

INTRODUCTION TO DR S.K.BHUYAN'S BIBLIOGRAPHY**By****Banikanta Kakati**

Dr. S. K. Bhuyan hardly needs an introduction. As the Provincial Director of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, as a frequent contributor of original historical articles to numerous learned periodicals, as a scholarly editor and translator of old Assamese chronicles, and as an author of numerous original compositions in English and Assamese, he is a valued name in the noted centres of historical studies in India. Some of his historical publications had the honour of being very favourably commented on in the pages of the "Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland", and the "Bulletin of the school of Oriental Studies", by such eminent authorities as Sir Edward Gait, Lt. Col. P.R.T.Gurdon, and Lt. Col. Sir Wolsely Haig.

The works listed in the following bibliography range over a period of about four decades. They fall mainly into three divisions: historical, biographical and original and miscellaneous. Dr. Bhuyan's forte is history and biography. Like those of many other historians, his earlier publications are mostly biographical with occasional dips into some interesting periods of history. Such earlier studies are "Ahomar Din," 1918, containing an account of the Ahom system of administration, and "Early British Relations with Assam," 1928. Some of his original Assamese compositions have already been recognised as classics, having been for many years running as text-books for several examinations of the Universities of Calcutta, Dacca, Benares and Gauhati.

Circumstances had developed which led Dr. Bhuyan on to devote his wholehearted attention to the history and antiquities of Assam. Sometime in 1927, the manuscript of his "Early British Relations with Assam" fell into the hands of Mr. J. R. Cunningham, then Director of Public Instruction of Assam. Mr. Cunningham recognized considerable merit in it has a piece of historical writing and look it upon himself to move the Assam Government to publish it. The book was accordingly published in 1928. Realizing at the same time possibilities of future research works in the unexplored field of Assam history, specially in view of the difficulties experienced by Dr. Bhuyan and his fellow-workers, Mr. Cunningham also moved the Government for establishing a department of historical and antiquarian studies to be maintained with a regular allotment from the provincial revenues. The Department thus came into being in June, 1928 with Mr. A. H. W. Bentinck, C.I.E., I.C.S., F.R.G.S., M.A (Oxon), then Commissioner of the Assam Valley Division as the Honorary Provincial Director, and Mr. J. P. Mills, I.C.S., M.A. (Oxon), Deputy Commissioner, and Prof. S. K. Bhuyan, M.A, B.L, Professor of the Cotton College, Gauhati, as Honorary Assistant Directors for the Surma and the Brahmaputra Valley Divisions respectively.

As the historical publications entered in the following bibliography will show, Dr. Bhuyan became the life and soul of the Department. He put in all the scanty leisure of a College teacher at the service of the Department. He collected historical manuscripts, collated and finally edited them

with necessary notes and introductions both in Assamese and English. To this must be added the onerous responsibilities connected with the administration of the Department. After the retirement of Mr. Bentinck from office in 1933, the Government of Assam offered free scope to Dr. Bhuyan's eagerness for the promotion of the Department's objects by placing him in sole charge of the Department as its Provincial Director.

Dr. Bhuyan's interest in the Department is that of a genuine selfless worker who desires its permanency on behalf of future scholars who will continue its traditions. The Department so happily inaugurated had so far been functioning with a name, but it had no local habitation. There was no permanent building to accommodate it, only a room in the Divisional Commissioner's office having been set apart for its work ; and previously to this, for many long years the Department was housed in Dr. Bhuyan's private quarters. Without embarrassing the Government with requests for more grants for this infant institution, Dr. Bhuyan looked about for funds from another sources towards erecting a permanent building for it. And he was not long in the search. He secured the sympathy of a generous and cultured Assamese gentleman Rai Bahadur Radhakanta Handiqui who had already earned the gratitude of his countrymen by considerable donations towards the promotion of Assamese language and literature. At Dr. Bhuyan's instance, Rai Bahadur Handiqui placed adequate funds at the disposal of the Government towards the construction of a permanent building for the Department. The building named after the donor's wife, Narayani Handiqui Historical Institute, was completed in February 1936. On April 4, 1936, the building was formally opened by His Excellency Sir Michael Keane, K.C.S.I.E., I.C.S, Governor of Assam, in the presence of the donor and his wife, and of an assembly of distinguished guests. For all time to come, the office of the Department has been located in this building. What Mr. Cunningham said about Dr. Bhuyan and the Department in 1932 is more than justified when viewed in the light of its subsequent achievements, - "The fact is that had it not been for one S. K. Bhuyan the Department would never have come into being, and were it not for the abilities and devotion of the same S. K. Bhuyan it would have had but little to record in the way of accomplishment.

The earnest zeal and sincerity of Dr. Bhuyan in the pursuit of historical and antiquarian studies were rewarded by the conferment of the title of Rai Bahadur in 1936 at a comparatively young age.

Dr. Bhuyan's research activities represent the historical instincts of the Assamese race combined with the critical methods of modern scholarship. In olden times knowledge of historical lore was looked upon as an essential part of the intellectual equipments of an educated Assamese gentleman. Often times he was expected to sum up his knowledge by writing a history of his country or some neighbouring tract. The tradition continued down through the last century, and three noted Assamese gentlemen with liberal English education, left behind three distinct studies of the history of Assam,- Kasinath Tamuli Phukan, Rai Bahadur Gunabhiram Barua, and Harakanta Barua Sadar-Amin.

With immense labour Dr. Bhuyan has unearthed a vast mass of unused materials from original sources. Under the auspices of the research institute, of which he is in sole charge, he has edited several original documents with all the requirements of a modern scholarly publication. Dr.

Bhuyan has never spared himself for a due appreciation of the materials that came into his hands. For a correct understanding of the racial and cultural traditions of the Ahom race he engaged for some time the services of an Ahom Deodhai Pandit, i.e. an orthodox Ahom priest regarded as a repository of the knowledge of Ahom traditions. His English version of the "Tunkhungia Buranji", published by the Oxford University Press in 1933, with a brief resume of the events of other periods before and after that dynasty, with notes, a glossary, an index and an introduction, is quite characteristic of the critical methods which Dr. Bhuyan has applied to editing the Assamese chronicles.

Dr. Bhuyan discovered some fresh materials about Mogul India from Assamese sources. They were published in several issues of the "Islamic Culture," Hyderabad, Deccan, 1928 – 29, and 1933 – 34, and they have now appeared in book-form under the title "Annals of the Delhi Badshahate."

A word must be said about Dr. Bhuyan's introduction to the several chronicles he has edited. They are in English as well as in Assamese. Each of them contains a critical synopsis of the contents with further applications from other available sources as well as an examination of their historical and literary value. They have bearing also on other aspects of Assamese civilization and culture. The chronicles, being comprehensive records of the political, social and religious sympathies of different times, Dr. Bhuyan has supplied the proper background of the varied thought movements by his illuminating comments, and has made each period covered by a particular chronicle full of life and vitality.

It must be admitted, that in spite of the limitations under which he is labouring. Dr. Bhuyan has been able to rouse interest in Assamese history and civilisation among eminent historical scholars in India and Europe. Prof. C. S. Srinivasachari, formerly of Annamalai University, and Mahamahopadhyaya D.V. Potdar of Poona, have reviewed one or the other of Dr. Bhuyan's works in the "Journal of India History." and "Journal of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute" respectively, calculated to evoke wide-spread interest in Assamese historical matters. Dr. B. A. Saletore of Poona has, in an issue of the "Journal of the Assamese Research Society," searched for Sumerian prototypes for the burial system of the Ahoms which has been fully described by Dr. Bhuyan in his introduction to "Deodhai Asam Buranji." The same book, as far as its contents can be judged from the English introduction, running up to seventy pages, has been reviewed in the German periodical "Orientalistische Literaturzeitung" of Leipzig. Dissemination of knowledge about the Assamese people and creation, far and wide, has been a welcome offshoot of Dr. Bhuyan's life-long devotion for the cause of Assamese historical research.

An intensive study of the several periods of Assamese history has brought Dr. Bhuyan into intimate touch with the varied streams of thought that go into making the cultural life of a people. "Assamese Literature; Ancient and Modern", – a note prepared at the instance of and printed by the Government of Assam, July 1936, shows how intimate is Dr. Bhuyan's knowledge of things Assamese.

To co-ordinate all the materials and bring them all together into a synthesis, the intervals of time in a teachers' business are not enough. The situation cannot be better depicted than in the words of Dr. Bhuyan himself, - "I must frankly declare that our chief handicap is one of time. The normal duties of a teacher in the constituent colleges of the Calcutta University leave him very little leisure for research and investigation. The routine work of our Department which has increased rapidly in recent years, caused by the necessity of securing a fair market for our publications in order to give some return for the money spent upon the Department by the Government together with the task of rearing an infant institution by enlisting support in its behalf, and conferring upon it status and prestige in the hierarchy of orientological institutions, and the unavoidable worries and cares relating to all these endeavours, has taken our life-blood out. With this enormous routine work to discharge where is the time for original contribution to which we fell tempted in view of the large mass of materials at our disposal? My own cherished researches have been sacrificed at the altar of the exacting goddess of routine and red-tape." Dr. Bhuyan's zeal would, however, acknowledge no discomfiture in the pursuit of the studies nearest to his heart. He proceeded to England on leave in search of that leisure and that facility which he could not get in his own land.

He joined the school of Oriental Studies in London, and worked under the late Professor H. H. Dodwell, the editor of the fifth and sixth volumes of "The Cambridge History of India." The result of his labours has been embodied in the publication. "Anglo-Assamese Relations" which was approved for the Ph. D. degree of London University. It is a comprehensive work containing information about the social, political and economic conditions of Assam side by side with Assam's relations with the East India Company, culminating in the occupation of the country by the British in 1824 – 25.

After his return from England towards the end of August 1938, Dr. Bhuyan resumed charge of his duties at the Cotton College, and also served Government in various other capacities. But all the while he maintained his connection with the D.H.A.S. by continuing to serve it as its Honorary Director in 1947; he was relieved of his duties of the Cotton College and placed in whole-time charge of the institute.

Dr. Bhuyan's services have been recognised by Government. In addition to his title of Rai Bahadur, he received the decoration of M.B.E. in 1946. After his retirement from service, the present Government has re-employed him as the Director of the D.H.A.S.

The following bibliography will show the variety and magnitude of Dr. Bhuyan's literary and historical output.

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