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## **Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury and his Contributions in Bengali Children Literature**

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### **Abstract:**

Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury (1863-1915) was a renowned painter, pioneer of Bengali printing industry and above all, he was a prominent personality in Bengali children literature. Though Ray was very good at studies since an early age, he developed an interest in playing songs and violins. His father Kalinath Ray was a good looking man having sound knowledge in Arabic Sanskrit and Persian languages. His nickname was Shyamsundar Munsî who had eight children out of them Upendrakishore was the third. From childhood Upendrakishore had a sound attachment to Bengali literature and later on, he joined to a number of children magazines such as Baalok, Shathi, Sakha and Mukul. His first article was published in Sakha magazine in 1883 while he was just leading a student life. He had practiced ceaseless endeavors on Bengali children literature throughout his life and became quite successful in flourishing children literature through his several innovating writings. He played a principal role by writing on all branches of literature, for example, poetry, songs, stories, plays, science articles and parable. Moreover, he penned all branches of children literature. One of his characteristics is he himself drew several engrossing pictures on his writings. The famous monthly children magazine 'Sandesh' was first published in 1913 by him that is still a popular children magazine published from Kolkata. He must had been successful by writing humorous stories, fictions and science related events, in addition to that, he was quite able to have established the 'Sandesh' as a loveable one to the hearts of the young. Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury wrote many literature books for children learners. His creation characters like 'Gupi Gayen', 'Bagha Bayen', 'Boka Jola', and 'Ghyaghasur', etc. are invaluable findings in Bengali children literature. His books like 'Tuntunir Boi', 'Chheleder Ramayan', and 'Chheleder Mahabharat' are very familiar with our beloved children.

**Keywords: Children Literature, Kamadaranjan Ray, Painter, Tuntunir Boi, Sukumar Ray, Satyajit Ray.**

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### **Introduction:**

'Ki moja ki moja raja khai bayng bhaja'

(What a joke the king eats fry frog)  
'Nak kata raja re dekh to kemon saja re'  
(O cut nose king taste how the pang is being) Tuntunir Boi

The above lines have been taken from the book 'Tuntunir Boi', a book dwelling around the tales of a 'Tuntuni' or a tailor bird and other animals including human beings. Tuntunir Boi is one of the finest representatives of children's literature ever written in the Bengali language. It is true that if children do not get acquainted with the above rhymes they will definitely be deprived of nectar of life or we, who are not familiar with such rhymes, our childhood too must have been despoiled from a valuable taste. Many of us know that these rhymes have been taken from the famous book written by none but Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury, a widely renowned personality. Besides his own introduction, there are two more introductions related to him namely, he is the father of the famous children literature writer Sukumar Ray, and the other, is to be the grandfather of the world recognized film director Satyajit Ray. Nothing to say, Upendrakishore does not require any of the mentioned introductions for himself as he deserves a unique recognition and a rare Bengali talent for his own, for, he was a prolific children author, a great musician, superb singer and a violin or musical instruments player as well. He was an unbelievable expert in printing lines, proudly he is remembered as the pioneer of the Indian printing technology, at the other hand he was an excellent artist and a superb painter too.

His Primary life:

Upendrakishore was born on 12<sup>th</sup> may in 1863 at the village Moshua which was at that time in Mymensingh district, at present; it has been included into Bangladesh' Kishoreganj district in Dhaka Division. His father Kalinath Ray was a scholar who knew Sanskrit Arabic and Persian and was good enough at these three languages. This versed gentleman would work as a land-deeds writer at the then British India. His common name in the society was Shaymsunder Munsu. However, he had eight children out of them the third one was Kamadaranjan Ray; some said he was the second. However, Kamadaranjan Ray is our Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury. There is a story behind his becoming Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury from Kamadaranjan Ray. The story is that there was a land lord named Harikishore Ray a family-relative of Shaymsunder Munsu, who was a Zamindar in Mymensingh district, when Kamadaranjan Ray was just 5 years old he was adopted by the land-lord Harikishore Ray Chowdhury. The name Kamadaranjan was not of his likeness so he changed the name and named him Upendrakishore, and the title Ray Chowdhury that was actually received from the British was added at the end of the name. Finally the new name had been Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury.

Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury passed the entrance examination in 1880 with a scholarship from Mymensingh district school. Later on, he came to Kolkata and studied for some days in Presidency College, he passed BA in 1884 from Metropolitan Institute, the present-day Vidyasagar College. He married Bidhumukhi Devi the daughter of the Brahma leader and social reformer Dwarkanath Gangopadhyaya in 1888. After his arrival in Kolkata his intimacy to Brahma Samaj increased to a great extent, communication was set in to the

Tagore family and therein he was much inspired by them in practicing songs and literature. The 'Balok' Published from Tagore House and the 'Mukul' edited by Shibnath Shastri etc. motivated him largely towards the creation of children literature. Thus, in literature was the appearance of the unparalleled Upendrakishore, the writer of children's minds and hearts. Upendrakishore had a close relation to Rabindranath Tagore and the relation was till his death. It is said that due to the profound relation Rabindranath often would come even bare footed to Sukiya Street where Upendrakishore lived. More often, there were enjoyed evening sessions of songs between them in full swing. Introduction of this friendship and endearment is witnessed from the forward of Upendrakishore's first book Chheleder Ramayan that is written by Upendrakishore himself. A great incident belonged to him that he embraced the liberal religious movement of Bahamo Samaj in 1883, for which he was being blamed by one and all of his society but being a determined personality he was satisfied quite enough with the decision and rather he became a vocal for the same among the masses.

**Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury as a Children Literature Writer:** In nineteen century there were two families as bright as stars in the domain of Bengali literature and culture, namely the 'Tagore' family and the 'Ray' family. In the discussion of Bengali children literature, indisputably we have to mention with due respect the name of Ray family. In fact, in the hands of the Ray family members the golden chapter of Bengali children literature was introduced. Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury was the person who invented the excellence background of children literature. When he was studying in a college, observed that the childhood and adolescence of children were passing by depending on some moral books taught in schools and or a few stories, tales, fictions, fairy tales and myths, told by their grandfather or grandmother. There was no opportunity to reveal the development of children imaginative power, nor was being written any good literature for children. He engaged himself on this fact and came to the conclusion that he first entered in the field of literature through a writing named 'Machhi' in the magazine Sakha in 1883. At that time many tiny magazines were published for the young such as Sakha, Baalok and Mukul etc. he would send writings to these magazines and the same were published. Thus a new dimension of children literature was unlocked; a new bright star appeared in the field of children literature. Let's have a look at the books written by Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury:

1. Sekaler Kotha – 1903 (science related)
2. Chheleder Ramayan -1907
3. Chheleder Mahabharat- 1909
4. Tuntunir Boi- 1910 (a collection of children's stories)
5. Sandesh ( a magazine)- 1913
6. Gupi Gayen Baga Bayen- 1915
7. Aakashar Kotha (science related book)

Apart from these, some more books go to his credit.

Among his literary collections the most mentionable book is Tuntunir Boi. It is believed by some that the book is considered to be his best children literary achievement in all writings throughout the ages. In this book there are twenty seven stories of varied color and taste. The main attraction of the stories is simplicity and easy languages. In this context a quotation of the writer's daughter Punyalata Chakraborty may be remembered. She said: 'Father would love children very much. He would laugh, played, danced and sang with them like children. He might understand the minds of children because of that his writings were so easy comprehensible and charming'. However, truly speaking, the book Tuntunir Boi is an extremely valuable resource of Bengali children literature. Apart from this, his other big contribution for the development of children literature is to introduce 'Sandesh' Magazine in April 1913, and it was published from his own printing organization. Many renowned writers, painters and rhetoricians of that time selflessly would send writings and photographs to the magazine for which they would not ask any remuneration from the magazine authority, further they would be pleased and proud of to have seen their works published on the magazine. The magazine was of a great acceptance and importance. The 'Sandesh' had been a mile stone for the development of Bengali children literature for that period.

While he was studying in university he concentrated on two other things besides literature these are paintings and songs. It is heard that he had learnt songs from many great musters, apart from this he could play violin very well. He would sing in different functions as well as play violins. Binod Bihary Mukhopadhyay wrote that he would see a gathering in front of the Ray family's house from time to time. People would gather to listen to the violin, played by Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury. It also has been revealed that while going to bed, Upendrakishore would play violin to the children including Sukumar Roy. He wrote many songs in particular Brahma Sangeets, he also wrote a few books on violin playing.

#### **Songs written by Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury:**

1. Ke Ghuchabe Hai Praner Kalimarashi
2. Joy Din Doyamoy Nikhil Bhuvanpati
3. Bolo Dekhi Bhai Emon Kore Vuban Ke Ba Gorchilo
4. Jabo Purobasi Bhagobot Prem Piyasi

He wrote many songs related articles in different magazines and translated a few Rabindra Sangeets also into English.

#### **His musical instrument related books are:**

1. Shikkhok Baytireke Harmonium Sikkha (1888)
2. Sohoj Behala Sikkha (1904)
3. Another extraordinary book named 'Bharotiyo Sangeet '

He was not only an outstanding writer or adept musician but also a notable painter of the renaissance period. He would draw exceptional good pictures and followed the Europeans in painting. He showed unusual rhetoric and tremendous pictures drawn by himself on his

books like Chheleder Ramayan, Chheleder Mahabharat and Tuntunir Boi etc. His drawn pictures on Rabindranath Tagore's book Sita Debi or adding rhetoric on Ramananda Chattopadhyay's books or pictures and rhetoric on Sandesh magazine are an eternal creation in the reign on Bengali culture. Upendrakishore as a Pioneer of Modern Indian Printing Technology

The above discussion on Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury will be completely incomplete if we do not cast light on him as a painter Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury, as it is said that he is the father of the Indian printing technology. The book Chheleder Ramayan was published from City Book Society in 1897. He was extremely sad when the book came to his hands for he found that printing was not good, pictures were invisible and rhetoric was not tangible. By watching such misery of the book he decided to print books by himself, along with his decision a turning point emerged to the Indian printing sphere. He started research works on photography and printing technology. While researches are on in different countries of Europe, the printing of photographs and books had already begun in half-tone method. He started studies and researches on half-tone method and a studio was set up in his house; his bathroom had been changed into a darkroom. He purchased foreign instruments from his own expenditure; by this instrument he started print works. He hired a rented house on the then 7 No. Shiv Narayan Das Lane in Kolkata, and opened a printing press namely 'U. Ray and Sons Company'. At that time no modern printing press was found throughout India and South Asia as well. For this reason he is called the 'father of Indian printing technology'.

**His worth mentioning articles, published in Penrose Annual (a famous journal) are as follows:**

1. Focusing the screen (1897)
2. The theory of half-tone Dot (1899)
3. Automatic adjustment of the half-tone screen(1901)
4. Diffraction of half-ton (1903)
5. The 60 degree cross-line screen (1905)
6. The half-tone theory graphically explained (1899)
7. More about half-tone theory (1903-04)
8. Multiple stops (1911-12)

After all, he had three sons and three daughters, the sons are Sukumar, Subinoy and Subimol and the daughters are Sukhalata , Punyalata and Shantilata. They all were well established by their own. The children literature writer Sukumar Roy needs no introduction as he is widely known in the field of literature by all and sundry. By writing nonsense rhymes he added a new chapter in Bengali literature. His grandson Satyajit Ray was a world famous film director, being widely known he also requires no further introduction. Unfortunately, Upendrakishore Ray was affected by diabetes from an early age and due to the First World War it was very difficult to bring medicine from abroad. Besides, at that time insulin was not invented. as a result, his vitality was decayed hurriedly due to

exceeding diligence, and his vigor had been detrimental. Consequently he passed away at the age of just 52 years on 20<sup>th</sup> December of 1915.

**Conclusion:** Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury was one of the winsome personalities of Bengal before the advent of twentieth century. His entire mature life and activities were centered in Kolkata but his birth ground was East Bengal in the district of the then Mymensingh. Having unique characteristics, it has not been possible for anyone to surpass Upendrakishore Chowdhury as a skilled writer artist editor and publisher. It is true, that Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Gaganendranath Tagore, and Abanindranath Tagore etc. his contemporary seniors and juniors reached the very position of literature and art where he could not, but his had no less achievement in cultural life of the country in all respects. It is quite unforgettable his fascinating words in the stories of Tuntunir Boi, and the mind attracting narrations of Chhatto Ramayan. The simple humorous prose style in Chheleder Ramayan and Mahabharat is an amazing creation in the world of children literature. He did not write so many rhymes and poetry, actually, his main motive was rather to compose prose literature and how much his prose was witty and influencing for children we can easily understand by the very personality of Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury. And history, science zoology etc. the educational complicated subjects to the children were made very easy and of much fondness and desired ones by his simple and unsophisticated expressions of him. His scientific bent of mind is reflected in the numerous science articles written for children. He was the first person who introduced the color printing in Bengal. He was abundantly influenced by the printing related foreign technologies and it was an eye opener for him towards a newer world of printing. The foundation of 'U and Sons Company' was a tremendous initiative ever taken by an Indian. In a nutshell, Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury was a man of multi- talents, touched many dimensions of arts in a just 52 years of life. Definitely, he will remain a most revered one in the hearts of all literature loving people throughout the ages.

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