



A Critical Survey on the Bengali Monthly Patrika, Prabasi and its Contributor, Ramananda Chattopadhyay

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Abstract: This article highlighted a new perspective on the Bengali monthly patrika, Prabasi edited by the enlightened scholar Ramananda Chattopadhyay (20th May, 1865 - 30th March, 1943). During the period of British colonial rule in India, when the drums of the nationalist movement were echoing and the background for the split of the Indian National Congress was being set, the enlightened scholar Ramananda Chattopadhyay made a remarkable contribution by founding and editing pioneering journal in 1901, the Bengali monthly patrika Prabasi. Prabasi patrika also critically analyses the role of socio-economic, political, religious, cultural scenario, different types of historical incidents and protest against the British colonial rule in India in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Introduction

In the beginning of the twentieth century standing at the threshold, we are leaving behind the colonial atmosphere and thought, various aspects of neutral was very difficult. I have attempted to evaluate the different types of news reporting of Ramananda Chattopadhyay and his monthly Bengali newspapers 'Prabasi', the personality of the editor, and the spread of awareness of his situation based on the power of his pen in the pre-independence period against the British. The inspiration came from Dr. Sukumar Maity, a distinguished scholar in the study of ancient manuscripts and palm-leaf texts, a pioneer in regional historical research, a renowned teacher, and one of the most eminent writers in Bengali language and literature. Encouraged by his guidance, I felt the necessity of bringing together several preserved issues of Prabasi magazine housed in his half-century-old institution of rich tradition, *Bijon-Panchanan Sangrahashala O Gabeshana Kendra* (Bijon-Panchanan

Museum and Research Centre) under a single cover. In doing so, I firmly believe that the present and future researchers will easily be able to grasp the thematic structure and access essential research materials at a glance. The issues of *Prabasi* contain a wide range of literary and historical contents, encompassing events and contexts from the early twentieth century to the present.

Objectives of this Article

1. To highlight the edited work of Ramananda Chattopadhyay's monthly Bengali newspapers '*Prabasi*' and critically analyse the role of socio-economic, political, religious, cultural scenario, different types of historical incidents and protest against the British colonial rule in India.
2. To try to highlight and to maintain the sequence of monthly Bengali newspapers '*Prabasi*' practice in pre-independence India but it is truly difficult because it's developed slowly in the different region and across the vast territories.
3. Ramananda Chattopadhyay's rational and analytical writings served as a powerful inspiration in guiding Bengal and indeed India toward the path of independence.
4. Ramananda Chattopadhyay's contribution in the issues of *Prabasi* contains a wide range of literary and historical contents, encompassing events and contexts from the early twentieth century to the present.

Materials and Methods

During the period of British colonial rule in India, when the drums of the nationalist movement were echoing and the background for the split of the Indian National Congress was being set, the enlightened scholar Ramananda Chattopadhyay (20th May, 1865 - 30th March, 1943) made a remarkable contribution by founding and editing two pioneering journal in 1901, the Bengali monthly *Prabasi*. From his student days, i.e, from the last decade of the nineteenth century, he had already begun to wield his pen against British colonial rule. In 1888, he stood first in the first class in the B.A. examination in the City College from University of Calcutta. At that time, he received the Ripon Scholarship of Rs. 50 per month. Impressed by his talent, Professor Hem Chandra Mitra (then editor of the Indian Messenger) appointed Ramananda as an assistant editor of the Brahmo Samaj's mouthpiece, Indian Messenger. Thus began his life long journey in journalism. In 1890, he completed his M.A. in English literature from the University of Calcutta. In 1893, he started teaching at City College, Calcutta. He also co-edited the children's magazine *Mukul* with Jagadish Chandra Bose and Shibnath Shastri. After completing his M.A., he took the charge of editing the magazine *Dharmasindhu* in 1890. Later, he also edited *Dasi* (1892) and *Pradip* (1897). While residing outside of Bengal, in Allahabad he began editing the monthly magazine *Prabasi* in 1901 a richly illustrated Bengali journal published beyond Bengal's borders. This was the first initiative. The editorial writing of a Bengali monthly magazine began through his hands. In 1907, under his editorship, the English journal 'Modern Review' was launched. For this reason, he is regarded as the father of Indian journalism.

A sage of knowledge, devoid of arrogance, saint-like in appearance, serene in disposition, a worshipper of truth, and a symbol of inner purity he possessed natural courtesy, extraordinary greatness, the majestic vigor of a lion, and the firmness of thunder, yet behind that firmness laid the softness of a flower. Dressed in pure white khaddar cloth and Punjabi, endowed with divine brilliance, modesty, and humility, he radiated a sacred aura from his body, mind, and soul that deeply attracted people. Ramananda Chattopadhyay was born on May 20, 1865, in Bankura district of West Bengal. His father, Srinath Chattopadhyay, and grandfather, Ramlochan Chatterjee, were both learned Sanskrit scholars by lineage. Their ancestral home was in Nabadwip, but his great-grandfather later moved to Bankura for scholarly pursuits. From childhood, Ramananda was exceptionally intelligent. He completed his education at Bankura District School, St. Xavier's College, and later City College. In 1889, he embraced the Brahmo faith and subsequently taught at various colleges. His research work culminated in the golden fruit of 'Towards Home Rule' in 1917. Later, he wrote 'The Book Trade and the Bengali Family of Five Generations,' 'Art and Culture of Bankura,' and 'Art and Culture of Howrah.'

As a literary scholar and orator, he possessed immense erudition and could deliver logical and captivating speeches. In 1928, he presided skillfully over the *Surma Literary Conference* held at Silchar. On 10th March, 1934, he delivered a long and memorable address before a gathering of students and youth on the role of newspapers. A brief excerpt from that speech reads:

“Ramananda Chattopadhyay spoke of the gathering of news, ideas, and facts, drawn by thoughtful people around the world. They must be presented in a language that a person on the street can understand. The faithful coverage of public opinion must be matched by the boldness to challenge it should that opinion not point in the right direction. A good knowledge of politics and governance is required, as well as the history of the rise and fall of nations, economics, social sciences, and even insurance. Other issues include the worldwide struggles of labour, the trials that beset women, and varying religious beliefs.”

He taught the youth how to think rationally, how to search for truth with a rational and detached mind, how to undermine the very foundation of colonial rule, and how to strike at the dominion of falsehood. He taught the awakened Bengal how to struggle and how to discover truth through the intense, searching light of criticism. He showed how to achieve liberation through the pursuit of reason. His rational and analytical writings served as a powerful inspiration in guiding Bengal and indeed India toward the path of independence. To assess or measure the extent of his contribution is extremely difficult. He remained ever alert so that enslaved India could taste the essence of freedom. Therefore, calling him one of the pioneers and architects of independent India would not be an exaggeration.

Not only that, Ramananda Chattopadhyay was a pioneer in the cultural scenario that gave rise to Indian nationalism in the nineteenth century. At the dawn of the twentieth century, Ramananda Chattopadhyay was illuminated in the context of nationalism through the currents of Realism, Socialism, and Romanticism. As it has been stated:

“Expressions of Romanticism and Nationalism were reflected in the literary efflorescence of 1905–1919, though the seed of all these can be traced back to the mid-1850s. The period also witnessed the beginning of realism and socialism. The transition from romanticism to realism is best exemplified in Rabindranath Tagore, who was the literary mouthpiece par excellence of the Bengali revolution. Already, even in Tagore (especially from 1915 onwards), anti-romantic strings were visible. The objective, positive, realistic, scientific, technical, or socialistic urges made their appearance. Besides, nationalism was being enriched with the ideologies of Vishwa-shakti (world force) in culture and politics. This was especially the age when internationalism was being 'acculturated' to the Bengali spirit. It was in this socio-cultural milieu that Ramananda Chattopadhyay emerged. Rather, it may be said that he was a product of the nineteenth-century renaissance culture.”

Ramananda Chattopadhyay wrote:

“In the name of the Almighty, the giver of all success, we are publishing Prabasi. This is the first endeavor to publish such a monthly magazine outside Bengal. Being far away from Bengal, we shall have to overcome many difficulties and obstacles in matters of writing, illustration, and printing.”

Ramananda Chattopadhyay passed way on 30th March, 1943. In the Bijon-Panchanan Archive and Research Centre, several compilation volumes of *Prabasi* magazine are preserved. It is noteworthy that the total number of issues published or the date of the final issue of *Prabasi* magazine remains unknown. If any kind-hearted person or researcher possesses accurate information about this matter and assists with proper evidence, it will be included in the future. It is especially worth mentioning that the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, has preserved several compilation volumes in microfilm form. The available data source is as follows: From 1308 (1901) to 1371 (1964) Bengali Era, a total of 64 volumes has been found. The statistics are as follows. Translated Text

Vol.-1 [1308 (1901)] - Vol.-6 [1313 (1906)]
Vol.-8 [1315 (1908)] - Vol.-27 [1334 (1927)]
Vol.-29 [1336 (1929)] - Vol.-64 [1371 (1964)]

Vol.-7 and Vol.-28 are missing. Custodian of paper copies:

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This paper attempted to explore and how to write different types of historical incidents in this regard to protest against the British colonial rule in India in the beginning of the twentieth century. As we give example that he had written in his *patrika* about langue, religion, communalism, provincialism and independence and the meaning of freedom. The word independence is generally used in two senses. If a country is not ruled by the people of any or other country, then it is called an independent country. For example, Afghanistan, Abyssinia and Nepal are independent countries. There is another meaning of freedom, which is a better meaning. We will refer to it as the second meaning. A country in which the people themselves or their elected representatives make or repeal the laws of the country, impose or collected taxes, appoint and dismiss official control the income and expenditure of the country, and declare war and a peace, is free in this better sense. (*Prabasi*, Issues, 1328 BS, Bengali Month of Magh, P.572)

As we give another example that he had written in his *patrika* why do Indians want independence? The declaration of Independence contains, quite simply and clearly, the statement that Indians, like all other nations, have the inalienable right to enjoy the fruits of their own labour, so that they may reap the full benefits of it. It also states that if any government deprives any nation of these rights and oppresses it, that nation has the right to alter or abolish that government. This is also a self-evident truth. (*Prabasi*, Issues, 1346BS, Bengali Month of Magh, PP.534-535)

Evaluation as Journalist

Now we discuss that about the sources of his extraordinary achieving as a journalist. The first thing to mention is his honesty and his skill in gathering information. When he had to express an opinion on a subject, he was not driven by mere emotion; like a skilled journalist, he would collect all the information correctly and based his decision on it. That is why his decision was so important and it was difficult for his opponent to subject to it.

Secondly, His brilliance, fearlessness and impartiality were inherent in him. He never hesitated to reveal unpopular truths or to attack injustice and injustice. But his comments were never intemperate, nor did they have the scent of hatred; therefore, even the opposing side received them with respect.

Thirdly, Deep patriotism and love for his people were the main source of all his actions. At a young age, he took the vow of serving the country and he has been fulfilling that vow throughout his life through newspaper service. Many of his contemporaries and colleagues had achieved fame in various fields of life. But he was never a pauper of fame and glory; he

worked quietly and in the background. Yet, like a sister covered in ashes, he could not hide himself for long, his fame and fame had spread all around on its own. Those who formed the new Bengali races, those who had the desire for independence in their hearts and there is no doubt he was the forerunner of those who awakened the spirit of freedom and fearlessly presented the demand for India's independence before the world. As journalists, we are proud of him. My we follow the great ideal of journalism that he has set. (*Prabasi*, Issues, 1351 BS, Bengali Month of Ashwin, PP.418-420)

Conclusion

This research article attempted to evaluate the reflection of the colonial era's thought in India. His contribution in journalism laid a path for a new era in the post-independent period. His contribution in impacting the young minds brought a change for the youths. His contribution as a teacher is enormous. He is not only a pioneering figure rather a rebel in that period. He is an inspiration for the next generation. His struggle like Derozio is always worth-mentioning. He will be forever remembered for his contribution in literature and history. He is successful in his struggle for what he has done for journalism and history. His writings reflected a rare blend of intellectual depth, moral integrity, and patriotic fervor. Chattopadhyay championed liberal values, social reform and national consciousness at the time when India was striving for identity under colonial rule. Through his dedication to truth, social reform, and social progress, he elevated journalism to a noble mission of public service. His legacy continues to inspire future generations to view journalism not merely as a profession but as powerful tool for national development and enlightenment.

References

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