

## **The Role of The Khan Family of Narajole in Spreading Cultural Consciousness and Social Service in Medinipur, 1870-1920**

**Mousumi Pal**

Garhbeta College, Garhbeta, Paschim Medinipur  
E Mail: mousumipal.history2014@gmail.com

---

### **Abstract**

---

The zamindars of Narajole were tireless soldiers of the Swadeshi Movement. They initially supported the British as collaborators, but later they became known as anti-British. Not only did they join the anti-British movement, but also never neglected their duties and responsibilities towards society. Even in the unstable political situation of that time, they have left a mark of achievement in social service and the development of fine arts. Under their patronage, the region became famous as a prosperous field. The way this family came forward in the fields of patriotism, education, rural development and domestic industries is truly admirable. My article aims to shed light on the cultural excellence and social service of the Zamindar family.

**Keywords:** Culture, social service, achievement, patronage, rural development

### **Introduction**

The Zamindari System of Bengal in the nineteenth century is one of the ill-defined and vague institutions. This system is discussed from various angles, but yet research on individual Zamindar family is hardly done. Many researchers have described them as tyrannical landlords over peasants and others as pioneers of various initiatives. Others have regarded them as revellers who lived off unearned income. Among the few Zamindar families in Medinipur district and in the entire Bengal, before the English rule, a wonderful combination of political spirit and cultural heritage can be observed. The Khan family of Narajole in Daspur police station of Ghatal sub-division was notable among them. The name of this family was prominent in various activities like the spread of education, public awareness

activities and cultural awareness among the common people of the district. The spread of folk art, the patronage of folk artists and their contribution to the development of culture in this region were truly commendable. Their liberality was evident in general philanthropy and charity. Besides, their contribution to the field of musical practice and Sanskrit and Bengali literature cannot be denied. They were always aware of their social responsibilities. This article focuses on the contribution of the Khan Zamindar family to the culture and social service of Narajole, as well as Medinipur.

Initially, the British did not interfere in the various affairs of the country due to their traditional respect for Indian culture. After some time, as a result of the spread of various ideologies in Britain, the British government engaged itself in various social activities in India. Utilitarians were always conscious of the objective of moral or mental reformation of Indians and to steer the society in the right direction. According to Orientalist principles, Indian culture should be known and recognized. It was applied in the field of governance. Just as the British were eager to free the Indians from various superstitions, the Indians also supported the many-sided reforms of the British.<sup>1</sup> It was later seen that the upper caste Hindus brought uniqueness to the intellectual development of modern Bengal. For them, the main goal was not the basic needs of the common people, but following the education and culture of the English.<sup>2</sup>

Gauripada Chattopadhyay discusses the agricultural unrest and the rise of political awareness in Medinipur district from 1783 to 1866.<sup>3</sup> The revenue collection details of the zamindars and their internal crisis, which precipitated their downfall, are analysed by Chitta Panda. During that period the situation of the peasant community and zamindars of Medinipur and the evolution of the relationship between the two communities came to the fore.<sup>4</sup> The relationship between the raiyats and zamindars of Medinipur is prominent by Syed Rashed Ali.<sup>5</sup> Mangal Kumar Nayak discusses the role of the Zamindar class in the undivided Midnapore District of Bengal, the main area of India's freedom movement during the British

---

<sup>1</sup> Bandopadhyay, Sekhar: *Palashi theke Partition O Tarpur*. Kolkata, Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd., January 2016, pp. 172

<sup>2</sup> Sen, Amiya P.: *Explorations in Modern Bangal, c. 1800-1900: Essays on Religion, History and Culture*. Delhi, Primus Books, 2010, pp. 2

<sup>3</sup> Chattopadhyay, Gauripada: *Midnapore : The forerunner of Indian Freedom Struggle*. Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1986

<sup>4</sup> Panda, Chitta: *The Decline of the Bengal Zamindars: Midnapore 1870-1920*, Delhi, Oxford University South Asian Studies Series, Publication : Oxford University Press, 1996

<sup>5</sup> Ali, Syed Rashed: *Midnapore District: Company, Raiyats & Zamindars 1780-1885*. Kolkata, KP Bagchi & Company, 2008

rule.<sup>6</sup> There is almost no research related to any particular Zamindar family and any specific zamindar in the undivided Midnapore District. Neelmani Mukherjee gives an idea about Zamindar Joy Krishna Mukherjee of Uttarpara.<sup>7</sup> However, at the same time, it can be said that no research on culture and social consciousness has been done in any zamindar family, especially for the Narajole Zamindar family. The primary sources for this work are government documents kept in state libraries, intelligence dispatches, field surveys and personal interviews. The secondary material is the writings of various authors, where the history of Medinipur and the contribution of the Zamindars are discussed.

### **Location of the Zamindari Area**

The zamindars of Narajole were among the few zamindars in Medinipur when Lord Cornwallis introduced the Permanent Settlement in 1793.<sup>8</sup> Narajole is situated in the north-east of the undivided Medinipur district and the western part of the Ghatal sub-division. Narajole is located at 22°34'4" North Latitude and 87°39'4" East Longitude.<sup>9</sup> Ghatal Thana is in the north of Narajole and Debra Thana and Keshpur Thana are in the south and west of it. Narajole was formerly part of pargana Qutubpur, but later it came to be known as a separate pargana, named "Tuppa Narajole". It consisted of thirty large and ten small villages. Parganas of Brahmanbhum, Barda and Chandrakona are situated on the north of Narajole, Brahmanbhum, Bhanjbhum or Medinipur on the west, Pargana Qutubpur on the south and Pargana Chetua on the east.<sup>10</sup> William Hunter states in his book that it was once a major centre for cotton production.<sup>11</sup>

### **Genealogy of the Zamindar family**

The early history of the Khan Zamindar family and their contributions in various fields are shrouded in mystery. Udayanarayan Ghosh of the Sadgopa, was the progenitor of this family. Fortunately, he was able to extend his dominion over the Narajole region by possessing a large chunk of property. It is estimated that he

---

<sup>6</sup> Unpublished research paper of Mangal Kumar Nayak, *Swadinata Andolone Medinipurer Jomidarshrenir Bhumika, 1900-1942*

<sup>7</sup> Mukherjee, Neelmani: *A Bengal Zamindar : Joy Krishna Mukherjee of Uttarpara and his times, 1808-1888*. Calcutta, Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1975

<sup>8</sup> O'Malley, L.S.S.: *Bengal District Gazetteers: Midnapore*. Calcutta, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1911, pp. 33

<sup>9</sup> Ray Kavyatirtha, Panchanan and Pranab Ray: *Ghataler Katha*. Vol I & II, Kolkata, Sadesh, July 1977, pp. 93

<sup>10</sup> Khan, Rajah Mahendra Lall: *History of the Midnapur Raj*. Calcutta, Thacker, Spink and Co., 1889, pp.31

<sup>11</sup> Hunter, W. W.: *Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. III, District of Midnapur and Hugli, 1876, pp.- 46

founded this family in the sixteenth century AD.<sup>12</sup> According to the legend of the family, he got the idol of Goddess Jayadurga from the deep forest and this goddess is still being worshipped in Narajole house as Kuldevi from generation to generation. Local lower caste people and indigenous families of the Khan family (Appendix I) from Burdwan settled in this forested area between the Kansabati and Shilavati rivers.

### **Social Service of the family**

Udayanarayana was succeeded by his son Pratapanarayana and then by his son Yogendranarayana who ruled the region. Yogendranarayan planned the Narajole fort. His son Bharatanarayan had promoted the agriculture.<sup>13</sup> Chhotoo Roy was an early prince of the Khan family. He dug a big tank in Hooddá Dogechhiá named after himself.<sup>14</sup> Kartikaram Ghosh received the title of 'Rai' from Sultan Sulaiman Khan Karrani of Bengal for his welfare work in his zamindari. From that time the zamindars of Narajole adopted the title of 'Rai'.<sup>15</sup> Shyamsingh 'Rai' built a fort called 'Fategarh' in Simana village of this region. Descendants of this family, Raja Ram Sing, son of Raja Raghunath Rai, excavated a large tank at Keshpur which still exists and is called Rámságar. In 1596 Balwant Khan of this family received the title of 'Khan' from the Subadar of Bengal. It was considered an achievement at that time.<sup>16</sup>

Sitaram Khan of this family was famous for his zamindari protection and public welfare work. During his time, Narajole became a flourishing market town. He dug trenches to protect the people of Rajbari and Narajole from the hands of Barghis. Besides that, he took various initiatives to improve security. In 1760, Chuar rebels in Midnipur created an atmosphere of unrest in Medinipur and neighbouring areas. At that time the zamindar Trilochan Khan of Narajole helped Rani Shiromani of Karnagarh in various ways. He was the caretaker of Medinipur Zamindari at that time.<sup>17</sup>

The Zamindars of Narajole were always trying to spread Sanskrit education. This Ghatal area within Medinipur was very notable in terms of education and culture. At that time almost every village in the region had a 'toll' or 'chatushpathi'. Local professors managed all these tolls. The zamindars of Narajole used to organize a Dharamsabha every year on the day of Janmashtami. Prominent Pandits of that

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99

<sup>13</sup> Bhattarchaya: *Ibid.*, pp.168

<sup>14</sup> Khan, Rajah Mahendra Lall, *Ibid.*, pp. 1

<sup>15</sup> Marshman, John C.: *History of Bengal*, Chapter XII, pp. 163

<sup>16</sup> Khan, *Ibid.*, pp. 2

<sup>17</sup> Basu, Surendranath: 'Medinipurer Rajbansha' in Kamal Chowdhury (Ed.): *Medinipurer Itihas*, Vol. I, Kolkata, Dey's Publishing, January 2008, pp. 607

time participated in this Dharamsabha. Jadunath Sarvabhaum of Nabadwip, Chandrakanta Nyayalankara and Harinath Smritibhushan of Mymensingh were notable among them. All these Pandits came to Narajole and shared their knowledge with common people. At the end of the assembly, the Raja used to give each person different gifts according to their status.<sup>18</sup>

The Rajtoll of Narajole was an ancient educational centre of this Sub division. This toll is mentioned in 'A Report on the Tolls of Bengal' written by Maheshchandra Nyayaratna in 1892. Grammar, Smriti, Nyaya, Vedanta, Ayurveda etc. were taught here. The tolls were borne by the zamindars for the education of the poor students, and this toll created a new horizon in the history of education at that time. The Rajas of Narajole took the initiative to spread education in the area by giving monthly stipends to toll professors and donating land on various occasions. Numerous manuscripts were composed in Narajole Chatushpathi. Unfortunately several of the early statues have been destroyed. These idols could be of immense importance in terms of literature, culture and tradition. Various texts including the Srimatbhagavata Geeta, Brahmabaibartya Purana, Agni Purana etc. were copied during the time of Raja Chunilal Khan.<sup>19</sup>

### **Social Activities of Mohanlal Khan**

After that, political unrest started between the Zamindar family of Narajole and Karnagarh for some time. From the time of Raja Mohanlal Khan, a new era of cultural practice and social service of this family began again. Raja Mohanlal Khan constructed thirty reservoirs in Narajole and its surrounding areas. Of these Lankagarh was the largest, about sixty and a half bighas. The banks of this reservoir were planted with luscious fruit trees and a beautiful house was built in the middle of it, which was used as the 'summer residence' of the zamindars. Raja Mohanlal Khan spent about 80,000 rupees to build this reservoir and garden. In 1819, he built a temple at Gar Narajole with stones and idols were brought from Benares. Rama, Sita, Bharata, Shatrughan and Lakshmana are worshipped as gods and goddesses in this temple till now. Every year a grand function is organized on the occasion of the establishment of this temple.<sup>20</sup> In 1829, he built a Math in Samat village of Rajnagar Gram Panchayat in Chetua Pargana of this district and appointed Gangaram Das as its Mahanta. Not only this, he performed various religious ceremonies and selflessly helped many people of Narajole and Abasgarh. Mohanlal Khan was famous for his philanthropic works and architectural

---

<sup>18</sup> Bhattacharya, Debashis: *Narajole: Ek Ananya Janapad*. Medinipur, Published on initiative by Narajole Archaeological Preservation Committee, 2013, pp. 94

<sup>19</sup> Bhattacharya, *Ibid.*, pp. 152

<sup>20</sup> Khan, *Ibid.*, pp. 33

achievements.<sup>21</sup> In 1823, Mohanlal Khan established a charitable hospital at Narajole.<sup>22</sup>

### **Social Activities of Ayodhyaram Khan**

Mohanlal Khan's son Ayodhyaram Khan spent most of his life in conflict with his relatives. The main reason was the dispute over the Medinipur property. But despite all this, he earned considerable respect from his subjects and then the English government by his righteousness, charity, service to the Brahmin scholars and tolerance. In 1851, Raja Ayodhyaram Khan spent a lot of money on establishing a Public Library in Medinipur which is one of the oldest public libraries in Bengal.<sup>23</sup> On 1<sup>st</sup> February 1877, he received a letter of honour from Her Majesty the Queen of England on the occasion of her accession to the title of 'Empress of India'.<sup>24</sup>

### **Social Activities of Raja Mahendralal Khan**

Mahendralal Khan, the illustrious son of Ayodhyaram Khan, was famous for his personality and active life. On 4<sup>th</sup> September 1879, he received the certificate of acceptance of the "Raj of Medinipur" from the District Judge of Medinipur. He was fluent in Bengali, English, Sanskrit and Persian languages. Mahendralal Khan maintained his family tradition as a religious, scholar and music lover. In 1870 he wrote a book called 'Sangitalahari', which was his first published book. His notable historical work 'History of the Midnapur Raj' was published in Calcutta in 1889. Apart from this, the book Manmilan (1878 CE), Gobindagitika (1883 CE), Sharadyotsob (1881 CE), Mothuramilon (1883 CE) etc. is a unique sign of his poetic talent.<sup>25</sup> On the first page of the book 'Sangitalahari', he politely informs that the 'patriotic music lovers' have 'The burden of judging the fault of this book is yours'.<sup>26</sup> The main theme of the Musical Drama called 'Manmilan' is Sri Krishna Leela. On the very first page of this book, he admitted that he wrote such a musical drama with the encouragement of some of his friends.<sup>27</sup> The theme of the ballad called 'Sharadotsava' is Durga Puja, beloved by Bengalis.

---

<sup>21</sup> Khan, *Ibid.*, pp. 37

<sup>22</sup> West Bengal State Archives, Medical Branch, Municipal Department, Government of Bengal, B-Proceedings for October 1909, File No. 3P/2, pp. 250-251

<sup>23</sup> Ricketts, Henry: *Reports on the District of Midnapore and Cuttack* (John Gray, "Calcutta Gazette" Office, Calcutta, 1858), pp. 46

<sup>24</sup> Chowdhury: *Ibid.*, pp. 615

<sup>25</sup> Ray Kavyatirtha, Panchanan and Pranab Ray: *Ghataler Katha*. Vol I & II, Kolkata, Sadesh, July 1977, pp. 69

<sup>26</sup> Khan, Rajah Mohendra Lall: *Sangitalahari*. Kolkata, 1870, pp. 1

<sup>27</sup> Khan, Rajah Mohendra Lall: *Manmilan*, Kolkata, 1878, pp. 1

Raja Mahendralal Khan had a wonderful combination of philanthropy with poetic traits. He donated a lot of money for the improvement of education. Pandit Iswar Chandra Bandopadhyay, a resident of the neighbouring Ghatal Sub-division was one of the pioneers of modern education in Bengal. His educational reforms influenced the Khans. In 1858, Raja Mahendralal Khan applied to the Department of Education of Bengal to convert the Narajole Pathsala into a school. With the help of Vidyasagar, Mahendralal Khan appealed again to the education department. But this was not implemented. Women's education and the widow marriage of Vidyasagar caused a considerable stir in the newspaper report of this time.<sup>28</sup>

In 1891, the Governor of Bengal, Sir Charles Elliott, appointed Maheshchandra Nyayaratna, the Principal of the Sanskrit College, to inquire into the causes of the deterioration of Sanskrit tolls in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and made efforts to explore how Sanskrit practice could be re-popularized in Bengal through financial support. The 'Ghatal-Nimtala Sanskrit Society' was established on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1892 with the cooperation of Raja Mahendralal Khan, Nimtala Zamindar Chandranath Guin etc. The objective of this association was to develop Sanskrit education in the region. Nimtala (formerly known as 'Hemantnagar') was once a prosperous trading centre on the banks of the Shilai River, not far from Ghatal town. The Sanskrit Samity established here was a well-known body for conducting Sanskrit Aadhya and Madhyam examinations among the approved Chatushpathis within the sub-division as well as within the entire district. The patrons of it were the rich people of this region. It was approved by the 'Bengal Sanskrit Association' (later 'Bangiya Sanskrit Shiksha Parishad').<sup>29</sup>

On behalf of this Sanskrit Society, examinations were conducted for the entire Medinipur district, neighbouring Hooghly and Bankura districts and scholarships were awarded by the government. Raja Mahendralal Khan was the lifeblood of this institution. With the initiatives of teachers, students and academics, this association was considered one of the main areas of education in Southwest Bengal at that time. Raja Mahendralal Khan tried to take this educational institution to a better level by providing financial assistance. He regularly paid Rs 500 every year from his treasury. In this way, he maintained the lineage of scholarly tradition.<sup>30</sup> He had shown his magnanimity by giving scholarships to poor students, giving money to poor people and people in debt and helping them during famines. He also used to take a *haritaki* as tribute from poor subjects. He waived the rents of all subjects as the cultivation in Narajole did not fare well due to the drought and floods of 1884-85. He built a dam at Narajole to protect the settlements and farming land of the

---

<sup>28</sup> Khan, 1889, pp. 45

<sup>29</sup> Ray Kavyatirtha, Panchanan and Pranab Ray: *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 261

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 331-346

subjects from floods. He started the 'Ayodhyaram Scholarship Award' in the name of his father to encourage the students of Medinipur College to study. He invited dignitaries in 1879 on the occasion of his father's death.<sup>31</sup>

In 1887 Mahendralal Khan was conferred the title of 'Raja' on the occasion of the 'Silver Jubilee' of Queen Victoria's reign. Sir Rivers Thomson, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, conveyed this news to the 'Raja' through a letter, which shows the friendship between the two and the respect of the English Government towards the Raja.<sup>32</sup> On 15<sup>th</sup> July, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Sir Stuart Baillie hosted the conferment ceremony at the Bengal Secretariat. He honoured Mahendralal Khan with a sword, a girdle and a garland of pearls. He then pointed out some of the philanthropic deeds of the Raja as well as his family.<sup>33</sup>

### **Social Activities of Raja Narendralal Khan**

After Raja Mahendralal Khan, Raja Narendralal Khan was the rightful heir of the Zamindar house of Narajole. Haranchandra Rakshit in his article praises Raja Narendralal Khan's deep affection for Sanskrit literature and praises him for being eloquent and innocent.<sup>34</sup> Protecting the tradition of the family, he respected and honoured the scholars and the virtuous. Apart from paying 500 rupees annually for the management of the said Sanskrit Society, he organized a Vedic examination with an additional payment of 1000 rupees per year. In this examination, the students were supposed to prove their proficiency in Hindu Shastra. Raja Narendralal Khan used to present a gold medal named after his mother to the person who obtained the highest rank in two examinations namely 'Halayudh' and 'Gunavishnu'. It is pertinent to mention that among the women members of this Sanskrit Society, Smt. Vidhumukhi Devi, the wife of Raja Narendralal Khan's paternal uncle Sri Upendralal Khan, took a prominent role.<sup>35</sup>

From the annual reports of the said Sanskrit Society, one can learn about the interest of the Narajole zamindars to spread education in the region. In 1894 Pandit Mahamahopadhyay Sri Maheshchandra Nyayaratna, Director General of the Society, presented a letter of recognition to Raja Narendralal Khan in a meeting at Ghatal-Nimtala. This letter is not only a laudatory reference to the Raja but also a beautiful record of his philanthropic activities. A look at the two pages of the association's annual reports for 1911 and 1913 and the testimonials gives the impression that Raja Narendralal Khan had dedicated himself to the history of

---

<sup>31</sup> Khan: *Ibid.*, pp. 38

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23

<sup>34</sup> Rakshit, Haran Chandra: 'Rajah Mahendralal Khan' in Chowdhury (ed.): *Ibid.*, pp. 610-612

<sup>35</sup> Ray, Pranab: *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 344-345



Medinipur not only as a freedom-loving public leader but also as an intellectual person.

At that time, when apartheid and casteism were rampant in society, the educational centres of the region were open to all irrespective of caste and caste. Along with Brahmin students, non-Brahmin students could also receive education in Raj Toll. In 1895, the names of two non-Brahmin students were found in the scholarship award list of the Raj Toll of Narajole – Bhuthanath Bhunia and Umacharan Ghosh. It is truly admirable how the Narajole zamindars took the initiative to eliminate the caste system and caste discrimination among the subjects.<sup>36</sup>

The role of the zamindars of Narajole in popularizing Sanskrit education to the common people is undeniable. But after 1913 Raj Pathshala probably took the place of this Rajtoll. Apart from Sanskrit Society and Rajtoll, Raj Pathshala played an important role in the history of education in Narajole. Pathshala is mentioned in an account of Rajbari in 1860. Sanskrit, Mathematics, Economics and Geography were taught in this school. In 1858, Mahendra Lal Khan took the initiative to convert the Pathshala into a school. He applied to the Education Department, although this application was not approved. After receiving the title of 'Raja' in 1887, he tried again to establish the school. But his efforts did not bear fruit due to his sudden death.<sup>37</sup>

After the death of Mahendralal Khan in 1892, his son Narendralal Khan assumed charge of the zamindari and his first and foremost task was to establish the school planned by his father. In 1894, with the interest of Narendralal Khan, Narajole Pathshala was converted into a school and dedicated in the name of his father. He named the school 'Narajole Mahendra Academy'. It started as a middle-class school. Incidentally, it did not receive official approval until the death of the Raja.

In the initial phase, the number of students in this school was very limited. Initially, classes I to VI was taught here. Raja Narendralal Khan played a leading role in spreading modern education in these remote areas. He arranged tuition, scholarships and free training of students in techniques of crop production using scientific methods.<sup>38</sup> This practical education system gained popularity in the region at that time. As a result, the number of students also increased.<sup>39</sup> A statistic from 1909, shows that this school had a good student population when compared to other schools in the surrounding area. According to statistics, in 1909, 96 students were studying in Narajole school which was out of 17 schools in the

---

<sup>36</sup> Bhattacharya, *Ibid.*, pp. 99-101

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110

<sup>38</sup> *Narajole Mahendra Academy Satabarsha Smaranika*, 1994, pp. 25

<sup>39</sup> Das, Binodsankar and Pranab Ray (eds.): *Medinipur: Itihas O Samskritir Vivartan*, Vol. I, Sahityalok, August 1989, pp. 221

region of Medinipur. Narajole Raj Library continues to be used for public welfare. The purpose of his initiative was to promote public education among the common people.<sup>40</sup> Ganganarayan Ghosh, Avilash Chowdhury, Rajendranath Das etc. are notable among the headmasters who have been remembered in the history of the school through their teaching, sacrifice and work in the primary phase of this school.

Raja Narendralal Khan, in addition to imparting practical knowledge in everyday life in the school he founded, also started cultivating high-quality fruits and vegetables in his garden, which were completely scientifically cultivated. Narajole is bounded by the Shilavati River on the north and Palash Pai Canal on the south. Hence this region had the prospect of highly developed in agriculture. However as the farmers did not follow proper methods in agriculture, there were problems in production. This initiative of Raja to remove this problem is still considered as commendable.<sup>41</sup>

During the Medinipur bomb case, Raja's legal counsel Mr. Keas said about Raja Narendralal Khan while applying for bail, "The Raja of Narajole was a man of unmistakable and striking personality, of vast property and enormous wealth. His charities were numerous and he was popular with all classes of people. He had been honoured with the title of Raja for his well-known loyalty and benevolent acts."<sup>42</sup>

Raja Narendralal Khan donated a lot of money to establish Medinipur Ramakrishna Mission. He tried to abolish the dowry system from society by establishing 'Prajapati Samiti' in Calcutta. On 29 November 1895, the British government conferred the title of 'Raja' on him for various philanthropic works. Sir Charles Elliott, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal paid tribute to the Raja with a complimentary speech at that time.<sup>43</sup>

Raja Narendralal Khan engaged himself not only in the development of Narajole but also in various public service works in Medinipur and Calcutta. Narendralal Khan's enthusiasm for establishing indigenous industries can be seen. The Raja had an initiative to establish a glass mill in Calcutta. A few wealthy businessmen of Calcutta played a major role in establishing this mill. But later when the factory closed, Narendralal Khan bought it. Through this factory, Bengali youths used to

---

<sup>40</sup> O' Malley, L. S. S., *Bengal District Gazetteers: Midnapore*, Calcutta, The Bengal Secretariat Depot, 1911, pp. 160

<sup>41</sup> *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, April 13, 1911

<sup>42</sup> *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, September 5, 1908

<sup>43</sup> Bhattacharya: *Ibid.*, pp. 192

learn skills from foreign artisans.<sup>44</sup> He took a significant role in establishing the Swadeshi Industry.<sup>45</sup> During his tenure as Commissioner of Midnipur Municipality in 1913, he showed his skills in various fields.

Raja Narendralal Khan contributed fifty thousand rupees to establish Medinipur Sadar Hospital. He was always kind to his subjects. He used to distribute 25 maunds of rice to the needy people every day.<sup>46</sup> Raja Narendralal Khan took the initiative to provide a good water supply in Medinipur. He promised to donate one lakh rupees to set up a waterworks in the city, though this plan did not succeed. He agreed to contribute rupees five thousand to the permanent fund of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad.<sup>47</sup> In 1920, he was requested to be the president of the reception committee at the conference of Bengal Provincial Committee in Medinipur city, although he refused to be the president.<sup>48</sup> Narendralal Khan wrote a letter to the Governor of Bengal to reclaim his honour from the British government after his arrest in the Medinipur bomb case. In that letter, Narendralal Khan gave a list of his philanthropic accounts. He announced financial assistance in various funds of the government.<sup>49</sup> He promised to pay Rs. 5000/- for the improvement of Midnapore College.<sup>50</sup>

Rabindranath Tagore had a close relationship with Raja Narendralal Khan's successor Devendralal Khan. The foundation of this relationship lay through Kumar Devendralal's tutor, Pandit Sriharicharan Bandopadhyay. He wrote a Bengali dictionary. Needless to say, he was appointed as Kumar's tutor during the time of Raja Narendralal. Therefore, it can be said that the Khan family had a close relationship with the Tagore family from a long time ago.<sup>51</sup> In a remote village like Narajole, the movement to eradicate untouchability, Kumar Debendralal invited Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. In 1925, Gandhiji came to Narajole and called upon the student community to join the work of rural society organisations and eliminate untouchability. However, it was not possible to go to Narajole for Rabindranath due to his health issues. In 1929, poet Kazi Nazrul Islam

---

<sup>44</sup> Home Department, Government of India, Proceedings A, January 1910, Nos. 126-127: *Report on the Political Situation in Bengal and Eastern Bengal and Assam for November, 1909*

<sup>45</sup> Bhattacharya: *Ibid.*, pp. 192

<sup>46</sup> *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, September 5, 1908

<sup>47</sup> Chowdhury: *Ibid.*, pp. 608

<sup>48</sup> *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, September 5, 1908

<sup>49</sup> Chatterjee, Pranab Kumar: *Midnapur's Tryst with Struggle*. The State Archives of West Bengal, 2004, pp. 65

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Mr. J. N. Gupta, Commissioner of Burdwan Division to H. L. Stephenson, Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, March 3, 1920

<sup>51</sup> Chattopadhyay, Sudin: 'Narajole: Rajporibar: Debedralal Khan O Rabindranath', 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2007 in Unpublished Ph.D Thesis of Mangal Kumar Nayak

came to Medinipur during an art exhibition at Sadar Narajole Raj Court in Medinipur.<sup>52</sup>

In 1909, when a conspiracy against Raja Narendralal to overthrow the British government came to light, the British government became alarmed. He was excluded from their court list. The title of 'Rajah' given by the British Government was also taken away. Even Narendralal Khan's special privilege of keeping ten gunners was taken away. However, he withdrew from direct involvement in politics.

Raja Narendralal Khan was not only a patron of geniuses but also a poet and calligrapher himself is evident from the various books he wrote. One of the most prominent of his works was the book 'Paribadini Shiksha'. Narendralal Khan and his music teacher and one of the leading musicians of the Bishnupur genre, Ramprasanna Bandopadhyay, also wrote three books. They are 'Sangeet Manjari', 'Mridanga Darpan' and 'Esraj Tarang'. Besides, 'Sangeet Chandrika' and 'Gitdarpan' were published with the financial help of Narendralal Khan, by one of the pioneers of this genre, Gopeshwar Bandopadhyay. These books were given by Raja Narendralal Khan to various learned persons as a gift. His wife, Rani Mrinalini Devi wrote the book 'Stuthikusumanjali'. The introduction of the book was written by Professor Shri Panchanan Devabarma.<sup>53</sup>

Raja Narendralal Khan's great spirit is evident in his not seeing religious differences while giving donations. One of the characteristics of Bengali folk culture is pottery. The pottery and Patua community existed in Narajole for a long time. His forefathers used to organize various competitions in the Rajbari on the occasion of a festival. Where pot-making and idol-making were popular competitions. Potters not only from Narajole but also from all the surrounding areas participated in this competition. As a result, by participating in this competition, they used to get royal honours at the same time. On the other hand, this competition became a means of exchanging art and artistic consciousness with the artists of different regions. Raja Narendralal Khan also maintained this lineage. He did not lack enthusiasm to advance this industry in various ways. He used to provide help to talented artists in various ways. All the potters belonged to the Muslim community. He built a mosque in Narajole to help them practice their religion. It is a shining example of communal harmony in the political situation of that time. In 1912, he gave a raiyat settlement of land to Golap Robbani Patidar and Chandravati Bibi, son of the famous potter Nabalal Patidar of the region.<sup>54</sup> In

---

<sup>52</sup> Ray Kavyatirtha, Panchanan and Pranab Ray: *Ghataler Katha*. Vol I & II, Kolkata, Sadesh, July 1977, pp. 79

<sup>53</sup> Bhattacharya: *Ibid.*, pp. 157

<sup>54</sup> Bhattacharya: *Ibid.*, pp. 71

this way, he not only took the initiative to keep an industry alive but also set an example for common people to maintain religious harmony.

Raja Narendralal Khan was always keen to promote the cultural activities of the district regionally. On the 1<sup>st</sup> Day of Baisakh every year, there would be a meeting in Narajole Rajbari, where the scholars of various subjects and the bright stars of the cultural field of the region would emerge. Here they not only presented their knowledge to the people of this area but also exchanged knowledge among themselves. Besides, there were classical music concerts held at the palace once a year, which Narendralal Khan made more popular. On the occasion of this event, he established a close relationship with the legendary music artists of Bishnupur Gharana, Shri Ashesh Bandyopadhyay, Gopeshwar Bandyopadhyay and Ramprasanna Bandyopadhyay. But his contribution to popularizing not only classical music but also local folk music cannot be denied. Various panchali songs and pir songs gained considerable popularity under his patronage.

Narendralal Khan himself was a great musician. He was enriched by the various rhythms of Dhrupad Khayal and Sur Bahar under his guru Ramaprasanna Bandopadhyay. The dance hall of Narajole got another dimension from his time. But his main achievement was that he did not try to merge dance and song and allowed both fields to develop in their way.<sup>55</sup>

His son Devendralal Khan was an expert on the sitar. He was his father's rightful heir. His name is notable for donating money to schools, helping in flood relief and above all in the Swadeshi movement. He took a leading role in eradicating untouchability in the country. Raja Narendralal Khan's other son Vijaykrishna Khan was the first prince to receive the school education instead of the home education. He was a calligrapher in Sanskrit and English literature. Devendralal Khan's son Amarendralal Khan funded many educational institutions and libraries.

Along with playing an important role in the development of cultural practices with the Khan family of Narajole, they got close to many wise and learned people at different times. Krishnachandra Bandopadhyay, the editor of the *Bangabasi* newspaper, regularly published articles against the British. Because of that, the British Government filed a case of treason against him. He resigned from the editorship and joined the post of the manager of Narajole's estate. Raja Narendralal Khan and Kumar Debendralal Khan had close relations with Rishi Aurobindo Ghosh's maternal uncle and Satyendranath Bose's grandfather Gnanendranath Bose. Khan's family had a close relationship with Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. In

---

<sup>55</sup> Bhattacharya: *Ibid.*, pp.196-198

1938, after becoming the president of the Haripura Congress, he came to Narajole and addressed the Congress activists meeting.<sup>56</sup>

Even though Medinipur Municipality was established in 1865, there was no provision of a water supply system. The Public Health Department constructed a reservoir in 1924, almost 60 years after the establishment of the municipality. For the construction of the reservoir, Debendralal Khan, Member of Bidhan Parisad, including a total of twenty-eight eminent people helped with money. Raja Narendralal Khan of Narajole donated a lot of money for setting up a water system at Medinipur – along with various social and developmental works. Perhaps that is why this reservoir was named after him.<sup>57</sup>

### Conclusion

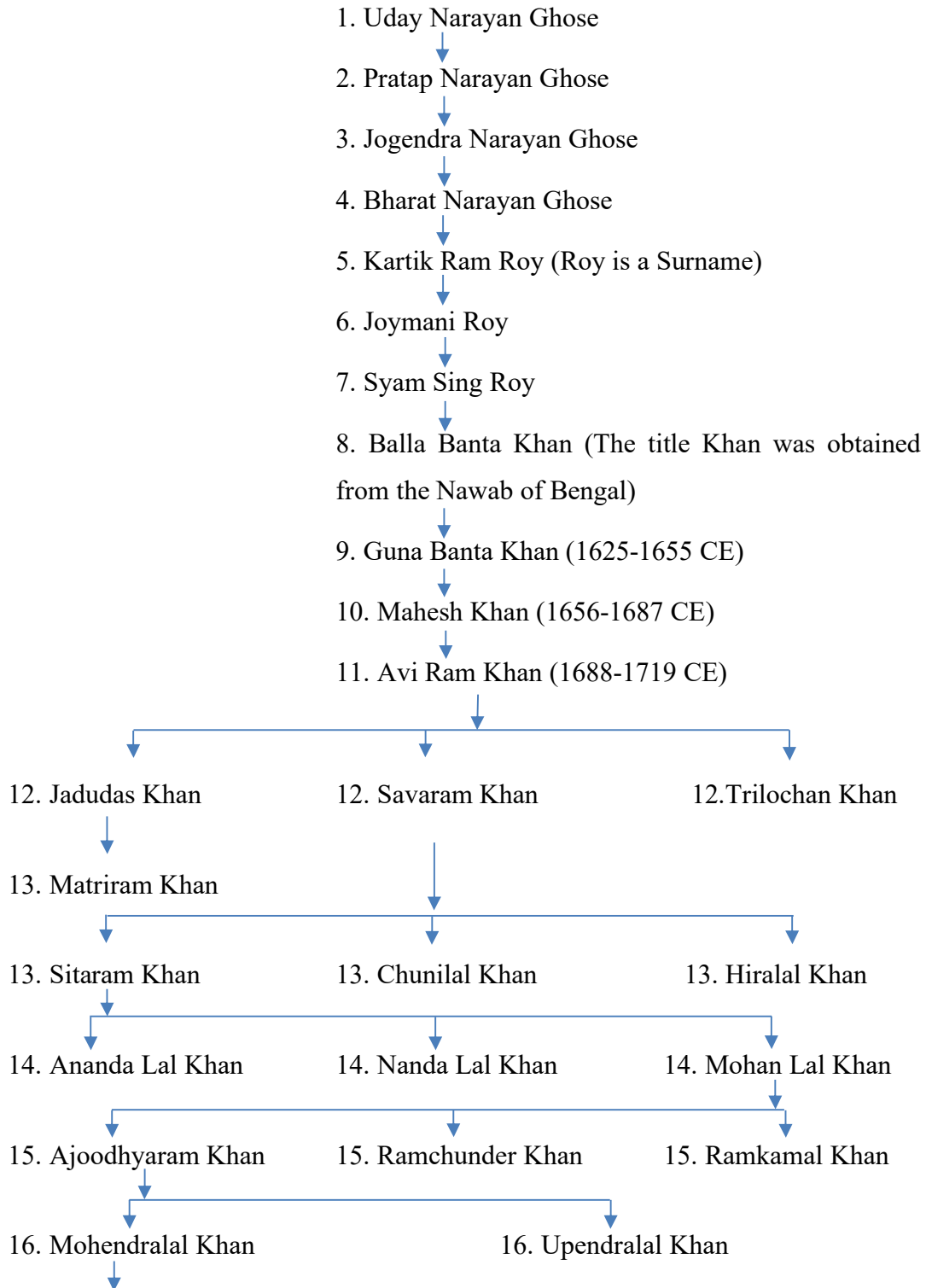
The zamindars of Narajole were tireless soldiers of the anti-British movement and their contribution in developing the social service and cultural spirit of that time in a large part of Medinipur district including Narajole is truly undeniable. Even in the unstable political situation of that time, they had left a mark of achievement in social service and the development of fine arts. Under their patronage, the region became famous as a prosperous field. The way the Khan family came forward in the fields of patriotism, education, rural development and domestic industries is truly admirable. Many philanthropic works of that time were carried out by their generous donations. This zamindar family was the bearer of the glorious tradition of the past, which got another dimension from the time of Mahendlal Khan. The progress in architecture started from the time of Mohanlal Khan and turned into philanthropy during the time of Ayodhyaram Khan. Then during the time of Mahendralal Khan, not only donations or philanthropy, but cultural practice, philanthropy and charity in the region got another dimension due to the direct favor of the calligrapher and culture-minded Raja. After Raja Mahendralal Khan, his son Raja Narendralal Khan marked his name in various fields like politics, society and culture of Bengal. He educated his son Debendalal Khan in proper education. However, it can be said that there is no doubt that the policy adopted towards the Zamindari system has forced the Narajole family to struggle for survival ever since. After the abolition of royal rights, Narajole's identity started declining.

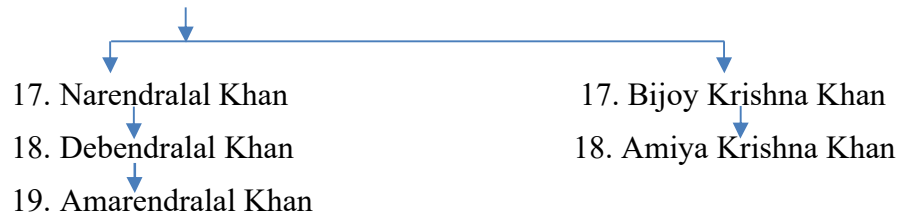
---

<sup>56</sup> Chattopadhyay: *Ibid.*, pp. 189

<sup>57</sup> This information was obtained from a marble inscription carved on the reservoir

### Appendix I





(Source: Rajah Mahendra Lal Khan: *History of the Midnapur Raj*, Calcutta, Thacker, Spink and Co., 1889, pp. 29 and Debashis Bhattacharya: *Narajole: Ek Ananya Janapad*, Published on initiative by Narajole Archaeological Preservation Committee, Medinipur, 2013, pp. 96)