

August 1973



*Neither swayed by contemporary emotions, nor enamoured of the traditional romance and myth attached to history, this greatest historian of the sub-continent, this 'Gibbon' of India, this illustrious peer to the giants in other fields like Sir C. V. Raman, Rabindranath Tagore, and J. C. Bose, dug out truth—and truth only—from the soil of past with the spade of precision.*

103rd Birth  
Anniversary Tribute

## SIR JADUNATH SARKAR

MONI BAGCHEE

“THE study of our country's history leads irresistibly to the conclusion that we must embrace the spirit of progress with a full and unquestioning faith.... We must not forget that modern Indian civilisation is a composite daily product. In God's universe no good thing, no honest work is ever lost. The sound seed will bear fruit, it may be a hundred years afterwards.”

Thus said Sir Jadunath Sarkar (1870-1958), one of the greatest historians of modern India. He was a born historian, nay, a self-educated historian with an innate capacity of historical perception which could easily span the past, the present and the future. As everybody knows, he was a truant from English Literature to History. But what exactly attracted Jadunath to History?

Here is the answer as given by

ANNUAL NUMBER  
BHAVAN'S JOURNAL



Acharya Jadunath himself: "My father, late Rajkumar Sarkar, has been my beacon light and helped me to fix the aim of my own life. History was his favourite subject of study. It was he who aroused in me a passion for history in my early boyhood. He first taught me Plutarch's *Lives* of great men of ancient Greece and Rome. Since then my vision was made clear as it were. It was impressed on my tender mind how a nation can become great, how one can find true fulfilment in life. Thus have I found the mission which is at the centre of my life."

Besides his father, there was Sister Nivedita to whom Jadunath owed a lot for what he became afterwards. No account of Jadunath's life would be complete without a reference to his association with Sister Nivedita. What drew the historian to Nivedita was her deep and sincere love for India.

It is not known to many that in October 1904 the Sister went to see Bodhgaya accompanied by Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, Lady Abala Bose, Rabindranath Tagore and Prof. Jadunath Sarkar. From Bodhgaya the party went to see the ruins of Nalanda and Rajgir or Rajagriha. Jadunath himself has left an interesting account of this memorable journey.

On another occasion, when Nivedita visited the Khuda Baksh Oriental Public Library at Patna, the young professor accompanied her. "I owe to her inspiration for the

field I was working. Once she told me, 'never lower your flag to foreigners. Try to be the greatest authority in the particular branch of research you have chosen for yourself. India must be recognised as the first here.' I can never forget these words. I was also strongly influenced when I read her remarkable book *Footfalls of Indian History* in which she explored the ancient history of India with the passion of a true historian."

With this preliminary observation, let us now look at the mind and face of the historian and let us also try to have a glimpse into his magnificent achievement which earned him international recognition from the highest academic bodies of Europe as a great historian who could be easily compared to Ranke or Mommsen. This apart, Jadunath founded a definite school of research which has its honourable place in the evolution of historiography in India.

A keen student of mediaeval Indian history, Sir Jadunath made the Mughal period his staple of research. In handling records for the period from the seventeenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century, he was really a trend setter. It was his singular achievement that he could make an engaging history out of dry data. The European thought of the nineteenth century witnessed a transformation from ideas to facts. During the period covered by Niebuhr's work (1811) and Professor



Bury's lecture (1903), History came to be an academic discipline, distinct from Philosophy and Literature.

In attempting to reconstruct the past according to verified original sources, History came to be regarded as a Science with universal laws of development. Besides there were also the conceptions of History as Literature and of History as Biography. Jadunath's writings reveal the impact of each of those conceptions in a remarkable degree.

Steeped in the European historical thought and inheriting its rich and variegated legacy, Jadunath found Indian Historical scholarship in a state of backwater. Hardly anything worth mentioning was done either in mediaeval or late mediaeval Indian history compared to what had been done by the Asiatic Society in ancient India.

In order to comprehend fully the role of Sir Jadunath Sarkar as a historian, one must take into account his stupendous industry, unceasing preparation, planning, and above all, his ascetic devotion to a lofty mission which never compromised with truth and which extended over more than 50 years of his life, beginning from the year 1901.

Jadunath's historical writings may be grouped in three broad categories, viz., (1) Mughal Studies, (2) Maratha Studies, and (3) Miscellaneous bye-products from the main workshop.

Primarily he was the historian of the Delhi affairs from the reign of Shajahan to Shah Alam II. It may be asked why did the historian select the Mughal period of the Indian history, and, again, why did he choose Aurangzeb as his subject for long and painstaking research? The answer to the first question is this that it afforded to him an untrodden track full of source materials; as regards his selection of Aurangzeb, the historian himself has said in his Preface to the *History of Aurangzib* (Vol. I):

"The history of Aurangzib is practically the history of India for 60 years. His own reign covers the second half of the seventeenth century and stands forth as a most important epoch in the annals of our country.... But the reign that saw the formation of the greatest Indian empire of pre-British days, witnessed also unmistakable signs of its commencing decline and disruption.... The reign of Aurangzib is also marked by the uprising of the Maratha nationality out of the ashes of their short-lived kingship, and by the appearance of the Sikh sect in the role of warriors and armed opponents of the ruling power. Thus the supreme factors of Indian politics in the 18th and early 19th centuries owe their origin to Aurangzib's reign and policy.... In the very reign in which the Mughal crescent rounded to fullness and then began to wane visibly, the first glow of a



new dawn was distinctly seen in our political sky.... Hence the reign of Aurangzib is an object of supreme interest to the student of political philosophy no less than to the student of Indian history."

The first two volumes of *Aurangzib* came out in July 1912. These volumes were at once acknowledged as the best authority on the subject.

Sir E. D. Ross complimented the author by saying that 'his manner of treating the subject might as well serve as a model to writers dealing with the subject of Indo-Muslim history.'

Based on full and critical use of the Persian sources, and written with a graceful style of his own, the book was hailed as a work of surpassing value. The third volume (1916) created a stir in the country. The Muslims as well as the Hindus felt aggrieved for opposite reasons. The fourth volume came out in 1919 on the eve of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms. A perusal of those two volumes revealed the historian's mission which was to discover 'the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about the past.'

Five years intervened between the publication of volume IV and volume V of Jadunath's *History of Aurangzib*. The last volume at once showed that he had not only written history, he had done more than that by thinking over his country's past and future in the light of the colossal failure of

Aurangzib.

In the last chapter the historian delivers his message with the clear vision and emphasis of a seer:

"If India is ever to be the home of a nation able to keep peace within and guard the frontiers, develop the economic resources of the country and promote art and science, then both Hinduism and Islam must die and be born again. Each of these creeds must pass through a rigorous vigil and penance, each must be purified and rejuvenated under the sway of reason and science."

But Aurangzib, as Jadunath has shown, did not attempt such an ideal. In spite of his high moral character and training, the Emperor failed to realise 'the eternal truth that there cannot be a great or lasting empire without a great people, that no people can be great unless it learns to form a composite *nation* with equal rights and opportunities to all.... It is only in that full light of goodness and truth that an Indian nationality can grow to the full height of its being.'

This is the lofty lesson that the historian-seer has left for his countrymen as a result of his prolonged study and research of the Mughal Empire. And the lesson still holds good.

If Jadunath was the historian of Delhi affairs, he has also given us the history of Maratha affairs of the royal period (1626-1707) and of the Peshwa period from 1700



to 1803, with equal precision and impartiality. The historian of Shivaji made a careful study of all the records about him in eight different languages. He has given us a true picture of Shivaji. To him the career of Shivaji illustrates what constitutes national leadership and how that leadership works. Indeed we get from him added depth and substance to the correct understanding of Maratha history.

*Shivaji and His Times* came out in April 1919 and since then it underwent four editions, the fifth edition of the book appearing in 1952, with considerable revision. It has been said that 'Maharashtra got a mixed shock' with the publication of this book. It should be pointed out here that 'Jadunath owes much to the labours of his predecessors and contemporaries, like Khare, Purandare and Sardesai, who had been most assiduous in making almost house to house search in the Deccan for every bit of historical papers relating to Maratha History. But there was a lack of constructive historical genius among them till Jadunath and Sardesai appeared on the field,' says Dr. K. R. Qanungo in an article in the Punjab University, JNS Commemoration, Volume I.

The book, however, was well received by such critics as Beveridge, Richard Temple and Vincent Smith: while Beveridge hailed it as 'the best,' Smith characterised it

as "a bold and deliberately provocative" book. But, this writer believes, the best estimate of Jadunath's *Shivaji* has come from the pen of Dr. G. S. Sardesai: "Jadunath has been accorded an honourable domicile in the affections of the Maratha people, though no historian has been so severe in exposing the weaknesses of our leaders which cost us an empire. But his heart is warm and his love and sympathy for our people deep and wide. He is a Herodotus in travels in the land of Maharashtra without the Greek Master's unsuspecting credulity, and in his treatment of Maratha history he is a Thucydides, calm and dispassionate, severely just and yet possessed of enough fire and firmness to inspire and admonish a brave nation about an unfulfilled political destiny in the eighteenth century.'

Another characteristic of Jadunath's *Shivaji* is that he has re-established Shivaji in all his real glory in the heart of every patriot throughout this sub-continent. According to the historian, in the midst of political gloom, Shivaji came as a ray of hope for Hindu India. He has analysed the real significance of Shivaji's life in the following inspiring passage in *Shivaji and His Times*:

"Shivaji has shown that the tree of Hinduism is not really dead, that it can rise from beneath the seemingly crushing load of centuries of political bondage, exclu-



sion from the administration, and legal repression; it can put forth new leaves and branches; it can again lift its head upto the skies."

Another of his monumental and thought-provoking works is *The Fall of the Mughal Empire* in four volumes which took the historian 25 years to complete.

This ambitious and monumental work can only be compared with Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Through these volumes, the historian has made a long survey of Indian history from about the middle of the 17th Century to the beginning of the 19th Century, based on the Persian, Rajasthani, Portuguese and Marathi sources, besides French memoirs and records of the National Archives of France. He dug down to the root of the original sources.

One remarkable characteristic of the *Fall* is this that he never allowed himself to be swayed by the contemporary current of revivalist nationalism. In short, through the pages of this four-volume history, Jadunath has brought to the surface the ills of the past as a stern warning for the future. The *Fall* also reveals the historian's profound knowledge of military science.

Speaking about the core of his life's work, Jadunath himself has stated in his Preface to the *Fall of the Mughal Empire* (Vol. IV):

## PEOPLE

There are three types of people the few who make things happen, the many who watch things happen, and the majority who have no idea what has happened.

"The story of the Mughul Empire which I began with my *India of Aurangzib* (1901) has come to its end with the extinction of that empire which is the subject matter of the last volume. The events of half the reign of Shajahan and the whole of Aurangzib are covered in my *History of Aurangzib* in five volumes with a supplementary work *Shivaji and His Times*. Then follows Irvine's *Later Mughals* (1707-1738) in two volumes edited and continued by me, and lastly, this *Fall of the Mughal Empire* (1738-1803) in four volumes."

Thus more than half a century of his long life was absorbed in the study of Mughal India. As one reads his works, one is at once led to conclude that accuracy and nothing but accuracy was his watch-word. It was a creed with Sir Jadunath, nay, an article of faith. And this distinguished him from his contemporaries. Besides the major and monumental works of Jadunath cited above, in his minor works and essays, he made many incursions into the field of social and economic history. He touched nothing that he did not illumine.



Thus, Sir Jadunath Sarkar will remain for ever as India's greatest historian. He was never afraid of offending the false sentiment of his revivalist countrymen. He has demolished romance and myth in historical study. With him the writing of history was not merely an art, rather he viewed it as evolving discipline. His conception of the moving forces of history—of causes—was never parochial. He was never a pious chronicler of history. With a rigid scientific frame of mind, and, what is more, with the gift of vision of a seer, he always valued accuracy and precision.

Again, his idea of historiography is lofty indeed. Through his works Sir Jadunath has revealed himself as a sage, counsellor and judge treating history as an object lesson for his people for all ages to come and here lies his glorious success as a historian.

His conception of the faith of a true historian can only be expressed in Jadunath's own words: "History is not merely a dialogue between the past and the present. It is something more—it is a sort of *Sadhana* which calls for a synthetic vision of mind. Unless we develop a synthetic vision of history of India, we shall never be able to get into the heart of India, however we might make academic endeavours."

□ □ □

## BOOKS FOR EVERYONE

	Rs.
IMPRESSIVE LETTERS ..	4.90
1001 WAYS TO IMPRESSIVE ENGLISH ..	4.00
A DICTIONARY OF LEGAL TERMS .. ..	10.50
THE WORLD'S GREAT SPEECHES .. ..	7.50
ASIAN LOVE TALES ..	4.50
1001 BUSINESS LETTERS	4.50
READYMADE SPEECHES AND TOASTS .. ..	4.90
THE WORLD'S WIT, WISDOM AND HUMOUR	4.00
EVERYDAY PARTY JOKES	3.75
MAD PARTY JOKES ..	3.90
HYPNOTISM .. ..	3.75
EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT.. ..	4.00
VOCABULARY MADE EASY .. ..	3.50
SMALL SCALE INDUSTRIES .. ..	6.40
PERFUMED GARDEN ..	5.95
BETTER SIGHT .. ..	
WITHOUT GLASSES ..	4.50
CORRECT ENGLISH USAGE	4.50
READYMADE BUSINESS LETTERS .. ..	4.90

## J'AIME PUBLICATIONS

Post Box No. 181,  
BOMBAY-400001