July 1902 to make it a reality. The key aim of the Dawn Society was to give real-world education to the students and build their moral character as well as patriotism in their hearts.⁷ The Dawn Society was the divine *guru* of the national education movement that started during the anti-partition movement in Bengal.

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In Maldah the pioneer of this movement was Benoy Kumar Sarkar, who worked later as a Professor in the Maldah Jatiya Siksha Samiti. He was one of the main forerunners of the National Education Movement in the Maldah district. Professor Sarkar was born on the 26th of December 1887 at Makdampur, English Bazar town the then headquarters of Maldah district. His ancestral land was in the Sannihati village of the Dacca district (now in Bangladesh),⁸ but his father Sudhanya Kumar Sarkar left Dacca and came to Maldah to work as a clerk in the *Munsefee* court. After staying in the Makdampur area for some time, Sudhanya Babu and his family started living in the Puratuli area at the northern end of English Bazar city and Benoy Kumar grew up there. When Benoy Kumar was old enough to join the school, he joined the Maldah Zillah School in English Bazar town. Benoy's personality began to emerge from his childhood as extraordinary intelligence power, punctuality, discipline, and enthusiasm for educational performance. In 1901, at the age of 13, Benoy Kumar topped the Calcutta University entrance examination and then joined the Presidency College at Calcutta in the F.A. class on a government scholarship. But in the final phase of the F.A. class exam, he was seriously ill and finally passed the F.A. by securing 9th place. Then in 1905, he secured the first position in the B.A. examination and was selected for the 'Ishan Scholarship'. At this time, Ishan scholarship amount was rupees 40 per month and with this amount, he was admitted to the M.A and Law class in 1906. At the same time, the British government was interested in giving him the post of Deputy Magistrate, but he refused it. He also refused a new scholarship for higher education in England.⁹ After that, the Partition of Bengal and the *swadeshi* with boycott movement were started in 1905, Benoy Kumar also joined the *swadeshi* and boycott movement. Based on that, he decided to boycott the M.A. examination in 1906 like other students. But at the request of Gurudas Banerjee, the first Indian Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, the students finally attended the M.A. examination. On that request, Benoy Kumar also attended the M.A. examination and passed the M.A. degree in English literature by securing the 5th position. Along with this Benoy Kumar continued the anti-government activities and anti-partition movement. But in this movement against the British government, the student society of Bengal had to suffer suppression.¹⁰ On 10 October 1905 R.W. Carlyle, the chief secretary of the then government of Bengal issued an order, that warned all the schools and colleges of Bengal that if any teacher or student joined the *swadeshi* movement against the partition of Bengal, the monetary aid due to that educational institution will be stopped and the university will

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remove the approval of the concerned institution.¹¹ Because of that instruction, the then-district magistrate of Maldah asked the students to refrain from such agitation, but the students of the district fearlessly rejected it.

Benoy Kumar was in Calcutta during the anti-partition agitation days. When the ‘National Council of Education’ was established in Calcutta in 1906,¹² he joined the National College as an unpaid professor of History and English and devoted himself to founding the national schools. Benoy Kumar, the saint of the national education movement, led an almost ascetic life and he moved from Calcutta to his native land Maldah in June 1907, he intended to spread the national education movement in Maldah. Benoy Kumar Sarkar on 6th June 1907 established the ‘Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti’ or the ‘Maldah National Council of Education’ with the help of Radhesh Chandra Seth, Pran Krishna Bhaduri, Bipin Bihari Ghosh, Maulavi Muhammad Nur Bux etc. The formation meeting of this samiti was presided over by Pran Krishna Bhaduri.¹³ Later Pran Krishna Bhaduri became the permanent president of this samiti. Maulavi Muhammad Nur Bux and Radhesh Chandra Seth were the vice presidents and the secretary was Bipin Bihari Ghosh.¹⁴ In the inaugural meeting of this samiti, Benoy Kumar read an article entitled “*Bange Nava Yuger Notun Shiksha*” (The New Learning of the New Age in Bengal). He said in that article, “Being born during the revolution in our country, perhaps we do not see the darkness of the future...”¹⁵ Also, Radhesh Chandra Seth was one of the speakers in this inaugural function and secretary Bipin Bihari Ghosh explained the purpose and work of this samiti:

- i. To spread education in society in several ways;
- ii. Making primary education free to all;
- iii. Setting up machine-aided high schools and science, night schools, libraries, and lecture halls at various places;
- iv. Establishing appropriate education systems and institutions for girls;
- v. Publication of magazines and books on literature, science, historical research, economics, and philosophy;
- vi. Inspire the people through essay writing competitions and lectures on literature, education, etc.¹⁶

It is necessary to mention in this context that when the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti started founding national schools during the *swadeshi* period and the Bengal partition, the literacy rate in this

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district was very low. According to the *Census Report of 1901*, Maldah had a population of 6,03,649 people, the literacy rate was only 3.74 %. The road condition was very poor and government schools were few and far between, however, it is surprising to think how the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti has overcome many obstacles and made a huge response in the field of education.¹⁷ To encourage education in Maldah, the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti had two departments namely (i) An Education Promotion Department and (ii) The Literary Research Department.¹⁸ Initially, eight schools were established under the education promotion department. Out of these eight schools, three were primary schools and five were high schools with a total of 748 students. Subsequently, after 1908, two more new national schools were established. These ten included night schools, girls' schools, and high schools which later grew to over 1,000 students. During the anti-partition movement in Bengal, these national schools were considered revolutionary factories in the eyes of the British government. Although, a large number of students enrolled in the national schools of Maldah, knowing that such education would have no identity to the British government as well as it would create barriers for government jobs, etc. The first national school of the district was established in 1907 at Makdampur (now east of Shibram house) in Maldah town, the number of students was 120. After the national school for boys was established in the city of Maldah, a girls' school called '*Mahakali Pathshala*' was established in the house of lawyer Amarendra Krishna Bhaduri (Velu Babu) with the interest of Benoy Kumar and it was the first national school for girls in the district. In 1908 six national schools were established and among these one was a night school. These schools were in English Bazar, Kutubpur, Kaligram, Dharampur, Parampur, Jadupur, and Malatipur in Maldah.¹⁹

A list of annual reports available the date of 31st December 1912 showing the number of students in the schools run by Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti, which is mentioned below:

Table 1: List of National Schools established Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samithi

SL No:	Name of Place	Schools	Year of Foundation	Number of students as of 31/12/1912
1	Dharampur	Secondary 2 nd	1908	158

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		Year		
2	Dharampur	Girls' School	1912	8
3	Dharampur	Night School	1912	15
4	Jadupur	Secondary 2 nd Year	1908	50
5	Kaligram	Secondary 3 rd Standard	1908	125
6	Kaligram	Girls' School	1909	40
7	Malatipur	Secondary 2 nd Year	1908	45
8	Maldah (English Bazar town)	Secondary 5 th Standard	1907	120
9	Maldah (English Bazar town)	Night School	1908	20
10	Narattampur	Secondary 1 st Year	1909	70
11	Paranpur	Secondary 2 nd Year	1908	80
Total Number of Students:				731

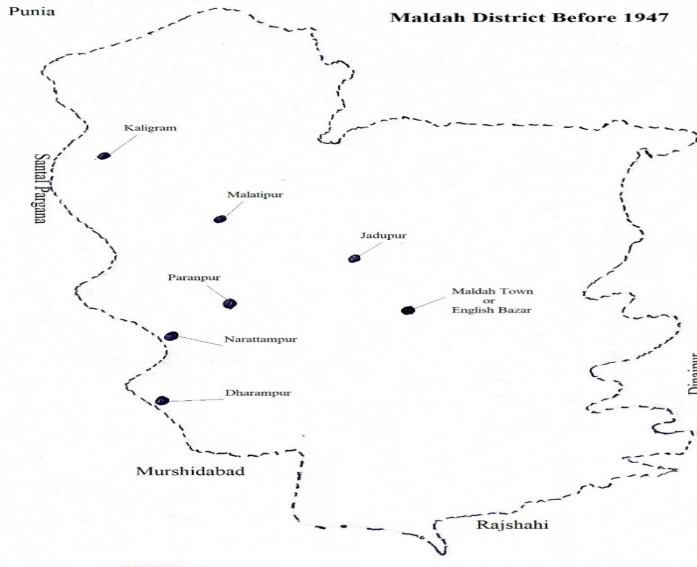
Source: Birendra Nath Dasgupta, "The National Schools of Benoy Sarkar," in *The Social and Economic Ideas of Benoy Sarkar*, 2nd ed., eds. Banerjee and Das, (Calcutta: Chatterjee and Co.Ltd, 1940), P.201.

From the above table it can be seen that to spread national education in Maldah, the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti did not stop only by setting up schools within the town of Maldah, they also tried to bring an environment of education by setting up schools in the far-flung villages of the district. Besides, the number of pupils shows that a large number of students came to study in those national schools and ignored the British-introduced education system, which

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created a new paradigm in the history of education in the district. And below a map is attached to showing the location of places where National Schools were established.

Map 1: Location of National Education Centers in the Maldah District



Source: Himansu Barman, “Western Education in Maldah District (1858-1947),” Unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, Sikkim University, 2023, P. 73.

It is clear from the map that the locations of National Schools recognized by Jatiya Siksha Samiti were located in English Bazar town or Maldah town as well as in far-flung rural areas. Students of all communities could study in these national schools irrespective of religion, caste, or gender. As an example, Kaligram national school can be mentioned. Here, students from different communities studied. The second annual report published by Kaligram National School shows that picture through a list below:

Table 2: Caste and religious background of the students at Kaligram National School

Caste and Religion	Students
Baishnab	4
Batri	2
Brahmin	13
Gandhabanik	1
Hari	1
Kaibarta	3
Kanshabanik	2
Kuyeral	2
Mohandar	2

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Muslim	7
Nagarbala	1
Narasundar	4
Tili	10
Tiour	2

Source: Malaysankar Bhattacharya, *Studies in Microhistory: Political Movements in Some Parts of India and Bangladesh 1857-1947*, (Kolkata: Indian Institute of Oriental Studies and Research, 2007), P. 25.

In other words, it is clearly understood from the above table that students of all religions and castes came to study in the schools introduced by the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti, the door of education was open to all, and there was no racial-biased, gender-biased, religious or caste discrimination.

In these national schools run by the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti was taught in the mother language Bengali but English has not been completely excluded. According to the curriculum of the National Council of Education in Kolkata subjects like Bengali, Mathematics, English, Geography, History, Drawing, Science, Agriculture, Commerce, Art, Health Science, etc.; were taught in the national schools in Maldah. Also, sometimes they were given several awards and scholarships to encourage students to study. Laboratories and libraries were also formed in higher-class schools. At that time about one thousand books were collected in the central library of Maldah National School.²⁰ All the national schools were properly functioning or not, to monitor this thing from time to time an inspection team visited the schools and the team head was Benoy Kumar Sarkar.

To bear the financial side, these national schools had taken help from various sections of society such as traders, zamindars, industrialists, lawyers, etc. Besides, every house begged for economic contributions which was one of the sources of finance. Funds were to be spent on various sectors for the running of national schools and they were registered by the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti. The following schedule gives an idea of the expenditure incurred by the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti during the year 1911 under review :

Table 3: Yearly financial expenditure on Jatiya Shiksha Samiti in the year 1911 (in Rs.)

1	Aides to Mofussil schools	300
2	Buildings	660
3	Hostels	300

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4	Library, Laboratory, and Workshop	300
5	Prizes	225
6	Research Department	550
7	Scholarships	275
8	Tours and Inspections	1801
9	Training of teachers and maintenance of poor students	3000
10	Yearly establishment	7850
Total Expenditure		15,261

Source: Birendra Nath Dasgupta, "The National Schools of Benoy Sarkar," in *The Social and Economic Ideas of Benoy Sarkar*, 2nd ed., eds. Banesvar Dass, (Calcutta: Chuckerverty Chatterjee and Co.Ltd, 1940), P.203.

Then the financial expenditure of Jatiya Shiksha Samiti's account of 1914 was mentioned below:

Table 4: Yearly financial expenditure on Jatiya Shiksha Samiti in the year 1914 (in Rs.)

1	Aids to the Mofussil schools	300
2	Buildings	700
3	Hostels	350
4	Library, Laboratory, Workshops	240
5	Prizes	280
6	Research Department	650
7	Scholarships	275
8	Tours and inspections	842
9	Training of teachers and maintenance of poor students	4000
10	Yearly Establishment	9780
Total Expenditure		17,417

Source: Birendra Nath Dasgupta, "The National Schools of Benoy Sarkar," in *The Social and Economic Ideas of Benoy Sarkar*, 2nd ed., eds. Banesvar Dass, (Calcutta: Chuckerverty Chatterjee and Co.Ltd, 1940), P.204.

From the above two tables that is Table No 3 and 4, it can be seen that the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti was spending money on various projects for educational expansion in the district such as hostels for students, building construction for schools, research works, library maintenance, etc. By spending money on these projects, the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti tried to

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provide a science-based and advanced education to the students of the district as an alternative to the British government education system. These steps of the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti were undoubtedly beneficial and deserve thankfulness. That was why, the actions of Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti, as well as Benoy Kumar Sarkar, were influenced by a prominent historian and Calcutta National College's professor Radha Kumud Mukherjee and he said: "Benoy's activities made Maldah a must-visit place during that time. Many of us used to go to Maldah to see Benoy's 'Field of Operation'."²¹ Apart from Radha Kumud Mukherjee, congress leader Ishwar Saranji of Allahabad, and Shiva Prasad Gupta of Banaras came to Maldah once to see the activities of Benoy Kumar.

The Jatiya Shiksha Samiti was an ethically educational body and has never lost sight of its task as such. Besides the main education work, at the very beginning of its existence, started a literary research department for the study of the culture, antiquities, and social and economic societies of the district. Hence national schools were also called '*Adarsha Vidyalaya*' (ideal schools). One of the main structures of this *adarsha vidyalaya* was to teach technical or vocational education like silk weaving, carpentry, scientific agriculture, animal husbandry, etc. During the year 1911 under review, the ten teachers in the literary and scientific departments of the *adarsha vidyalaya* worked in the smithy and carpentry departments. The mofussil's national schools were informed to have no technical department but most of them had arrangements and teachers for basic sciences. There were 4 teachers at Malatipur, 10 at Kaligram, 2 at Jadupur, 4 at Dharampur, 4 at Paranpur, and 2 at Narottampur. There was also a boarding house attached to the *Adarsha Jatiya Vidyalaya* under the direct supervision of the authorities from the very beginning of its existence. There was a boarding house in 1912 at Paranpur also. Kaligram has been a hostel from the day of its foundation.²² The Jatiya Shiksha Samiti did not bind itself to setting up schools and hostels but also took special steps in writing textbooks for teaching in those schools, so Haridas Palit and Radhesh Chandra Seth took responsibility for writing schoolbooks. In the annual report of the samiti it was mentioned with appreciation, "Radhesh Chandra Seth the vice-president of the samiti is preparing suitable textbooks for national schools. Historical and geographical description of Maldah district, a compilation of historical stories as per rules of National Council, etc., will increase our enthusiasm and benefit the teachers accomplished."²³ Benoy Sarkar himself wrote several books to fill the shortage of textbooks in Bengali at that time, such as '*Prachin Griser Jatiya Shiksha*' (National Education in Ancient Greece), '*Bange Nava Yuger Notun*

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Shiksha' (The New Learning of the New Age in Bengal), '*Bhasha Shiksha*' (The Study of Language), '*Shiksha-Vijnaner Bhumika*' (Introduction to the Science of Education), '*Shiksha Sopan*' (Steps to a University), '*Sadhana or Strivings*' (National and Cultural Problems), '*Aitihashik Pravandha*' (Historical Essays), '*Shiksha-Somalochna*' (Educational Observations), etc. These books, covering a wide variability of subjects, served the purposes of textbooks in the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti, and did a yeoman's service to the cause of education in general.²⁴

Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti's enlightening outreach activities were not restricted to Maldah district, its surrounding districts, and notably by establishing two national schools in the Dacca district (now in Bangladesh). These two schools were founded in Sannihati village near the Bikrampur area of the Dacca district, one for 5th standard co-ed school and another was a girls' school.²⁵ According to the annual report of 1914, the students of these two schools were 97, among them in 5th standard co-ed school were 70 pupils and 27 pupils in girls' school. Then the major achievement of the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti was to send some meritorious students of Bengal to the U.S.A. for higher education in the industries, sciences, and arts. The following list gives the names of students, the district of Bengal to which they belonged, their subjects of study as well as the American Universities to which they went:

Table 5: List of Students who went to the USA with the help of Jatiya Shiksha Samiti

Sl. No.	Name of Students	District	Subject	University they Went
1	Banesvar Das	Maldah	Chemical Engineering	Illinois State University
2	Bejoy Kumar Sarkar	Maldah	Economics	Harvard University
3	Birendra Nath Das Gupta	Jalpaiguri	Electrical Engineering	Purdue University
4	Dhirendra Kumar Sarkar	Maldah	Applied Chemistry	Yale University
5	Hem Chandra Das Gupta	Barisal	Mechanical Engineering	Yale University
6	Hemendra Kishore Rakshit	Dacca	Economics	Wisconsin State University

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7	Hiralal Roy	Dacca	Chemistry	Harvard University
8	Jatindra Nath Seth	Calcutta	Physics	Harvard University
9	Jnanada Chandra Das Gupta	Barisal	Pharmacology	Michigan State University
10	Khagendra Narayan Mitra	Maldah	Biology	Wisconsin State University
11	Nabin Chandra Das	Maldah	Sociology and Pedagogics	Wisconsin State University
12	Nagendra Nath Chowdhury	Dacca	Economics and Sociology	Northwestern University
13	Narendra Nath Sen	Faridpur	Mechanical Engineering	Purdue University
14	Narendra Nath Sen Gupta	Rangpur	Experimental Psychology	Harvard University
15	Rajendra Narayan Chowdhury	Maldah	Agriculture	Ohio State University
16	Surendra Nath Bal	Dacca	Pharmacology	Michigan State University

Source: Birendra Nath Dasgupta, "The National Schools of Benoy Sarkar," in *The Social and Economic Ideas of Benoy Sarkar*, 2nd ed., eds. Banesvar Dass, (Calcutta: Chuckervetty Chatterjee and Co.Ltd, 1940), PP. 210-211.

There was a total of sixteen students who went to the USA with the help of Jatiya Shiksha Samiti and this thing was also a major success of the Samiti. These above-mentioned students were sending their reports about studies and examinations to Benoy Kumar several times a year. The reports contained details about the books and chapters they went through, the experiments in the laboratory done by them, home studies as well as the marks obtained by them at the periodical tests. Most of these reports were published in extenso by the Collegian (Calcutta) during 1912-1914. The publication of these reports of the Maldah scholars in the Collegian served to a certain extent to bring American Universities and other seats of learning in the U.S.A. home to the Indian educational experts and administrators.²⁶

Although the chief objective of the Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti was to promote national education, but they also started promoting nationalism in Maldah. Because they realize that running national schools requires public participation, so they take the help of the popular

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'*Gambhira*' folk song to make people aware. At that time rural music or folk songs changed its nature and added a new dimension to promote nationalism in Bengal, like the '*Jari*' song in the Mymensingh district, then the '*Bhadu*' song in the Bankura district, etc., same as Maldah's own folk music *Gambhira* song. From this time onwards *Gambhira* song entered the field of politics and the scope and appeal of these songs increased manifold.²⁷ Benoy Kumar knew that there are countless folk festivals throughout the villages of Bengal, and people are closely associated with these festivals. People come together in this festival so it becomes easy to inspire them with *swadeshi* thinking. That was why he chose Maldah's folk song *Gambhira*.²⁸ Benoy Kumar while appreciating the song *Gambhira*, wrote:

The songs of the *Gambhira* have flowed from the hearts of the village poets and have carried currents of devotion, love, and poetry to the hearts of the mass. And as results of this there have been a continuous stream of national poetry and births of *minnesingers*, *volksdiehters*, and *litterateurs*. Many Ramaprasadas and many Chandidasas (the former was a saintly poet of the eighteenth century and the latter a poet of considerable parts in the fourteenth) have thus owed their origins to the *Gambhira*. The sweet and melodious pomes of these born poets have diffused, far and wide, like sweet flowers, the rich fragrance of their music. The growth and development of rural literature and folk-poesy in Bengal are solely due to the energy that institutions like the *Gambhira* have ever called into existence.²⁹

The range of *Gambhira* song was in many districts of Bengal. Therefore, one of the goals of Benoy Kumar was to highlight the secular culture of Maldah as a supporter of Jatiya Shiksha Samiti along with the national education movement. So, he wanted to bring out the unique wealth of the soil of Maldah, *Gambhira* song. *Gambhira* was considered by him as a successful element of mass education in the social sphere. Benoy Kumar says:

I used to think of the national education movement as a people's movement. The movement of *swadeshi-swaraj* of the Bengal revolution was in my mind an expression of mass power. As a result, I hoped illiterates and poor people would improve. Since my childhood, I saw that *Gambhira* is a universal thing, so there was a rush to write the history of this universal *Gambhira*.³⁰

In 1907, Benoy Sarkar announced a prize of 25 rupees for writing the history of *Gambhira* song in the '*Maldah Samachar*' newspaper. Responding to his call in 1909, Haridas Palit wrote an article titled '*Addyer Gambhira*' in the '*Bangiya Sahitya Parishad*' newspaper and it was published in 1912 as a book. Based on the '*Addyer Gambhira*' book, Benoy Sarkar wrote '*The Folk-element in Hindu Culture*', and the book was published in London in 1917.

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After the book was published in London, Benoy Kumar had this to say when he saw a copy of the book in universities around the world:

At that time I was at Harvard in the U.S.A. Then I saw a copy of this book in the big libraries of different countries like America and Europe. Every time I saw it, the chest was torn, and then I got a huge shock of life. I thought this is the victory of my Jamtalli's Gambhira. It seems this is my Puratuli's victory. I imagined this is the victory of my Maldah, the victory of my Chunia-Nunia brothers.³¹

Gambhira festivals and competitions were organized every year at that time under the initiative of the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti and several *Gambhira* groups participated in them to encourage national sentiments through this unique folk culture of Maldah. Moreover, a magazine called '*Gambhira*' was published from Kaligram in 1914, sponsored by Haridas Palit and Krishna Chandra Sarkar. The function of the Literary Research Department of the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti was to publish textbooks, promote the regional language and literature, and nurture folk music and folk culture. Bipin Bihari Ghosh, Radhesh Chandra Seth, Haridas Palit, Aditya Nath Maitra, Kumud Nath Lahiri, Pramatha Nath Mukhopadhyay, Atul Chandra Gupta, Radha Kumud Mukhopadhyay, Manindra Mohan Bose and others oversaw this Literary Research department. The initiative of this department was to collect ancient manuscripts, promote *Gambhira* and folk culture, investigate historical issues, and hold conferences on folk literature. As a result, in 1911, the famous historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar was present as the chief guest at the 'North Bengal Literature Conference' organized in Maldah. Then, in November 1913, prominent scholar and professor Amulya Chandra Vidyabhushan came as the chief guest at the 'Maldah Literature Conference' held in Kaligram. At that time Haridas Palit collected over a hundred old manuscripts from various parts of the district. Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee wrote a letter to Haridas Palit asking him to donate those manuscripts to Calcutta University, the letter is given below:

"Senate House, Calcutta

10th May 1922

My dear Haridas Babu. Babu Basanta Ranjan Roy tells me that you have a valuable collection of Bengali MS which you are prepared to present to the University. We shall be very grateful if you do so, and Basanta Babu will take delivery on our behalf.

Yours sincerely

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Haridas Palit responded to the appeal of Sir Ashutosh and donated the huge resources of the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti to Calcutta University for the needs of the country. Another major work of the Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti was to run peripatetic schools. These peripatetic schools were taught in villages where schools could not be established. Binod Chakraborty, Manindra Bose, Haridas Palit, and Yogindra Nath worked as teachers for this school and their director and organizer was Kumud Lahiri.³³

Conclusion

The works of Maldah Jatiya Siksha Samiti created a new way in the field of education in the Maldah District. The schools established by the British government were located mostly in places where there was good connection of transport and communication. On the other hand, Jatiya Siksha Samiti tried to establish schools in the remote areas of this district. As a result, the children who belong to the remote areas were also able to get an education. Another speciality of the Siksha Samiti was that the teachers or gurus used to move from one village to another village to teach the students. The Siksha Samiti also gave importance to technical and vocational education. The students were given training in different industrial fields like the cotton industry, sericulture, carpentry etc. As a result, they became economically independent and it was also beneficial for the district's economy. These were the major achievements of the Maldah Jatiya Siksha Samiti compared to the British-introduced government education system. The medium of language in these schools was not only Bengali but other languages like English, and German were also taught so that the students could get admission to the colleges and universities of foreign countries. It had established many primary and secondary schools, night schools, and technical schools. It is also known that students of different communities were allowed to study in those national schools and girls were also given equal importance in getting an education under the Jatiya Shiksha Samiti. Further, it must also be noted that the role of Benoy Sarkar and his Shiksha Samiti in spreading the feeling of nationalism among the common masses in the district was immense. He tried to grow the national sentiments among the common people through the traditional folk culture like the '*Gambhira*' song. Initially, this song was mainly related to Hindu mythology but later, the Siksha Samiti politicised and socialised this song and tried to grow educational awareness and anti-British sentiments through this song. Due to the process of

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socialising this song *Gambhira* which was earlier just limited to Hindu mythology, got a new dimension. Hence Jatiya Shiksha Samiti was a successful parallel education system in bringing mass education into the social sphere. But Radhesh Chandra Seth died in 1911 and Benoy Kumar Sarkar left for the U.S.A. in 1914, resulting in a lack of leadership, hence the national education movement in Maldah remained paused for some years. Again in 1934 the Maldah Jatiya Siksha Samiti re-organised itself and started national education in a new way which will be discussed in another article.

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