

Tribute to a Historian and Thinker

By

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I met the late Dr S. K. Bhuyan only once or twice, but I will not forget how he invited me to his home, made his daughter sing his poem, later translated and published in Hindi *Ajkal*; how he referred to his fellow-historians in Maharashtra, particularly in Poona; how he took me round the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies museum-cum-library. He showed me the illuminated manuscript of *Hasti-vidyārṇava* on berch and explained the history and legend behind many a sculpture-find. He used to talk a lot, enjoyed indulging in reminiscences and had a very large range of memory and interests.

I have read two of his works : *Atan Buragohain and His Times* and his *Studies in the Literature of Assam*. Next to Dr Banikanta Kakati, I owe to his writings my knowledge about the history of Assamese culture and language. He was an eminent educationist, he was Vice-Chancellor when I met him. But he carried his learning lightly. Not unlike many co-workers in the field of historical research in Maharashtra, Dr Bhuyan was a person of strong likes and dislikes and gave free vent to his opinionated views about men and matters. He gave me many wise tips and guided me about the policies of Sahitya Akademi, which, I humbly submitted, were determined by an Executive Board. Dr Bhuyan had his own views on matters of language, and Hindi in particular. All this conversation took place nearly nine years ago. I remember only this much that his voice was emphatic and he supported it with his thumping stick too. For me all this experience was not new: I had met D.V. Potdar and N.R. Pathak and T.S. Shejwalkar in my own province and I had a foretaste of the historian-antiquarian type. But Dr Bhuyan was not a mere ancient history man; he was a connoisseur of arts. He knew so much about medieval painting and sculpture, calligraphy and epigraphy, numismatics and military science.

He remembered his days in Delhi with an almost nostalgic touch. He did not quite approve of the literary groups and 'these modern-manias' in Assamese. His taste was rather conservative, quite befitting his years; yet even amongst the people belonging to his generation he was a reformist. His special forte was the study of the Ahoms and pre-history of Pragjyotish. He had delved deeply through the Buranjis and the prose

records of centuries in quaint scripts and unknown tongues. He knew well what happened for centuries on Assam-Burma borders. But later he allowed himself to be scattered in other interests. And his versatility did not allow him to gather any moss. Though a loser in worldly possessions, he was a gainer in 'the last infirmity of noble minds.' His name and fame spread over India as an eminent historian and a very perseverant past-hunter.

I pay my humble tribute to this savant and thinker, this multi-purpose reservoir of energy, this indomitable soul and the warrior of words who fought for higher values and idealistic standards.