

Exploring an Untold Chapter: Ramesh Chandra Majumdar's Contribution to 'The Journal of the Greater India Society'

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Abstract

This article tries to analyze the writings of Ramesh Chandra Majumdar published in the Journal of the Greater India Society regarding Early India's interaction with South-East Asia. These essays form a very intriguing aspect of India's historiography called 'Greater India'. This emerged as a significant part of India's cultural nationalism. Present historiography aimed to focus on India's cultural contribution to her neighboring countries. The articles written by Ramesh Chandra show how they successfully endorsed such concept of 'Indianization' where India's inclusive impact over the Southeast Asian countries, led them to form a part of 'Greater India' or extended India. I have tried to examine limitations and significance of these writings, such as, how far they showed biasness towards Indian impact yet acknowledged local characters. A comprehensive discussion has been attempted to understand the author's ability to interpret sources and rational analytical framework

Keywords: *Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, India, South-East Asia, cultural impact, Greater India, Indianization, cultural nationalism, indigenous character, contradictions.*

Ramesh Chandra Majumdar

Ramesh Chandra Majumdar or R.C. Majumdar as he is better known, is one of those versatile historians whose fascinating research and writings have left lasting impression over minds. What is intriguing, this erudite scholar has contributed to almost every aspect of Indian history and produced an enormous number of academic works, which has been subject to critical acclaim for a long time. While paying homage to the memory of such a doyen of Indian history, his student Himansu Bhushan Sarkar (1980) once wrote, "Among the most outstanding historians of the present century, the name of Acarya Ramesh Chandra Majumdar...can hardly be forgotten in years to come. Apart from his massive scholarly productions, for which he is justly famous, he is also the only historian in India who has, to his credit, voluminous scholarly works on both ancient Indian history and culture and equally precious works on South-East

Asian history and culture” (Sarkar 1980: 361-365). Sarkar's admiring words perhaps help us to indulge in the subject of present article focusing on the essays of R.C. Majumdar published in the Journal of the 'Greater India Society'. They were related with a historiographical paradigm named 'Greater India'. The study of 'Greater India' can be regarded as an interesting aspect of India's cultural exchanges with her Asian neighbours. However, the definition of 'Greater India' asserts us that this is more than a mere discussion of socio-cultural interactions between India and the Asian nations. This vision was simple and straight, sought for the blanket idea of an extensive and profound influence of Indian culture throughout Asia. Intertwined with the contemporary environment of nationalist consciousness of the twentieth century, this 'Greater India' theory was dedicated to challenge the orientalist critique of the British imperialists about the backwardness and non-changeable features of ancient India. The key feature of the 'Greater India' theory was the emphasis on peaceful extension of India's rich, vibrant cultural heritage to her Asian neighbours. Those nations became enriched by absorbing Indian culture in totality and were transformed into India's 'cultural colonies' or extended parts of India's cultural entityⁱ. Thus, India was claimed to be the source or 'mother' of the Asian cultureⁱⁱ. The approach was seen to be just and appropriate for its friendly, human and non-violent character which was explained as the long-cherished tradition of India. This heritage, as the Greater India theorists claimed, gave Asia her cultural identity that differentiated her from the imperialistic and materialistic West. The 'Greater India' study has been subject to debate in the historiography of South-East Asia for decades. It faced severe criticisms for a selective interpretation of ancient Indian history and especially for ignoring indigenous characters of South-East Asia. But the scholars' intensive research, dedicated efforts to gather and analyze sources are commendable. This research was also linked to a broader context of trans-cultural studies. It underlined the significance of history about the shared past of a large community, however imagined it was. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar is an unparalleled figure in this genre of study. He mainly chose South-East Asian regions as his field of research. Profound impact of his works was evident as the writings continued to be published for a long time, even after independence. Among such writings, those published in the Journal of the Greater India Society remain unobserved and my article is an effort to reappraise their significance. Those essays were important both as part of the Greater India study as well as South-East Asian history and due attention should be paid to them.

The Ideological Background:

Ramesh Majumdar was associated with the Calcutta based Greater India Society. It was formed on 14th October, 1926 and known as the *Brihattara Bharat Parishad*ⁱⁱⁱ. The society served as important platform for further research regarding India's strong cultural impact in

her neighboring areas. South-East Asia appeared to be one of the most discussed areas in this aspect apart from China and Central Asia. It should be noted that Calcutta in the twentieth century emerged as a hub of intellectuals who were politically conscious and engaged in cultivating nation's tradition and culture. Ideal of Asia's distinct cultural identity and India's prominent position among the Asian nations gained popularity in many Bengali intellectuals' writings. Rabindranath Tagore's emphasis over cross cultural interaction, universal peace and humanism appeared to be a huge inspiration for the Greater India scholars. Abanindranath Tagore and his disciples sought for rejuvenating India's artistic traditions and building nationalist consciousness through the concept of art leading to the famous Bengal School of Art. (Guha-Thakurta 1992) Many supporters of this art movement like O.C. Gangoly and A.K. Coomaraswamy was associated with the Greater India School. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal saw the growth of Bangiya Sahitya Parishad or Barendra Research Society which were part of the process of shaping regional identity and history (Basak 2011: 132-58) R. C Majumdar was himself associated with the Barendra Research Society and contributed to its research. It was not surprising that Calcutta provided a platform for the Greater India Society and relevant research^{iv}.

To fulfil the objective of Greater Indian research, the Greater India Society brought out a journal from 1934-59, with an interruption from 1947-54. The editors of the 'Journal of the Greater India Society were' U.N. Ghoshal, Kalidas Nag and Nalinaksha Dutt. Tagore contributed a Foreword to the inaugural issue of the Journal where his words reflected the idea of the society (Tagore, 1934:1)^v. The journal published writings of eminent scholars among whom Ramesh Chandra Majumdar was a notable one. Undoubtedly, the writings were 'Indocentric' where emphasis was on the 'Indianization' of South-East Asia. It encouraged rich debate ranging from the question of Indian influence to later shift to the role of indigenous characters and internal dynamism of the South-East Asian society and culture^{vi}. It is interesting to see how the Indian scholars, including Ramesh Chandra, imbibed the characteristics of these two contrary opinions.

The Greater India genre of writing used trans- disciplinary methods like anthropology, archaeology, philology, linguistics, cultural and environmental studies etc. (Manguin, 2004: xv). Major inspiration for came from archaeological excavations and academic research by the European scholars^{vii}. The study was extremely benefitted by the works of C.C. Berg, N.J Krom or G. Coedes who voiced for the presence of strong Indian influence in those regions (Berg's *Kshatriya* thesis and Krom's *Vaishya* thesis highlighted roles played by Indian Rajput rulers and traders in spreading Indian influence.) Coedes emphasized more on the role of Brahmanas and merchants in 'expansion of Indian culture' (Coedes, 1964). He even used the word like

'Indianization' which closely resembles with the approach adopted by R.C. Majumdar and others (Coedes, 1964). Close impact of these works on Indian writers was evident from their emphasis on the role played by Indian 'traders, *Brahmanas* and *Kshatriyas*' in spreading Indian culture through settlements and intermarriages in South-East Asian regions. R.C Majumdar's fascinating research on such places in Cambodia like Su-Huynh, Samrong or Takua Pa showed stages of 'Indianization' following commercial, missionary and cultural interaction between Indians and indigenous South-East Asians.

However, a contrary approach was always present which emphasized on the 'active agency' of indigenous people in articulating South-East Asian cultural substratum. Such idea gained support from the works of Sylvain Levi, Paul Mus, J.C. Van Leur, F.D.K. Bosch and H.G.Q. Wales (Bayly, 2004: p. 722). Regional history and culture was given more importance during and after the Second World War when South-East Asia as a distinct region of study gradually received attention. Works of D.G.E. Hall published in 1955 significantly contributed to popularizing this new genre of study (Hall, 1955). Indian scholars could not ignore this alternative view. But question is whether they adopted an unbiased approach? Detailed reading shows that Indian writers were selective in using data to show the Indian impact. Indigenous characters were seen as passive receivers of Indian culture and were gradually transformed into 'Indianized' ones. Majumdar was certain that South-East Asian people received the fruit of progress and civilization only after their encounter with the 'superior' Indian or 'Hindu' culture. He used the term 'barbarous' to define the indigenous people and culture (Majumdar, 1940). However, these features were commonly associated with the 'Greater India' study. Interestingly, Bijan Raj Chatterjee who also voiced for the all-inclusive impact of India over South-East Asia, denied using the term 'colony' and provided an alternative definition- 'cultural influence without political influence' (Chatterjee, 1965: 15). Possibly he was preoccupied with the political connotation of the term related with forceful domination and was different from the idea of peaceful cultural penetration as claimed by the Greater India study.

The above context may be useful to understand Ramesh Chandra Majumdar's involvement with this scholarly discourse. His writings were vocal for the 'Indianization', the fundamental concept of Greater India School. Majumdar's works in this area include not less than nine books which are well read and discussed. What remains unobserved is his seven articles published in the Journal of the Greater India Society. Among them, five essays are political in nature- 'The Date of Accession of Jayavarman II, 'King Suryavarman I of Kambuja', 'The Rise of Sukhodaya', 'Decline and Fall of the Sailendra Empire' and 'The Struggle Between Sailendras and Cholas'. In these writings, he addressed varied subjects of political significance of Cambodia and Malaysia. Majumdar's skillful and critical use of diverse sources is beyond

doubt. Nevertheless, he was more interested to prove the ‘Indianized’ character of the South-East Asian polity and culture which reflects his faith in a certain perspective shared by a particular genre of scholars in twentieth century. Fortunately, the brilliant analytical approach, historical intelligence and maneuvering skill for which Majumdar is well known, are present in these writings. As a curious historian Majumdar often challenged old historical theories and offered new interpretations.

A visionary analyst- Reconstructing history through new reading of sources

Published in 1943, ‘The Rise of Sukhodaya’ traced the Thai kingdom’s origin. Majumdar questions existing propositions about when and how Sukhodaya emerged. After corroborating inscriptional and literary sources he offered new explanation and analysis of the relevant events. Majumdar’s analytical approach towards sources led him to deny earlier views expressed by P. Petithuguenin and Coedes. Following the Nagara Jum inscription, Petithuguenin emphasized that Sukhodaya began its journey in 1218 C.E. (Majumdar 1943: 47). But Ramesh Chandra found this conclusion to be based on a ‘very weak basis and cannot be taken seriously’. (Majumdar 1943: 47). He thinks that 1256 C.E should be the year when Sukhodaya’s journey started (Majumdar 1943: 47). His opinion was based on the inscription of Rama Khamheng, the third king of the dynasty. Also, Majumdar did a comparative analysis with the Pali chronicle Jinakalamalini and Chinese text by Chau Ta-Kaun. However, he also warned that we should not regard this as an ‘established fact’ (Majumdar 1943: 47). This shows the historian’s proficiency in handling different types of sources and balanced approach especially when the sources are meagre.

Ramesh Chandra opposed Coedes’ opinion about North Siam’s liberation from Kambuja’s control resulting in the rise of Sukho-daya. Coedes’s ‘generally accepted conclusion’ was derived from an inscription of Sukhodaya and he was praised by Majumdar for showing its historical importance’ (Majumdar 1943: 44). But Majumdar’s further analysis offered a new perspective. He tried to explain the emergence of Sukhodaya ‘as an independent kingdom’ resulting out of ‘the civil war’ fought between the son and son-in law of Jayavarman VIII and Srindravarman (Majumdar 1943: 50). According to him, this fight might have taken place either in 1275 C.E. or later as Srindravarman was not very old during his accession in 1295-96 C.E (Majumdar 1943: 50). In support of his assumption, Majumdar referred to the famous Bantei Srei inscription where the young Srindravarman was revered for his endeavor for making the earth free ‘from the thorns and brambles grown up during the reign of an old king’ (king Jayavarman VIII) (Majumdar 1943: 50). He also observed that the Siamese kings’ continuous use of the old Kambujan titles possibly indicated their persistent relation in later time. (Majumdar 1943: 46). Ramesh Chandra was certain that a terrible fight broke out between

Siam and Kambuja and the latter suffered. He corroborated Rama Khamheng's inscription with the writing of the Chinese traveller Cheu Ta Kuan who, along with the Chinese embassy, came to the court of king Srindavarman of Sukhodaya in 1296 C.E. (Majumdar 1943: 45). After analyzing different theories and sources, he proposed to connect this battle with the civil war of Kambuja. The discussion shows Ramesh Chandra's ability in accumulating information, analyzing it in a critical way and applying strong sense of logical reasoning. Sometimes his conclusions were nothing but mere hypothesis and he himself was aware of this. But perhaps such issues are normal when sources are meagre.

Ramesh Chandra's praiseworthy analytical approach continued in other articles. After thoroughly studying various sources, he posed new questions and tried to answer those considering recent discoveries. In 'The date of accession of Jayavarman II', he opposed Coedes' challenge to the generally accepted view that Jayavarman II commenced his reign in 724 saka or 802 C.E. (Majumdar 1943: 52). Instead, he emphasized, this should be regarded as the foundation year of Jayavarman II's capital on Mount *Mahendra* (Majumdar 1943: 52). Ramesh Chandra not only opposed this but also criticized those scholars who accepted Coedes's proposition without further argument and re-evaluation of sources (Majumdar 1943: 53). After analyzing all other evidence, he found it to be irrational and failed to find any definite source to connect the year with establishment of the capital on Mount Mahendra (Majumdar 1943: 53-54). Despite admiring Coedes, Ramesh Chandra did not follow him blindly, shows historical impartiality. Coedes later accepted that the king reigned from 802 C.E. to 854 C.E., which proved Majumdar's authenticity in this regard (Majumdar 1943: 54).

Ramesh Chandra's essay unveiled a significant limitation of Indian researchers- over dependence on French or Dutch research work. They of course consulted primary sources, but footnotes and bibliographies mostly refer to articles and books written by established European scholars. Majumdar understood that dearth of source might be a possible reason. But sometimes a proper analytical approach might be missing in such situation. A fine example of this was his criticism of Bijan Raj Chatterjee who voiced for Coedes' hypothesis even long after Coedes changed his view (Majumdar 1943: 55).

Ramesh Chandra's next article from the Journal demonstrates his expertise in historical observation and criticism. In 'King Suryavarman I of Kambuja', he tried to answer questions about Suryavarman's accession and whether Suryavarman and Jayaviravarman were identical persons as claimed by Aymonier and Finot. This confusion arose after inscriptions of three different kings, namely, Suryavarman, Udayadityavarman and Jayaviravarman were discovered. The inscriptions belonged to the year 923 Saka, when king Jayavarman V died and of a later period. Ramesh Chandra showed that those inscriptions with kings' names

on them belonged to different years and different parts of Cambodia. Following Coedes's view Majumdar suggested that Suryavarman and Jayaviravarman were two different persons. He tried to reconstruct a possible narrative of the incidents that took place after the death of Jayavarman V through analyzing sources like Prah Khan Inscription, *Tuol Don Srei* inscription and ten inscriptions found over the Gopuram of Angkor Thom. He concluded that Udayadityavarman sat on the throne after king Jayavarman V's demise in 923 *saka* and it was contested by Suryavarman and Jayaviravarman. After Udayadityavarman died, the struggle continued between the two others. Later records of Suryavarman like *Tuol Don Srei* inscription and others showed his struggle and success against Jayaviravarman. Ramesh Chandra was skeptical about the historical authenticity of Camadevivamsa, the book consulted by Coedes. This strongly establishes Majumdar's knowledge of conscious historical enquiry.

If studied carefully, we can see that this essay follows an important aspect of the 'Greater India' genre of study- extensive spread of Indian socio-cultural and religious influences. The king was claimed to be proficient in Indian philosophy, literature and socio-religious norms. Inscriptional evidence was referred to show his competency in *bhasya*, *kavya*, *dharmasastras*, *atharva veda*, *yoga*, *panini's* grammar etc. Majumdar even believed that the king wanted to impose Indian social features and using the *Prea Kev* inscription he discussed how Suryavarman I proposed regulations for the caste system. Ramesh Chandra assumed, being versed in the Hindu sastras Suryavarman I might have introduced orthodox social rules. However, he never tried to know whether such reforms retained indigenous character. It was not surprising as his main intention was to show how Suryavarman I performed king's *dharma* as prescribed in the Indian scriptures, different from ruler's *varna-dharma* of the *kshatriya* order as warrior and protector of people. Such approach revealed a narrow perspective unexpected from a historian of his stature.

Discourse on the Sailendras; fresh sources and perspectives-

Good historical narratives never fail to impress with their critical approach and ability to provide new information. Ramesh Chandra's essays about the Sailendra empire invariably fulfilled this primary objective. He contributed three essays on the Sailendras in the first and second volumes of the Journal. Beside posing new enquiries, these historically significant writings throw light on the origin and power of the Sailendra empire. The essays also discuss Shailendras' relation with the China and Chola Empire. They present the author's method of cross-examining sources thus highlighting the importance of early Chinese and Arabic records.

In the first volume of the Journal of the Greater India Society, Majumdar's lengthy essay discussed about the Sailendras up to the 10th century. His writing ranged from the theories regarding the original seat of the Sailendras (Majumdar 1934:15-17) to their rise as Malaya's

dominant power (Majumdar 1934: 17). Here also, Majumdar profusely used Arabic records by Ibn Khordadbeh, Abu- Zayd Hassan or Alberuni. They praised the wealth and power of the kingdom of *Zabaj* or *Zabag* which was none other than the mighty Sailendra empire. (Majumdar 1934: 17-25). The texts led Majumdar to conclude that the Sailendra empire flourished from the middle of 9th to at least 10th centuries. She retained the position of a political and economic power in the Pacific region throughout the tenth century despite the struggle and losing Cambodia and Java. (Majumdar 1934: 25). That the Sailendras or San-fo-tsi emerged as significant political and commercial power during 10th and 11th centuries and developed commercial interaction with China was attested by the Chinese ambassadors also. Recently, this aspect has been explored by Pierre- Yves Manguin through his excavation of Palembang, the important trade centre of Srivijaya from where the 9th century Guang-Dong ceramic has been unearthed. (Manguin 2012: 306).

Ramesh Chandra's second article in the series 'The struggle between Sailendras and Cholas' was published in the second issue of the journal in 1934. Like the previous article, here he made effective use of inscriptional records, Tamil literary works, Arabic and Chinese travelogues and memoirs. For example, he mentioned the Leiden Grants, written in both Tamil and Sanskrit, from Rajendra Cola's period to discuss the cordial relation between the Sailendra and Chola rulers (Majumdar 1934: 71-72). These records mention the erection of Culamanivarman-vihara at Nagapattinam by Culamanivarman, the ruler of Kadaram or Kedah in Malay peninsula (Chakravarti 2001: 86, Majumdar 1934). They also show the grant of a village by Sri Maravijayattungavarman who was born in the Sailendra family, ruled at Sri Visaya and established his authority over Kataha (Kadaram) (Chakravarti, 2001: 86). Later historians rightly assumed that such cultural interaction was an outcome of the commercial relation enjoyed by the two powers. Historian Ranabir Chakravarti noted that Srivijaya's intermediary role in the maritime trade network between South India and China was the determinant factor behind her cultural patronage showered at Nagapattinam (Chakravarti 2001: 86). It should be remembered that Nagapattinam emerged as the premier international port during the Chola period, a point which had not found mention in Majumdar's writing. This absence is surprising, no doubt, but what is interesting that Ramesh Chandra was aware of the thriving trade relation between South India and Kadaram. The ace historian referred to an old Tamil poem depicting ships filled with commercial goods coming from Kalagam (Kadaram/kataha) to Kaveripattinam, the famous port situated at the mouth of river Kaveri (Majumdar 1934: 23). Most likely, he indicated to the famous Tamil epics Silappadikaram and Manimekalai. They skillfully projected flourishing state of Kaveripattinam during the Chola period. Interestingly, historians like B.C. Chhabra and Ranabir Chakravarti have also emphasized over the important role played by this Tamil coastal region in making contacts with South-East Asia and Sri Lanka (Chhabra 1965; Chakravarti

2001). Both Majumdar and Chakraborti referred to Rajendra Chola's records for significant evidence of this close alliance. These inscriptions mentioned gifting two Chinese golds by the Kadaram king's agent to a Nagapattinam temple (Chakravarti 2001: 86). Donation of jewel to Karonasvami temple of Nagapattinam by the Srivijaya ruler had also been discussed in these epigraphical records (Chakravarti 2001: 86). The idea was inherent in Majumdar's writing also who explained how such interest was related with the Chola's notion to obtain 'the mastery of the seas' and to pursue that, they followed 'an aggressive imperialistic policy' reflected in the maritime expeditions across the Bay of Bengal in the 11th century. (Majumdar 1934: 82) He pointed out that the geographical position enabled the Sailendra empire to control 'almost the whole volume of maritime trade between western and central Asia' and prospect of the 'future commercial supremacy' inspired Rajendra Chola to undertake the oversea expedition (Majumdar 1934: 82-83). Rajendra Chola's ventures, Majumdar added, procured significant resources from the conquest of Kalinga. The Eastern coast provided him with necessary access to the Kalinga and Bengal ports as well as the ships and sailors familiar with the maritime voyage (Majumdar 1934: 82).

Ramesh Chandra consulted Rajaraja and Kulottunga's inscriptions to reconstruct the history of a long struggle between the two powers. These sources mentioned the names of those places which were won or lost by the Cholas. A careful reading of Majumdar's narration shows his preference to create a glorious image of the Chola power against the Sailendras. He briefly discussed the places which the Chola rulers' especially Rajendra Chola's inscriptions claimed to have won. Interestingly, Majumdar tried to identify modern locations of those places. His detailed listing of the Chola inscriptions is commendable, but such over dependency on the Chola records is perhaps an important limitation of the discussion. Very few Sailendra inscriptions were addressed and that too which attested to the 'political supremacy of the Cholas.' (Majumdar 1934: 90) Nevertheless, Ramesh Chandra's work throws light on another significant aspect. He referred to an inscription found from Lobu Tua near Baros in Sumatra. Dated in 1088 C.E., it mentioned about an organization of fifteen hundred which, he believed, might function like other South Indian trade bodies e.g *Nanadesi*, *Valangai* etc. (Majumdar 1934: 90). Ramesh Chandra's research thus may remind us of the important work by R. Champakalakshmi on the activities of the merchant bodies like *nanadesis*, *manigramam* and 500 *svamis* of *Ayyavole* in Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Sumatra.

While studying 11th and 12th centuries' Chinese records including Chola and Sri Vijayan embassies to China, Ramesh Chandra made significant alternative observations. For example, he mentioned the account of Ma Twan Lin recording an embassy from Pagan in 1106 C.E describing the Chola ruler as a vassal of San-fo-t'si (Majumdar 1934: 84) Other narrations

were not so direct, but their descriptions of tributes, presents and representatives arriving from different regions once owned by Sri-Vijaya, clearly showed the rulers' autonomous status (Majumdar 1934: 85-86). He was rational to think that the Chola inscriptions' claim to the conquest of Kedaram by the successors of Rajendra Chola i.e Rajadhiraja, Vira Rajendra and Kulottunga, possibly indicated to the country's success in regaining independence (Majumdar 1934: 86). Such contradictory information present in the Chola and Chinese records forced Majumdar to assume that the Chola rulers 'tried to maintain their hold on the distant over-sea empire' despite continuous struggle with the Sailendra rulers of Srivijaya. (Majumdar 1934: 87) After the Cholas abandoned their effort of controlling Sumatra and Malay Peninsula, the Sailendras slowly recovered former position. (Majumdar 1934: 87)

Ramesh Chandra's next article 'Decline and Fall of the Sailendra Empire' talks about his curious search for the continuation of the Sailendra rulers till the 14th century. It was published in 1935 in the journal's second volume. Here Majumdar analyzed unexplored Chinese annals and chronicles like Chu-fan-chi by Chau-Ju-Kua and Arab records by Edrisi, Kazwini, Ibn Said etc. While previous scholars could not trace the empire's existence after 12th century due lack of information, Ramesh Chandra's account elucidates the importance of new sources and broadens the scope of research. Among such sources, Chu- fan- chi (Records of foreign nations) or the *Zhufanzhi* is a significant one as the writer Chau Ju- Kua or Zhao Rugua served as the inspector of foreign trade in Fukien. Composed in 1225/26 C.E., this account is an immensely significant record in the study of Chinese commercial activities in South and South-East Asia leading to the growth of a maritime trade network in the Eastern part of the Indian Ocean. Apart from the Sino-Indian commercial relation flourished between the mid-10th to the 15th centuries, the Srivijaya kingdom became an active part of this commercial network with its expansion to South-East Asia (Ghosh 2014: 41). Thus, Zhao Rugua's text *Zhufanzhi* can help us to know the trade connection between India, China and South-East Asia (Ghosh 2014). This vividly described the foreign countries and trade commodities involved in this commercial interaction. Suchandra Ghosh's valuable work on Chu- fan- chi or the *Zhufanzhi* shows Zhao Rugua's meticulous documentation of significant commercial centres, merchandise etc. Ghosh observed that 'the courtly culture and the manners, dress, etc., of the various countries did not escape his attention' (Ghosh 2014: 43). Inclusion of such a valuable text in reconstructing the history of Srivijaya is unquestionably a great contribution of Ramesh Chandra. *Zhufanzhi*, however, was not completely unknown to the historians. Scholars like Frederic Hirth and W.W. Rockhill had already published the book's edited and translated version in 1912 (Ghosh 2014: 42). Majumdar's discussion is itself based on this translated work, as his references show. Another prominent historian of the Greater India Society, Nilakanta Sastri also discussed some parts of Zhao Rugua's works focusing on Sri-tan or Ceylon and India. Nevertheless, Sastri's

discussion was not connected with the aspect of Greater India or Sino-India-Sri-Vijaya trade network which Majumdar did efficiently.

Ramesh Chandra discussed how the text portrayed San- fo- tsi as ‘the master of the Straits of Malacca’ and controller of ‘the maritime trade between China and Western countries’. (Majumdar 1935: 14) Thus, in the words of Chau- Ju- Kua or Zhao Rugua, the Sailendra empire was a ‘great centre of trade’. (Majumdar 1935: 14) Ramesh Chandra referred to a list provided by Zhao Rugua mentioning the fifteen states dependent on the Sri- Vijaya Empire (Majumdar 1935: 14-15). Among them, Sumatra, Java and Malay Peninsula were claimed as the parts of the Sailendra or San- fo- tsi empire in the 12th century C.E. (Majumdar 1935: 16). Surprisingly, Ramesh Chandra knew that one cannot identify such states with certainty, yet he did not hesitate to accept the information mentioned in the text without any comparative analysis of the source (Majumdar 1935: 16). However, Zhao Rugua’s statement about the Sailendra’s continuous existence was supported by other Chinese and Arab texts as well depicting the glory and power of Zabag or San- fo- tsi in the 13th and 14th centuries. Majumdar corroborated this literary data with the inscription of Caiya of 1230 C.E. It described Javaka king Candrabhanu’s achievements and mentioned his two expeditions against Ceylon in the 13th century (Majumdar 1935: 18). Validation of this information had been traced in the Ceylonese chronicle Culavamsa which recorded the invasion and destruction of Ceylon by Candravanu during the reign of Parakramabahu II (Majumdar 1935: 18). In this way, Majumdar’s suggestions helped to fill in a lacuna in the history of the Sailendra empire. It offered a new avenue in the discussion regarding her continuous existence and relation with other powers like Ceylon.

Majumdar on lingual and racial uniformity between India and South-East Asia-

As a versatile academician, Ramesh Chandra looked beyond political subject. A noteworthy example is his article ‘The Malay’ which highlighted the antiquity of India and South-East Asia relationship. Majumdar believed that this antiquity could be established by the migration of Indians from an ancient period. This paved the way to later spread of Indians and the consequent ‘cultural colonization’ (Majumdar 1936: 86). The original theory sought for the linguistic and ethnic unity between primitive Indian tribes like Munda, Khasi etc. and South-East Asian tribes like Mon-Khmer. Based on this, Schmidt, Levi; Pryzuluski and J. Bloch upheld the theory of a larger unity between the Austro-Asiatic and Austronesian groups and defined the family as Austric. According to them, India was the original home of these pre-historic people who gradually spread to East and South-East Asia (Majumdar 1936: 87). Pryzuluski tried to prove Austro-Asiatic influence over certain Indian myths. Levi pointed to maritime India’s tradition of people’s movement and interaction (Majumdar 1936: 88-89). He

believed that adventurers, traffickers and missionaries of the Christian era were benefited from the technological growth in navigation. They followed the 'way traced from times immemorial by the mariners of another race whom the Aryans or Aryanised India despised as savages' (Majumdar 1936: 89). To Ramesh Majumdar, this process was 'the first phase of Indian colonisation in the Far East' took place before 'the Aryan or Dravidian conquest of India' (Majumdar 1936: 89). To establish the prehistoric connection between Malaya and India, he referred to the vivid use of the name Malaya in Malaysia which was also a dominant race and language there. According to him, archaeological and literary evidence showed the presence of Malava-Malaya tribe in ancient India. The similarity of this name, according to the writer, indicated the long connection between these two regions. Not only that, different South-East Asian place names like Malay, Malacca, Malayu etc. which showed the popular use of Malaya as a geographical identity 'across the sea', was also a significant example of such relation (Majumdar 1936: 93).

Through his theory, Majumdar thus refuted the claim of Hutton and Hornell that India had been 'colonised' by Indonesians in primitive times and 'the later Aryan colonisation of the Far East was merely the reverse of that process' (Majumdar 1936: 89). Instead, Ramesh Chandra argued that Indian history was a witness of migration of people and ideas to the East and South-East Asia from an ancient time (Majumdar 1936: 90). This is a common concept which the 'Greater India' scholars generally emphasized over.

The issue of Austronesian dispersal remains an important subject of debate even today. Ramesh Chandra, for that matter, can be credited for bringing up this topic. It was astonishing that no other Greater India scholar paid attention to this. Yet, they all shared similar thoughts about the antiquity of India and South-East Asia connection. However, Majumdar himself did not show any interest to proceed with this subject later in 1940s, 50s or 60 s when the issue of Austronesian dispersal invited scholars' attention and various interpretations were offered. Moreover, Majumdar based his analysis over only one opinion through which he could establish India as the origin of the pre-historic people who migrated to South-East Asia. Other possibilities about the Austronesian homeland were not considered. For example, Majumdar did not mention about the research of the famous archaeologist Robert Heine-Geldern, which was published in 1932. Geldern proposed the movements of Austronesian speakers from South China. In 1960s and 70s, more linguistic and archaeological research came up emphasizing over South-China origin of the Austronesians. Apart from China, Melanesia also was considered as a possible place by the American linguist Isidore Dyen in 1960s and British diplomat A. Coates in 1974.. Perhaps such alternate propositions focusing on the Austronesian origin other than India failed to impress him. Or maybe, we can interpret this as the absence

of an unbiased approach. This can also explain why despite being an observant historian, Ramesh Chandra did not consider the indigenous South-East Asian origin of the Austronesians and saw their evolution as internal developments. His intention to show India as the source of civilization in South-East Asia, even in the pre-historic days, led him to deny the theory of Hutton and Hornell focusing the reverse movement of the prehistoric people from South-East Asia to India.

Conclusion

Detailed discussion about Ramesh Majumdar's articles published in the Journal of the Greater India Society show that they are not free from limitations and contradictory approach. There is an inherent biasness in his works which cannot be ignored. He was majorly preoccupied with the impact of the 'superior' Indian culture over the 'inferior' indigenous cultures of South-East Asia. But this was a 'dominant conception' prevalent among Indian historians even in post-independence days. Majumdar's works including lectures and essays on this subject, unhesitatingly projected this 'cultural conquest' of Indians over the 'barbarian' locals of South-East Asia and India's contribution in transforming them as civilized. Moreover, a structural biasness of the nationalist historiography to equate Indian culture with that of the 'Hindu' was very much present. His essays were not very vocal about indigenous social features and tried to figure out the Indian influence. He did not delve into economic activities of the concerned kingdoms either. For example, in the article 'King Suryavarman I of Kambuja' Majumdar primarily concentrated on the political issue. Socio-religious aspects of the kingdom were also not neglected, but the familiar approach of measuring the degree of Indian influence remained the same. Despite a detailed discussion about the reign and contribution of Suryavarman I of Kambuja, his connection with the Chola ruler Rajendrachola I has not been touched upon. Possibility of a commercial connection and related cultural relation between the Chola and Kambuja kingdoms was indicated by Geoff Wade (Wade, 2009: 244). He rightly turned our attention to the gifting of a chariot by Suryavarman I to Rajendrachola I and assumed that this 'relationship likely have had a trade dimension' (Wade, 2009: 244). This crucial inference had been borrowed from Coedes's famous book 'The Indianized States of South-East Asia' where he argued that Suryavarman I's objective behind sending this gift was to gain help from Rajendrachola (Coedes, 1968). To identify the power which threatened the Kambujan ruler, Coedes took help from R.C. Majumdar's writing named 'The Overseas Expedition of King Rajendrachola' published in 1961, much later than his article on Suryavarman I. Following Majumdar, Coedes argued that this threat 'undoubtedly came from the king of Srivijaya, Maravijayottunggavarman...' (Coedes, 1968). Perhaps paucity of sources could be a reason for which Majumdar was unable to incorporate this aspect in his article published in 1943. Even in the second article mentioned above, he drew our attention to this meagerness of sources.

Despite such drawbacks, competent and comprehensive analysis offered by Ramesh Majumdar in the essays under review, should be acknowledged. They represent the author's sense of historicity, method of critical analysis and prolific intellectual attitude to reconstruct historical narratives. Majumdar's Inquisitive nature inspired him to examine available sources, deconstruct established propositions and put forward new queries. His writings tried to solve few confusions posed by contemporary historians. This help readers to be aware of new approaches and information enabling them to develop own ideas. True that he could not always adopt unbiased approach towards the sources and emphasized over a structural reconstruction of India's past. But he was not alone in this endeavor. This was an inseparable part of the cultural nationalism in India, a tendency that grew with the nationalist upsurge. It undertook the task of creating an alternative cultural history of India's past. Thus, his essays along with other writings must be judged as products of time. Because a historian's work always reflects his time and environment. It is debatable whether true representation of past events is possible that Ranke hoped for, as changing environment and historians' own perspectives leave a deep impression over history writing. But a historian should never stop his search for truth. His aim should be collection of sources and after their scientific analysis, try to describe past events. Majumdar tried to deliver this scholarly duty very skillfully. His preference towards using authentic sources even led him to travel to the South-East Asian countries (Majumdar, 2018). Ramesh Chandra's inquisitive nature is evident from his effort to trace logical sequence of historical events. Through observation and critical analysis of facts, he put forward three major queries in his narrations- why, when and how. Undeniably, this aspect can help readers to have a thorough idea about the subject under discussion. Majumdar himself expressed his concern about the duty of historian to bring out truth from the darkness of past (Majumdar, 1968). In his Bengali work named 'Bharate Itihas Rachana Pranali', Ramesh Chandra discussed the process of unbiased historical analysis (Majumdar, 1979). Thus, while studying about early India's relation with South-East Asia, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar might not act as an impartial judge, but his prejudices reflected contradictions of the contemporary milieu where scholars were caught between their nationalist soul and mind of historian. Nevertheless, his writings published in the Journal of the Greater India Society and other works inspired fellow academicians and future scholars to study more into this subject. He not only fulfilled demands of the time by highlighting an important chapter of ancient India but also delivered the task of a historian by showing the path of critical research and creating new possibilities.

Endnotes

- i. This image of 'cultural colony' was the central part of the 'Greater India' idea and has been upheld by all the concerned writers.
- ii. This idea was present not only in the writings of the Greater India scholars but was also buttressed by some prominent twentieth century Indian intellectuals like Keshab Chandra Sen and Aurobindo Ghosh. See, Hay 1970. For a more particular observation, see, Sen 1954, Ghosh 1965.
- iii. *The Inaugural Report of the Greater India Society*, p. 3.
- iv. That Calcutta in the 19th and 20th centuries became the hub of intellectual activities and thinking, has been marvellously explained by Frost, 2011, pp. 1-41. Tapati Guha-Thakurta has also discussed the artistic and intellectual nonseverance in Calcutta and referred to the works of the Greater India Society. See, Guha-Thakurta, 1992.
- v. Foreword written by Tagore to the inaugural issue of *The Journal of the Greater India Society*, p. 1.
- vi. Tarling, 1999
- vii. Tarling, 1999.
- viii. Upinder Singh has vividly discussed about the 'dharma' of kings and different social orders as described in Ramayana, Mahabharata, Arthasastra and Buddhist texts. See, Singh, 2021
- ix. Suchandra Ghosh makes an exceptional analysis of the text as a source of maritime trade. See, Ghosh, 2014.
- x. To analyse different theories regarding such migration, see Gaillard and Mallari, 2004. Also Yamagata and Matsumura, 2017
- xi. Gaillard and Mallari, 2004. Yamagata and Matsumura, 2017
- xii. Gaillard and Mallari, 2004. Yamagata and Matsumura, 2017
- xiii. This approach is evident in almost all the works done by Ramesh Chandra like *Greater India, Hindu Colonies in the Far East* etc.

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