

DR. S. K. BHUYAN AND THE ASSAMESE**BURANJIS****Professor J.N. Phukan****(Dr. H.K. Barpujari Endowment Professor of History)****Gauhati University**

Dr. S. K. Bhuyan after obtaining the M.A. degree in English Literature from the Presidency College, Calcutta in 1916 joined as Professor of English Literature in the Cotton College where his “acquaintance with English Literature gradually became more extensive”. As a student, he had the guidance of eminent professors like Prof. H.R. James, Prof. Manmohan Ghose, Prof. J. W. Holme, Prof. T.S. Sterling and V Parfulla Chandra Ghosh. Prof. Ghosh, as Dr. Bhuyan himself writes in his London Memories “succeeded in implanting in us a love for Carlyle”. He had therefore, no opportunity to have undergone historical discipline under the guidance of trained and renowned historians who adorned the Department of History of the Calcutta University then.

While teaching English literature in the Cotton College, he writes, “I had taken to historical pursuits as a very serious occupation.” What then made him shift his interest to historical pursuits is not very clearly explained. But it appears that it was since the publication of his Ahomar Din (the Days of the Ahoms), a small but significant work on the Ahom rule in Assam in the year 1918 that he developed interest in the study of Ahom history, more particularly the Buranjis. The Kamrupa Anusandhan Samiti (the Assam Research Society) which was established a few years earlier in 1912 for the promotion of research on the history and antiquity of Assam, had been another factor that enthused young Dr. Bhuyan in this direction. As Dr. Bhuyan himself admits, “My rudiments of training in research were obtained during my association with the Assam Research Society”. (London Memories, P.11) But his close association with it as Secretary in 1921 – 22 and again in 1926 – 29 had brought him into frequent contact with Pandit Hemchandra Goswami from whom he received the “first lessons” on historical research.

It is therefore a matter of considerable admiration that during a period of nine years from 1930 to 1938 he compiled, collated and edited with running marginalia eleven buranjis which are given below in order of their first dates of publication.

1. Assam Buranji by Harakanta Barua	March,	1930
2. Kamrupar Buranji	October,	1930
3. Tungkhungia Buranji		1932
4. Deodhai Assam Buranji	October,	1932
5. Asamar Padya–Buranji	October,	1932
6. Padshah Buranji		1935
7. Kachari Buranji	May,	1936

8. Jayantia Buranji	September,	1937
9. Tripura Buranji	February,	1938
10. Assam Buranji	June,	1945
11. Satsari Assam Buranji	September,	1960

The task involved considerable difficulties in several ways. No doubt the editing of Assam Buranji written by Harakanta Barua and Asamar Padya- Buranji (a collection of two separate metrical chronicles viz. Kali Bharat Buranji by Dutiram Swarnakar Hazarika and Belimarar Buranji by Bisweswar Vaidyadhip) both being late nineteenth century compilations, was comparatively easier. But the collation, compilation and editing of other buranjis by drawing materials from different manuscript sources were by no means an easy task. Kamrupar Buranji was compiled from seven different sources, and Deodhai Assam Buranji was compiled from as many as 14 sources such as the American Baptist Mission Manuscript first published in the Arunoday, manuscripts obtained from Anandaram Gogoi in North Guwahati, Saratchandra Goswami, Mohar Sing Deka of the Topakuchia Raj Family of Nogaon, Bhumidhar Kakati of Baligaon, Nagaon, Tolan Chandra Saikia of Jorhat, Fathiyyah-i-Ibriyah of Shahabuddin Talish as translated by Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Ms. No. 28 of the India Office Library collected by the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samity, Dambarudhar Bardaloi of Uzanbazar, the Ahom Juvak Sanmilan, William Robinson and Thengkur Sing Ingti Christian of Golaghat.

Barring the Padshah Buranji and the Satsari Assam Buranji (Published by the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti and the Gauhati University respectively), the other nine Buranjis were published by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies of the Government of Assam. As Dr. Bhuyan noted in the preface to the Assam Buranji of Harakanta Barua that the publication of buranjis represented the policy of the Government to bring to light all available source books in the history of Assam.

Since its inception Dr. Bhuyan was intimately associated with the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies. It was due mainly to his tireless effort and persistent zeal that the Department saw its rise and growth. It was he who turned it into a major centre of collection of Buranji manuscript written in Assamese and Ahom languages. Under his able guidance it became an institution of historical research in the country.

Dr. Bhuyan had firm faith in the Assamese “buranjis” who, he believed were guided by the pre-eminent object of faithfully and correctly enscrolling facts as they noticed in state papers or witnessed actual events. According to him, any “irregularity of discrepancy which we may come across due to unintelligent handling of the original source rather than to willful misrepresentations or exaggeration” (Introduction to Asamar Padya Buranji, p.v). It is perhaps one of the several reasons for which he never seriously questioned the many discrepancies of dates of facts appearing in the buranjis compiled or collated by him from various old buranjis. In the Tungkungia Buranji, for instance, edited by him the date of Siva Singha’s death is given at page 1 as Saka 1666, 6 Aghon whereas at page 39 the same Buranji it is given as Saka 1666, 10 Aghon, Friday.

Another reason for not putting the facts or dates as found in the old chronicles under serious scrutiny was that he was more concerned with the task of placing “at the disposal of students of history a large mass of materials” of a comparatively unknown field of study like buranji. He was perhaps well-aware of this aspect. But considering the paucity of published materials till then, he left this problem to be tackled by the future generation of scholars, and

remarked, “We have refrained for the present from annotating and commenting on the text which can be better accomplished when sufficient original sources of information have been published facilitating the indication of references”(Bulletin No. 1 of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, February 22, 1992). Without the publication of the invaluable and voluminous ancient sources of information stored in buranjis that he came across and many collected by the Department, he thought it pre-mature to attempt at the modern historical compilation of an Assam Buranji on scientific lines. He therefore paid for greater attention in the publication of buranjis than anything else.

It is also of exceptional interest to find intellectual pursuit of Dr. S.K. Bhuyan, an M.A. in English Literature and a B.L. from the Calcutta University moving round the medieval history of Assam, more particularly the history of the Ahoms rather than any other field. Among his many publications which included poems, short stories, Assamese literature, autobiographical sketches, he is better remembered by the posterity for his major research works on ‘Lachit Burphukan and His Times’ (1947), ‘Atan Buragohain and His Times (1957), Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha’ (1975), His Ph. D. dissertation of the London University, ‘Anglo-Assamese Relations’, 1771-1826, is undoubtedly his “magnum opus” in which he reconstructed the history of the phase of the Ahom rule in the background of the East India Company’s relations with Assam. One may be surprised at the labour and time that he had invested in collecting and incorporating great mass but diversified information on topics not directly connected to the main theme of the work. One is also moved at his capacity of narrating in poignant language some of the crucial situations faced by the descendants of the great Swargadeos.

But the most outstanding contribution of Dr. Bhuyan is in the field of buranji. Since he did not possess the requisite knowledge of the Ahom language to enjoy the taste of the buranjis written in that language, he naturally fell back on those written in the old Assamese language and became their master. His experience in deciphering and his mastery over the archaic and obsolete words as found in the buranjis remained unchallenged and unmatched. With his wide knowledge he could dive deep into the inner thoughts and sentiments of the compilers of the ancient texts. The literate public of Assam will gratefully remember Dr. Bhuyan for the buranjis published by him. In fact, his name has become a by word for buranji.

In recent years, doubt has been expressed in certain quarters about the authenticity of the buranjis due to the lack of their authorship and dates of compilation. Dr. Bhuyan was fully conscious of this shortcoming as early as 1932 but found reasons in their defense. The long and constant handling of the buranjis made him to believe rather strongly that “a religious veneration for truth and a “rigid adherence to truth became an established traditional feature of Assamese historical compilations”. He therefore, pleaded that the anonymity of buranjis should not be interpreted as willful misrepresentation or exaggeration of facts. He further notes, “the practically universal anonymity on the authorship of the buranjis and the great secrecy insisted upon in their circulation are a guarantee of their good faith” (Introduction to Asamar Padya Buranji, P.1)

Dr. Bhuyan took pain to establish rather unhesitatingly the fact that more than any other source, buranjis are indispensable for the study of the political, diplomatic, economic, social and religious history of the Assam under the Ahom rule. Buranjis constitute one of the original contributions of the Ahoms to Assam. Other sources only elaborate, support, corroborate or confirm what the buranjis say. He therefore, laid the greatest emphasis on their publication. It is

on the basis of the narratives in the buranjis that Dr. Bhuyan also tried to build up a connected account of the neighbouring states like Cooch Behar, Kachari, Jayantia, Tripura and the tribes in the frontier. It is for this, we are in possession of buranjis like the Kachari Buranji, Jayantia Buranji, Tripura Buranji which he collated and compiled from various original buranjis.

Buranji became Dr. Bhuyan's life-long passion or rather they became a part of his life and thought. He moved and lived among them, and tried to understand their true meaning like a sage of ancient times. He felt that the people of Assam who are now in a state of stupor and indolence should derive inspiration from the glorious deeds and achievements of their forefathers and rise to the occasion to occupy their rightful position in the national life. They should be inspired by the spirit of courage and selfless sacrifice of those great heroes in the buranjis. The timeless utterances made by some of the great characters like Atan Buragohain, Momai Tamuli Barbarua, Lachit Barphukan, Swargadeo Chakradhwaj Singha and others had greatly moved him, and he found time to compile 'Buranjir Vani' (1951), and 'Saraighatar Suvachani' (1963) incorporating such utterances and lessons of history as ready-made examples for the future generations. His study of the buranjis made him convinced about the intrinsic goodness of the Assamese people, their simplicity of character. He felt that it is by preserving the good elements of the culture of the Assamese people that they could thrive and prosper, and not by rejecting them.

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