

## **Dr. S. K. Bhuyan and Historical Research in Assam**

**Dr.R.D.Choudhury**

Late Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan has become a legendary figure in the studies of history of Assam. Without his reference we cannot talk of the research of the history of Assam, nay, North –East India. He will remain as an example to the future historians. **The Professors Suryya Kumar Bhuyan Commemoration Volume** has included as many as sixteen substantial articles on Dr. Bhuyan<sup>1</sup>. All these articles were written by eminent persons. Off all these articles the first articles i. e, “Professor Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan: A Life-sketch” by Dr. Neog, should be considered as most informative. The second article by Dr. Neog on the bibliography of the writings by Dr, Bhuyan has also become very useful. It was originally prepared by Dr. Bhuyan himself.

Late Nanda Talukdar’s book on “Dr. Bhuyan in Assamese has become very exhaustive<sup>2</sup>. While writing this book which is full of information on Dr. Bhuyan, Talukdar had to take lot of pains. There are also some sources which furnish good deal of information on this scholar<sup>3</sup>.

When I was a student of 1<sup>st</sup> year I.A. (Intermediate in Arts) Class in Bajali College, Pathsala in 1959-60, a front page news item published in “Dainik Asom” (an Assamese daily from Guwahati), attracted my attention. The News carried the information that Dr. S.K. Bhuyan was not elected as the Vice-Chancellor of the Guwahati University for the second term in his place late Dr. Hiranya Kumar Bhuyan, who was a student of Dr. Bhuyan in The past, was elected Vice –Chancellor. In the I.A. class I offered Assamese as second language. For this paper we had to read Buranjir Bani by Dr.S.K.Bhuyan. Through this book for the first time I could know about the Rajatarangini the famous work of Kolhon and Ammit Prabha, a daughter of a Kamarupa King who was given in marriage to a prince of Kashmir. It was very interesting for me.

Many articles on Dr. S.K. Bhuyan and his work have already been published. Many more scholars will write articles on him on the occasion of birth centenary of this great scholar. Therefore, I do not want to repeat the same thing here. Here I would like to briefly discuss about the activities of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti and the Directorate of historical & Antiquarian Studies, Assam. In the field of study and research in history and culture of Assam and the role played by Dr. Bhuyan in it.

It is needless to tell that the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, Guwahati was the first and foremost voluntary institute set up for carrying on research in history and culture in North-East India. In a meeting of Banga Sahitya Sabha held at Kamakhya under the presidentship of Babu Sasadhar Roy on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 1912<sup>4</sup> a decision was taken to form a Society to carry on research in history and culture of Assam or North-East India under the name of Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti and it came into existence on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 1912 in Guwahati. Here Kamarupa does not mean the present Kamrup district. It means the Kamarupa Kingdom that existed long before.

The object of the Kamrupa Anusandhan Samiti is laid down in the rules of the Samiti is as follows<sup>5</sup> :

“The main object of the Samiti is tom carry on researches in the matter relating to history, Archaeology Ethnography etc. i.e., all that usually come under the preview of a research Society and

to collect books manuscripts, coins copperplates, statues, carved stones, anthropological Articles etc. i.e., the things that should find place in a library and a museum of such a society. The article suitable for the museum should be made over to the Government to be placed in the proposed Government Museum at Guwahati.”

Regarding the jurisdiction of the study of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti the Rule says:

“The Samiti will have its jurisdiction for research works over the area formerly included in the sacred and ancient province of Kamarupa now comprised within Assam, Western and northern Bengal and Cooch-Bihar. Research work will also be extended to any other part of India if anything relating to ancient Kamarupa happens to be extended therein.”<sup>6</sup>

Subsequently, on 25<sup>th</sup> June, 1928 the department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam was established. It formally began to function regularly from 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1929. The Assam Gazette of 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1928 notified the appointment of A.H. Bentinck, Commissioner of the Assam valley Divisions as the Honorary Provincial Director, while J.P. Mills, the then Deputy Commissioner of Catcher, for Surama Valley Division and Dr. S.K. Bhuyan, Professor of Cotton Collage. Guwahati the Brahmaputra Valley Division, were respectively appointed honorary Deputy Directors of this newly created Department. On the retirement of Bentinck, on 6<sup>th</sup> December, 1933 Dr. S.K. Bhuyan was appointed Hon. Provincial Director of the department and subsequently he become the full-fledged director. For some time Sri S.K. Dutta and Dr. B.K. Barua were appointed as Hon. Deputy Directors of the Department.

The aims of this Department was as follow<sup>8</sup>

1. Search for recovery and acquisition of Ancient historical classics.
2. Search for recovery and acquisition of modern historical works compiled by living or dead authors.
3. Compilation of historical works by private scholars under arrangement with the Department of historical & antiquarian Studies.
4. Compilation of historical works departmentally by the staff of the department.
5. Receiving information on historical subjects from officers and private gentlemen, and collection of such information received from one or more sources in a presentable form.
6. Editing and publishing of historical works mentioned above as far as funds permits.
7. Sales of the publication of the department.
8. Direction of research project undertaken by individual investigators, if the assistance of the department be desired.
9. Appointment of the corresponding members, interested in historical research.
10. Any other works which should legitimately form part of a historical and antiquarian organization in order to advance the cause of historical pursuits.”

Now it is clear to us about the objects of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti (K.A.S) established in 1912 and the D.H.A.S established in 1928. Both the organizations stood for the study, investigation and research about the history of the state.

It is to be noted that when Dr. S .K Bhuyan joined D.H.A.S. as the Hon. Deputy Director, he was the Secretary of the K.A.S. It is not understood as to why Dr. Bhuyan left K.A.S. giving the responsibility of the secretary, K.A.S. to late Dibakar Goswami. The object of both the organizations was the same to study and carry on research in history of Assam-undivided Assam. Nanda Talukder <sup>9</sup> thinks that though there is scope to think that there must have been some difference with the other members of the K.A.S., yet we must note that he remained as a member of the Executive Committee of the K.A.S. This shows that he maintained good relation with the K.A.S. But it is certain that he left the Honorary post of the secretary, K.A.S. for seeing better future and facilities in D.H.A.S. of course, Dr. Bhuyan utilised all the facilities available with him in D.H.A.S. for his studies and climbed to highest point of the ladder of life making himself an institute by himself for which we remember him today.

Dr. Bhuyan through the D.H.A.S. conducted both extensive and Intensive research and published them in the form of books. He made indepth study in the Ahom history. He also worked for the history of Jaintia, Kacharis, Tripuris and Moghals. Therefore, his studies confined to late medieval period. Dr. Bhuyan did not make any attempt to reconstruct the history of Ancient Assam or Kamrupa Pragjyotispur.<sup>10</sup>

It is not known to us as to why he did not pay any attention towards the glorious past of the Koch king, who ruled in lower Assam, and North Bengal and the great Koch general Chilarai subdued the Ahoms, occupied Gargaon defeated the kacharis Jaintias and Tripuris<sup>11</sup> during the rule of the king Naranarayana the elder brother of Chilarai. Their greatness and scholarship and benevolence of king Naranarayana had no parallel. As a patron of art, literature, religious discourse, poetry, music etc. Naranarayana earned high reputation. The Koch kings, who were highly educated through Sanskrit language and literature, had their rich library at Koch Behar, which was full of manuscripts, rare books and mine of information. This rich library after the fall and decay of the Koch dynasty became guardian less and ownerless. Due to lake of care or maintenance, the valuable manuscripts books, records and documents were lost. The descendants of the royal families and also the Government were largely responsible for this.

Moreover, during the Koch rule particularly during the regime of Naranarayana, Sankardeva, the great Vaisnava sage of Assam, alongwith his disciple Madhavdeva took shelter in Koch kingdom after being chased by the Ahom king and composed many books i.e., manuscripts. The Kirtanghosa of Sankardeva and Namghosa of Madhavdeva, which formed the backbone of the Assamese literature and Assamese Society were composed at the patronage of the Koch King.<sup>12</sup> Why Dr. Bhuyan did not take interest in the history of such great Koch Kings who had immense contribution towards Assamese culture is not clear to us. Under the able guidance of Dr. Bhuyan, the D.H.A.S. collected many valuable manuscripts and records from this library and from the libraries of the Zamindars of Gauripur, Mechpara, and Sidli etc. could have been saved from destruction. The people of Koch Behar and Old Goalpara district of Assam would have been happy and come closer to the Assamese society. It is, thus clear that the history of western Assam and the religion beyond was not under the preview of his studies or the D.H.A.S, though some attempts had made in this regard.

However, the K.A.S. kept link with the western Assam or Cooch Behar. Maharaja Jitendra Narayan Bhupa Bahadur of Cooch Behar, and Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua of Gauripur were two important patrons of the K.A.S. Khan Choudhury Amanatulla Ahmed of Cooch Behar who was the Person to move the proposal to establish research society in Assam in the meeting at Kamakhya on 7<sup>th</sup>

April, 1912, had close connection with the activity of the K.A.S. and wrote A History of Cooch Behar.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, at the patronage of Raja Bahadur of Gauripur Nagendranath Basu wrote A Social History of Kamarupa in three volumes. The K.A.S. unlike D.H.A.S. maintained close link with Cooch Behar and Gauripur royal families. Western Assam had, in fact, no less contribution to the greater Assamese Society.

Though the Britishers are blamed for ruling India, yet we should also be grateful to them for uniting the vast country like India through introduction of English language British administrative system and opening our eyes for the study of rich history and culture of our country. Late Kanak Lal Barua and Dr. S.K. Bhuyan were even given the title of "Rai Bahadur" by the Britishers. It is true that all these scholars to our knowledge were not connected with freedom movement. It is also a fact that had these scholars of Assam including Dr. Bhuyan participated in freedom movement, we would not have seen the work on history done by them and we would have remained backward in the studies of history of our state.

Dr. Bhuyan was an M.A. in English. This facilitated him to go nearer to the Baptist Missionaries<sup>14</sup>, from whom he could collect valuable data for his research work leading to Ph.D., degree from the London University. In fact, he could have free access to these documents available with them, Dr. Banikanta Kakati was also an M.A. in English. But he did not keep relation with the Baptist Missionaries, as we think.

Dr. Bhuyan's effort to publish the Ahom Boranjis was, undoubtedly a great success. This gave the Ahoms or the descendants of the great Tai races who entered Assam valley in the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century a high place in Assam. Each of the books written in Assamese included an introducing chapter in English. This chapter gives good deal of information to the readers from outside Assam or India. These styles of Dr. Bhuyan in bringing out publication are useful to Assamese readers as well as to non Assamese readers.

From the available documents with the K.A.S. it is not clear about the reasons of Dr. Bhuyan's leaving the K.A.S. But in all probability, Dr. Bhuyan wanted more freedom to do work. Instead of working under the president ship of the K.A.S. and under the supervision of the executive members of the K.A.S. he preferred to do work independently. He was the Secretary of K.A.S. twice, first as the Secretary he found Hem Chandra Goswami as the president. In the second term also he found again him as the president. Subsequently, he found K.L. Barua as the President of the K.A.S.

Though A.H.W. Bentick, the then Commissioner of the Assam Valley Division was appointed Honorary Provincial Director of Historical & Antiquarian Studies Department, as Assistant Director of the same department for the Brahmaputra Valley Division Dr. Bhuyan got enough liberty to do research work. In fact, he worked as the sole authority of the Department. This resulted in publication of the books by Dr. Bhuyan<sup>15</sup> as he desired. He also perhaps thought that a Government organization would be better than a non-Govt. research organization like the K.A.S.

It appears that as at that time separate Archaeological Department was not established in Assam, Dr. Bhuyan through his Department carried out a Survey of archaeological objects<sup>16</sup> in the District of Now-gong and Goalpara. Late Birinchi Kumar Barua and Late Sarvesvar Kataki volunteered their services for undertaking the survey work. The K.A.S. was also collecting archaeological objects for its museum and at the same time the D.H.A.S. was also collecting some antiquarian objects in addition to the manuscripts. It is not clear as to way both the organizations were

doing duplication. Possibly, the D.H.A.S. wanted to work with more zeal as a Government organization. There were at that time Department of Archaeology, State Museum and State Archives in some states of the country. But there was no state in India having a Department of Historical & Antiquarian Studies. It is only in Assam which has such a Department. Dr. Bhuyan also was the president of the Provincial Museum established by the K.A.S. for a brief period and made some collection for the museum.

At that time there was great public demand to have a University in Assam<sup>17</sup>. The K.A.S. first mooted the idea and moved and worked hard for the establishment of a University in Assam.<sup>17</sup> Dr. Bhuyan and his comrades engaged in original research realized that the University would not come soon and “at times pessimism and even suspicion about their own wisdom constantly harass their mind.”<sup>18</sup> But Dr. Bhuyan was bold enough, without caring for the establishment of the University he was continuing his work through the D.H.A.S.

But a day came. Light fell on Assam penetrating thick cloud. A university was established in Assam. A long felt demand of the people of Assam was met. But who cared for the K.A.S. and the D.H.A.S. now? Both these institutions, who cried for the establishment of the University, slowly were relegated into back ground. The K.A.S. after the establishment of the museum in Guwahati and subsequently handing over it to the state Govt., become a neglected institute, as the Guwahati University become the centre of attraction, The D.H.A.S. also lost its prominence. But due to untiring effort and strong Personality of Dr. Bhuyan, its reputation could not be affected.

It is not clear as to why after becoming the Vice- Chancellor of the Guwahati University; Dr. Bhuyan did not bring the D.H.A.S. under the direct control of the university. Dr. Bhuyan certainly through the publications and research work done in the D.H.A.S. could rise to the position of the Vice-Chancellor of the Guwahati University. He could have very well done this, instead of opening a Department “Assam culture” by name, in the Guwahati University, which however, had to be closed down again due to public criticism. The reason, therefore, is not clear to us.

1. Everybody will join with me. There is no doubt, to say that the D.H.A.S. reached its zenith during the days of Dr. Bhuyan. After him it started to decline. However, Dr. P.C. Choudhary, who succeeded him, could retain its glory. After the retirement of Dr. Choudhury, it lost its reputation to a great extent and now it is struggling for its existence. There is no director now.

To me late Anandoram Barua the great Sanskrit scholar, Professor K.K. Handique, another great ideologist, Dr. B.K. Kakati, Dr. S.K. Bhuyan and Dr. B.K. Barua, were the strong pillars in Assam who gave a strong foundation to the study and research of the history and culture of Assam. Anandoram Barua and K.K. Handique’s field of research was very wide i.e., on Indian culture, while other three late scholars confined their fields to research to Assam or North-East India. Such dedicated scholars, who did not believe in any kind of reward, believed only on work, are very few in Assam now. Now every scholar in our society wants some things. i.e., some award, reward, recognition etc. in return. That generation has gone forever. Dr. Bhuyan was a very systematic and disciplined scholar,<sup>19</sup> who preserved every document, list of publications etc, very systematically. Though he did not find attraction in the study of the history of the Koch Kings, his contribution in study and publication on the Ahom history and the other history is unparalleled and I am sure, in this century, if not in the next century, he cannot be surpassed by any scholar in this matter.

## References

1. M. Neog, & H.K. Barpujari (Ed) Professor Surya Kumar Bhuyan Commemoration Volume. Guwahati, 1966. Pp I-9
2. Nanda Talukdar, Surya Kumar Bhuyan (in Assamese), Guwahati, 1984.
3. S.K. Bhuyan, (Ed). Department of Historical and Antiquarian studies Bulletin No-II pp 16-49. S.K. Bhuyan, some literary Reminiscences Guwahati, 1954.
4. An Account of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, Guwahati, 1993 p.<sup>2</sup>.
5. Rules Kamrupa Anusandhan Samiti, Guwahati, 1912.
6. Ibid.
7. B.B Hazarika, "The D.H.A.S. : An appraisal of its Activities", Golden Jubilee Celebration (1928-1978) Souvenir, Department of Historical & Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati, Ed. B.B. Hazarika, 1978-79. pp <sup>1-3</sup>
8. S.K. Bhuyan. Op. cit, p. 22. Also, B.B. Hazarika, op. cit.
9. Nanda Talukdar. Surya Kumar Bhuyan, Guwahati (Assamese) 1954, p. 211
10. Neog & H.K. Barpujari, op cit. pp 10. 19 also see A list of Publication of DHAS, 1970
11. Robin Dev Choudhury, "Asamiya Sanskritilai Koch Raja Sakalar Anudan" Natun Dainik. (Assamese daily) Guwahati, 21<sup>st</sup> May & 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1989
12. Ibid
13. AN Account of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, 1993,, p 2
14. This information was given by Professor HK, Barpujari, Guwahati.
15. This information was given by Sri Hemrath Barman DHAS. Who Worked in the same Department with Dr Bhuyan from the beginning as his principal Assistant in the real sense. Barman further told me that there are still some important documents with the family members of late Dr Bhuyan
16. SK Bhuyan, op, cit, pp 41-43
17. Raghunath Dev Choudhury, Manuhar Maje Maje, (Assamese) Patacharkuchi
18. AN Account of Kamrupa Anusandhan Samiti, 1993 p 4
19. SK Bhuyan, op cit p 17
20. I received an information from Sri Samiran Barua, who documented the personal library of late Dr. Bhuyan that in the file of Dakar Basan, the manuscript could not be traced 'However, a book under the same title was published by Sri Hemrath Barman of DHAS.

\*\*\*\*\*

*From :- The Glimses of Dr. S.K. Bhuyan's Personality 1994*  
*Edited by Kanak Chandra Deka*