

Chapter-I

Introduction

During his lifetime itself, S.K.Bhuyan (27th.January, 1894-5th.July, 1964) became a legendary figure in Assam for his conspicuous presence in the area of historical studies in Assam. The influence of S.K.Bhuyan in the intellectual arena of Assam is nicely reflected in a summed up comment of Dr. B.K.Kakati - “*Dr S.K.Bhuyan hardly needs any introduction*”¹

S.K.Bhuyan began to write historical articles on different topics of Assam history along with his literary works, in his school life, which were published in the contemporary Assamese magazines. The attraction for history, which grew in his early life, became an ardent mission in his matured stage of life and he carried out the mission till the last moment of his life. He wrote historical articles in the magazines, attended the public meetings and delivered lectures on historical topics. wrote authoritative books, gave expert comments whenever required and endeavoured to give solutions for the crises of the national life of the Assamese people throughout his life. He wanted to make the spectacular figures of Assam history popular, to popularize the reading of history, and advised to take lesson from history in time of crises and guidelines for future progress. He wanted to inspire the people of Assam to live victoriously and gloriously among the other Indians as well as among all the mankind. With the growing maturity of his life, his activities in historical studies grew gradually serious. He got engaged in recovering the manuscripts and other original sources of Assam history. Herewith he took measures to preserve them, to publish them (being edited by him) among his fellow Assamese people as well as among the other men of rest of India and world. The facts

¹ Kakati, B.K.-LHW-p.3

preserved in the pages in the manuscripts so far were made public. Like the public meetings, he attended the students meetings and seminars participated by the scholars and delivered lectures in different places of India and abroad. Simultaneously he wrote some valuable original books on different topics of Assam history and many of them were published in his lifetime. Apart from these, he did his research work on the topic 'EAST INDIA COMPANY'S RELATIONS WITH ASSAM' from the University of London in 1938. He was awarded the Degree of D.Litt from the same university in July, 1951. All these he did in midst of his busy schedules and engagements as government servant in different responsible posts (and also in midst of his household responsibilities to his family, which he maintained successfully). In this way, his life was transcended to an institution of Historical studies of Assam. He, in his early age composed poems and short stories. He was student of English literature in B.A. and M.A. He joined as a lecturer (first Assamese lecturer) in the Department of English in Cotton College. He exerted his duties efficiently in different posts of government service both in British and Independent India. But his recognition as historian subsides all other recognitions. The posterity has done much in the historiography of Assam on the basis of his historical activities, historical writings and his guidelines left for the posterity. To evaluate and understand the contemporary historiography of Assam, which is dependent much on the works done by S.K.Bhuyan, one must study his writings. Likewise, to have a thorough idea about the course of evolution of historiography of Assam, the intervening period between the Ahom Historiography and contemporary historiography of Assam, one must read the writings of S.K.Bhuyan who illuminated like the mid Sun in the period (the intervening period). His writings have some noteworthy features. His works themselves witness transitions and can be

categorized on the basis of their changed features. These features are related to Historiography and Structure of his writings. Some of them are rooted in the past and some are shaped by the contemporary and surrounding political, intellectual and social factors. His personal thirst and passion for the subject, intelligence and stamina must have been important factors for his dexterous achievements.

It is noteworthy that S.K.Bhuyan himself was critical of his writings. In many cases, he pointed out his own limitations and their reasons. In many cases, with all the humility he expressed his inability to focus on or to explain some points, which he left for the posterity. He preserved his writings systematically so that the future readers can access them easily. It will not be irrelevant here to mention that the habit of systematic preservation of records is noticed not only in regard to his historical writings, but also in his all other activities. This aspect of punctual and disciplined life of S.K.Bhuyan is felt greatly beneficial even in this research work. If his articles, lectures and monographic booklets on different topics and characters of Assam history, scattered in different magazines, Journals and News papers were not collected by himself and had he not compiled them in volumes, some of them would have lost forever and quest for their recovery would have been a life-long search.

This research work aims at the critical observation of these features, the background and factors responsible for it and the place of his writings in the historiography of Assam. Some articles and seminar papers on some aspects of the writings of S.K.Bhuyan have been written. Sporadic comments and appreciations on the works of S.K.Bhuyan are also available. But no work has been done so far seriously evaluating his historical writings. In this research work, to arrive at the logical conclusions regarding the contents, thoughts, nature, features, merits and demerits of the historical writings of S.K.Bhuyan, all of his historical writings, both

published and unpublished are studied for observation and examination. His writings of other categories, like the Biological writings and memoirs are also studied as per the requirement of the research work. But emphasis has been given on the Representative writings to avoid the possibility of falling in limitlessness and vagueness. The historical writings of the predecessors and successors of S.K.Bhuyan are studied for the sake of a comparative view. Other sources, utilized here, are mentioned in the bibliography.

In studying critically the historical writings of S.K.Bhuyan, the ideas of history discussed by R. G. Collingwood and E.H. Carr are taken as main guidelines. *“One of the main theses of collingwood’s philosophy is the close relation between history a parte objecti, the historical process, and history a parte subjecti, the thought of the historian.”*² Attempt has been made for careful examination of both of ‘a parte objecti’ and ‘a parte subjecti’ in the writings of S.K.Bhuyan. Likewise Carr’s idea of *‘history as a constantly moving process, with the historian moving within it’*³ i.e. in other words the time spirit in history also has provided an important dimension for this study. The ideas taken, as guidelines in analyzing the historical writings of S.K.Bhuyan, will be unfolded gradually in the course of this study. For the biographical information on S.K.Bhuyan, in addition to other sources, ‘SURYYA KUMAR BHUYAN’ of Nanda Talukdar is mostly utilized.

Writings of a writer, particularly in any subject of the humanities in a way reflect the ideas and philosophy of the writer. So, the Critical examination of such writings inevitably necessitates the examination of ideas and philosophy the writer. Writer’s ability, tenacity, austere and arduous practice are also entangled with it. In

² Collingwood, R.G.- The idea of History, p. xxiv,

³ (Carr, E.H.-What Is History, p. 177)

examining the historical writings of S.K.Bhuyan, who had not only been revered and loved by his contemporary distinguished scholars and common people of his times but also being honoured and loved by the present generation also, there is a constant risk of devaluation or eulogizing the contributions and the public image of the historian. The researcher's ideas and abilities also create a matter of concern in this respect. Care has been taken for these aspects throughout the study.

Some other problems were also confronted in different places of this study, which are mention worthy here. One of them is the orthography of the names of the monarchs of Assam and place-names. For example, S.K.Bhuyan, Edward Gait, S.L.Barua, H. K. Barpujari and many other historians have written the Hindu names of the Ahom Monarchs as 'Pratap Singha', 'Rudra Singha' or as 'Rajeswar Simha', 'Gaurinath Simha' and so on. As 'Singha' or 'Simha' is a part of the complete names of the monarchs, and not a separate title, it was thought that this part should be attached with the main part of the names so that the names will appear as 'Shivasimha', 'Rudrasimha' etc. More over, the part 'Singha' or 'simha' with names of the Ahom monarchs is different from the 'Singha' title possessed by many North Indian castes. But writing the names of the Ahom monarchs in such a way creates confusion in case of the names like, Gadadhar, Pratap and so on, which creates misled pronunciation of these names. So it is decided to write the names with the "Singha" part in detached place.

It is noticed that, some scholars have started to write the Ahom Names of the monarchs and of the place-names (and some other words also) in different way. But they are also not free from confusions. For example, B. J. Terwiel⁴ writes 'Suea Ka

⁴ Terwiel, B.J. is a faculty member of Thai and Lao Languages and Literatures, University of Hamburg, Germany

Pha' for Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom dynasty in Assam. But J. N. Phukan writes 'Siu-ka-pha' for the same and P. Gogoi writes 'Hso-ka-pha'. Likewise, some scholars write 'Ja-sing-pha' and 'Ja-sing-phra' for Goddess Jasingpha, 'Che-rai-doi', 'Che-tam-doi' and 'Cha-rai-doi' for Charaideo and so on. Here in this study, the forms, like Charaideo, Sukapha, which are commonly used and already widely prevalent, are retained.

In regard to the name of the province, three different forms are retained in different context of this study as per the requirement. Whenever, the name of the province is required to write simply in English, it is written as 'Assam', whenever a simple transliteration of the name of the province as pronounced or written by the people of the land in Assamese language is required, it is written as 'Asam' and whenever the name as pronounced by the Assamese people is required for phonetic expression (as per IPA), it is written as '*axam*'.

In the attempt for textual criticism of the edited chronicles of S.K.Bhuyan, preference has been given in comparing the texts of the published chronicles to the original manuscripts. In some inevitable cases, transcripts are taken for this purpose. But due to lack of proper care for preservation of the manuscripts in the library of DEPARTMENT OF HISTORICAL AND ANTIQUARIAN STUDIES, ASSAM (DHAS), all and every manuscripts utilized in the said edited chronicles could not be traced out. For example, the manuscript of the DEODHAI ASAM BURANJI obtained from the American Baptist Mission could have not been traced out. Likewise, The manuscript of the Assam Buranji recovered from the family of Sukumar Mahanta originally contained 119 folios (as per the DHAS catalogue). In spite of my strenuous effort in the first attempt the manuscript could not be traced out in neither of the two possible places - the Library of the Kamrup Anusandhan

Samiti and the Library of the DHAS. Later on, a part of the portion of the manuscript, which was published by the DHAS, was traced out (82 folios only).

In different context of this study, it became frequently necessary to quote S.K.Bhuyan, from his writings, which are written both in English and Assamese language. Instead of transliterating most of the quotations from Assamese to English, they are translated from Assamese to English. These translated quotations are indicated by the abbreviation 'Td' along with the mention of the source, within parenthesis.
