

Chapter-IX

Conclusion

In the earlier chapters, different aspects of the historical writings of S.K.Bhuyan have been discussed. In this chapter, the findings of the observation made in this study will be summed up. In the earlier discussions it is revealed that S.K.Bhuyan wrote huge number of articles, speeches, seminar papers and books of ancient, medieval and modern period of Assam history. The subjects of these writings are mainly on the polity, society and Economy of the province of Assam. Apart from the original writings, he edited mainly twelve books with his sufficient editorial plan and interventions, out of which eleven are Assamese chronicles –the ‘Buranjis’ and the remaining one is the Buchanan Hamilton’s ‘AN ACCOUNT OF ASSAM’. He translated some of his original writings from English to Assamese or from Assamese to English. Again many of his articles or speeches were later compiled in some in some independent volumes. Although his writings deal with different subjects of different periods of Assam history, he wrote mostly on the period of the rule of Tungkhungia clan of the Ahom dynasty and the Mughal invasions in Assam. Among his original writings the following five books are most important from the viewpoints of the variety and originality of their subject matters and information-

(I) SWARGADEO RAJESWAR SINGHA

(II) ANGLO-ASSAMESE RELATIONS: 1771-1826

(III) LACHIT BARPHUDAN AND HIS TIMES

(IV) ATAN BURAGOHAIN AND HIS TIMES

(V) KOWANR BIDROH

He started to write historical writings since his school days, but he began studies and writing in history seriously since his joining as a lecturer in Cotton College in the year 1918 (July-4) and it continued till his demise in the year 1964 (July-5). His involvement with the 'Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti' the first non-governmental historical organization of Assam sharpened his awareness for the history of his motherland and accelerated his creation in the area. But his historical studies bloomed with the DHAS. Dr. Maheswar Neog has rightly said that the DHAS was his heart and soul. S.K.Bhuyan had contributed much in the foundation, growth and running of the DHAS. Likewise, most of his creations were backed by the departmental inputs and findings.

The contemporary intellectual awakening and socio-economic and political surroundings motivated him for his die-hard labour in historical studies. The newly emerged out Assamese middle class shouldered the responsibility to modernize the Assamese society. S.K.Bhuyan was also a member of this middle class grown up with the western education and colonial economy. This class characteristic influenced his historical studies and writings.

The other influences on him were the preceding historians of modern age, the role of the missionaries in the historical studies, the historical studies made by the British administrators cum historians serving in Assam, his personal studies in Indian and western historiography and western literature. There are ample internal evidences of influence of 'Plutarch's Lives', history of ancient Greece and Roman civilization and modern European history, but the medieval 'Buranjis' written in the auspices of the Ahom government influenced him in utmost level, with which he was busily engaged for their collection, preservation, editing and publication.

The sources utilized by S.K.Bhuyan in his writings are mainly (almost the all) literary sources- the Buranjis. He also utilized related Persian chronicles or the

other Indian writings, but they were utilized merely as supplementary sources. In writing up 'EARLY BRITISH RELATION WITH ASSAM' and in working out 'ANGLO-ASSAMESE RELATION: 1771-1826' a huge number of archival sources were utilized.

Writings of S.K.Bhuyan were piecemeal, monographic and Biographical. There is clear tendency of hero-worshipping in these writings. S.K.Bhuyan was an individualistic and utilitarian (not in the sense of the school of political thought by this name) historian. To him the individual will, power and strength can control the course of history. He tried casually to find out existence of general causes like underlying economic and geographical forces in analyzing the course of evolution of the society or of the nation. The individual who can work for the greater interest, who work for the nation, who are loyal to the cause of the state are ideal person. Others should follow them. From his writings, it can be known that he identified individual will as an inner force of the historical phenomena. He did not even denied the divine factor as an inner force. His writings are utilitarian because he held that History consists of some teachings that can help in the present crises. The events of history set some guidelines for the statesmen and for the common people of present or future time so that they can decide what to do or what not to do in their political and social life. From these points of view, his historical writings may be termed as idealistic.

He was dominantly a nationalist historian; of course, there are some differences between the writings of S.K.Bhuyan and the typical nationalist historians of India. The aims and objectives of his writings were the uplift of the nation. Of course by the word 'nation' and 'Desh' he did not mean the Indian nation but the land of Assam. Thus he was rather a regional-nationalist historian. Unlike the typical nationalist historians he was not critical of the colonial Government in Assam and he

wanted to harness fruits and progress with the existing system under the colonial rule. Observing his pro-British perspective, it can be opined that his historical writings are not free from imperialistic features. From that sense, his perspective of historical writings may be said as an admixture of nationalist and imperialistic historiography.

The methodology followed by S.K.Bhuyan in his writings was traditional one. He basically narrated the activities of the monarchs or of the heroes of some particular episodes of history. He was adamantly dependent on the information supplied by the crude source, mainly by the 'Buranjis'. He hardly analyzed the perspectives followed in the 'Buranjis'. His personal emotions; faiths and feelings influenced the nature of his writings. He gave advices to his Assamese fellowmen in midst of his writings, he prescribed guidelines for the progress of the Assamese 'nation', he analyzed the merits and demerits of the monarchs, nobles, common people of Assam in time of narrating particular episode or topic of Assam History from Assamese angle. His anxiety in the events of Assam history leading to deterioration or humiliation of the Assamese people found open expression. Like wise, he tried to project Assamese glory and his personal feelings of pride in the glorious activities of Assamese people also similarly found expression. Thus the objectivity was seriously disturbed in his methodology. His methodology may be said as an admixture of 'Buranji', 'Itihasa'¹ and modern 'History'.

S.K.Bhuyan was a conservative historian. Although, S.K.Bhuyan made experiment of scientific methodology in his historical writings, he was dominantly a pro-government and pro-status-quo historian. He searched the glory of Assam mainly in the rule of Ahom dynasty. He often tried to defend the weaknesses of the

¹Sreedharan, E. - A Text Book of Historiography, p.316. Apte, V.S. in his *Sanskrit English Dictionary* has taken the definition of *Itihasa* from *Mahabharata*

Ahom rulers. Like wise his love for the British rule is also not a hidden or dormant matter, but it was open and vivid. To depict the heroism of the Assamese and their glory, S.K.Bhuyan preferred the area of period of Ahom rule. He did not want to annoy the British Government by writing up their oppressions and exploitations. S.K.Bhuyan wanted to use the British administration for the uplift of Assam. He wrote on Maniram and Madhumallik after Independence. The anti British movements led by Gomdhar, Piyali Barua, Peasants movement, participation of Assam in the Independence movements and such other anti-British activities in Assam were not dealt with by him. He openly praised the British administrators and Administration in Assam. In the article 'An Asiatic Society of Assam' he wrote "*On February 24, 1826 was signed the treaty of Yandaboo by which Assam passed into the hands of the British. Let this passage of a century, which has been attended by all the beneficent advantages of our association with the most cultured minds of the world, be signalized by the foundation of an Asiatic Society of Assam. Let some Britishers, inspired by the love of learning and spirit of enquiry, which characterize his race, do for Assam...*"² S.K.Bhuyan believed in the view to grow with status quo not with protest and revolution, to grow with the ruling government not with radical peoples and to grow with the conservative social values, not with radical changes. In personal life also, S.K.Bhuyan noticed the good qualities of the people he met and was indifferent to the bad aspects. This aspect of the personality of S.K.Bhuyan influenced his writings, which to a great extent made it blunt the sharp critical approach essential for an unbiased historical observation and writing

Main drawbacks of his writings are the repetitions; self contradiction in perspectives and contradictions with facts; too much dependence on the utterances than the actions in analyzing the personalities of the characters of Assam history; too

² Bhuyan, S.K. - Studies in the History of Assam, p. 200

much dependence on the chronicles as source-material; lack of analysis of the information supplied by the sources; biased favoritism for the rulers; apathy for the rebels, invaders or the conspirators; acceptance of unscientific explanation or information at least in nominal , influence of personal emotion, faith and feelings and literary influence.

The causes of these drawbacks may be summed up as follows-

- (i) Lack of proper planning in writing up the books or the other writings can be felt in the writings of S.K.Bhuyan. Had S.K.Bhuyan taken some care and showed some patience to plan his writings, his writings would have been more valuable. He wrote most of his writings, whenever he felt an urge to meet the demand of his society and the country. He wrote more for contemporary political and social requirements than for intellectual quest. In doing so he started to write on a subject with the materials whatever he had in his disposal. All these resulted in repetitions in his writings, upgrading of his writings time to time and lack of intense reflection in the subject.
- (ii) His multifaceted engagements in both governmental and non-governmental activities in different period of life lessened his time to give more attention in the historical studies. For example, He served as lecturer in English at Cotton College; as Asstt. Director and Director of the DHAS; as DPI, Assam; as special university officer; as Vice-Chancellor, G.U.; and as M.P. Apart from these responsible Governmental duties, he was involved in other social activities also. In exerting the administrative duties or other duties connected with these services, he had to devote sufficient time, energy and attention of his life. He did not have the opportunity to devote exclusive devotion with time, energy and attention in the studies of history. It was his passion that motivated to spare time for historical studies.

(iii) Untrained historian: A.L. Rowse opined in regard to Macaulay and Carlyle by quoting Trevelyan, *“Trevelyan thinks that ‘Macaulay and Carlyle themselves would have been even better historians than they were if they had been thorough and academic course of history such as they could have got if they had lived at the end of the nineteenth century instead of at the beginning.’ I wonder. They might have been less biased, more accurate; they would certainly have been less passionate, less coloured, less vivid”*³

These few lines are befitting for the Assamese historian S.K.Bhuyan. He had studied History as a curricular subject only till his school days. He studied English literature in his college education and appointed as a lecturer in English at Cotton College. It was his passion and a sense of patriotic duty to his motherland that motivated him to write ‘AHOMAR DIN’ in his school days and to work in the arena of historical studies of Assam in his later life. No doubt he lived in an age of enthusiasm for historical studies in Assam and was in close contacts of scholars of History, both native and foreigner, these were not sufficient for him to acquire the skill of a professional historian with academic background in History. He had some experiences in archival activities, he got guidance of some famous historian in working out his thesis, but these trainings proved to be casual in his later creations. He himself was aware of limitation in this respect. Although, it was an expression of his humility, in his presidential speech delivered in the Modern History Section of Fifteenth Gwalior session of Indian History Congress, he rightly admitted, *“I am not a professed student or a trained teacher of history like many of you assembled here I had to earn my bread by teaching Shakespeare and Milton. But history has been my beloved pursuit to which I have consecrated all my thoughts and my energy”*⁴

³ Rowse, A.L.- The use of History, p.69

⁴ The speech, para-2

(iv) The time spirit: In regard to impact of time spirit in historical writings Rowse commented, *“There is something childish about the uncultivated man. Not to have a sense of time is like having no ear or sense of beauty- it is to be bereft of a faculty...the time sense of most uneducated people is equally childish: they are not adult. Even educated people lose a lot of subtlety in understanding things through not looking at them historically. I never cease to be taken aback by people’s short-term judgment of nations and peoples-...you cannot tell what a people really are until you see them in a long- term perspective. It is like expecting to know a man from one moment’s look at him. And nations are much more complicated”*⁵

Although, Rowse quoted these few lines in a different context of the impact of time spirit in history, the spirit in these lines is applicable to the writings of S.K.Bhuyan also. The period of historiography of Assam, in which S.K.Bhuyan lived, was a conjecture of medieval and modern age-i.e in the conjecture of feudalistic historiography of medieval Assam and European modern historiography; he was born and brought up in a personal conservative culture of his family but he received a materialistic western modern education (with highest academic degree of a reputed western university); The environment in which, he was born of brought up lacked of scientific temperament- new western education in Assam was introduced in Assam comparatively in later than other parts of India.-the people lived generally with dogmatic ideas, superstitions, misbelieves; lack of sufficient scientific equipments- he could avail the facility of the modern equipments like a typewriter and a printing press but had he found the opportunity to use some instruments like ‘Photo-state’ machine, Computer Scanner and typing or a electronic microfilming system of our age, he could have done more and better than he did. All these contradictory features of his age found reflection in his writings. So it will not be justified to judge the

⁵ op cit, pp.134-135

writings of S.K.Bhuyan with a viewpoint of modern age. In other words, a reader must keep in his mind the social, economic, political, cultural environment in which S.K.Bhuyan lived and wrote his writings.

(v) Patriotic emotion and purposeful writing are also to some extent corollary to the impact of time spirit, which is discussed in the above paragraph. S.K.Bhuyan wrote history to inspire his fellow Assamese people, to give new vision and enthusiasm, which was felt necessary in the new changed political, social, cultural, economic situation with the introduction of British rule in Assam. He played the role of defender and protector of the Assamese identity and wanted to glorify it through his historical writings and studies. So his writings were guided by his pre assumptions and intention. These pre assumption and intentions can be understood both by his open statements, exposed and latent messages, which pass to the readers through his writings.

Richness in information is the most important positive aspect of his writing. In writing up a book on particular topic he assembled huge information, facts and figures from different sources. Moreover he narrated the events in minutest detail. He brought the characters and episodes of Assam history to limelight and into public focus. He focused upon the outstanding qualities of the figures of Assam history. He could see the importance of some characters, issues and subjects, which are apparently not important. He focused upon those points and drawn attention of the scholars as well as of the common readers. He was aware how an outwardly unimportant subject sometimes could change the course of history. He focused upon them and the things begin to illuminate with its greatness. In other words, the importance of a thing, latent or exposed could hardly escape his keen attentive eye.

Another positive aspect in his writing is that he tried to draw attention of his readers to similar events or characters in the histories of other countries, throughout

the world while discussing some characters or events of Assam history. In this way he tried to pass the message that the people of Assam also can progress in the rhythm of progress made by those other powerful countries of the world. What the Assamese people need are the self-respect, confidence and awareness for their own inherent strength.

He was self-critical about his writings. He was aware of his limitations. He continuously upgraded his writings and amended them whenever new materials came to his disposal. Whenever he could have not settled some points, he pointed out them to his readers and asked the posterior scholars to do research on those points. S.K.Bhuyan was not a historian for scholar's sake alone. He was a scholar both for the common readers and the scholars. He not only wrote books for the readers, but also worked for the mass awareness for the history of their motherland. He attended public gatherings and conveyed the glorious past of their predecessors. He advised them what to do and what not to do for the uplift of the nation. To a great extent he taught the masses to boast of the heroes, and some past achievements. So the writings, particularly some of his articles, which were meant for the common audiences, do not have new information and cannot be said as invaluable from academic point of view.

Original historical writings are not the only contribution of S.K.Bhuyan to the historiography of Assam. In fact, he did more, and more important works than his original writings for the historiography of Assam. These works can serve as invaluable repositories of information. More over what he did for the historical studies in Assam is equally important in the historiography of Assam.

The initiative taken by the American Baptist Mission to collect the manuscripts took a form of movement in later by the efforts made by the KAS and DHAS. While the KAS had been already a well-established non-governmental

organization for historical studies and research on Assam, when S.K.Bhuyan got involved with it, the DHAS was creation of S.K.Bhuyan (in the patronage of Government). The huge number and large varieties of manuscripts collected by the two organizations are invaluable assets for the historical studies of Assam. These manuscripts immensely contributed in the reconstruction of Assam history in modern times. These literary sources provide information regarding the religious, social, economic, political, historical, intellectual activities of Assam since the days of ancient Kamrupa. There are still some manuscripts, which are not yet published and there are raw-information not yet utilized. S.K.Bhuyan prepared catalogues of the collected manuscripts and transcripts. He edited some of them and some others were by other scholars. The chronicles edited by him throw light on the history of Ahom Government. The publication of these chronicles has made them easily available for the researchers and historical writers.

The DHAS has a library- the library with its invaluable manuscripts, old and new journals, magazines and invaluable books, has been helping the researchers. It is noteworthy that the family of S.K.Bhuyan has donated five wooden Almirahs full of books to this library. A separate room was arranged for preserving and reading these collections of S.K.Bhuyan in the DHAS.

S.K.Bhuyan prepared a Bibliography of the historical articles in the contemporary magazines. Expecting it that the act of preparing such bibliography will be continued either by him in later or by posterity, the bibliography was termed as the first part *BURANJIMULAK PRABANDHAVALIR TALIKA-PRATHAM KHANDA*). In this Bibliography, articles published in forty-three (43) different (magazines are listed and it includes names of three hundred and twenty-one (321) writers. He set an example of compiling such a bibliography. Such a bibliography

can help a researcher to search and to access those invaluable articles scattered in different magazines written by different persons in different times.

The passionate study of S.K.Bhuyan in the history of Assam till his demise, his keen attention and observation on archaeological remains, social, cultural, economic, and political issues gave him an authoritative hold in the history of Assam. During the colonial period, the colonial government in Assam and in the post- independence period Indian and Assam Governments sought opinions, remarks and advices from him on the critical issues and situations, which demanded authoritative solutions from historical point of view. Some scholars like Dr. Maheswar Neog, Dr.H.K.Barpuzari, Dr.Laksmi Devi, Dr.Lila Gogoi, C.P.Saikia, Dr.P.C.Choudhuri, Dr.Birinchi Kumar Barua and many more were benefited with the personal guidance, and contact of S.K.Bhuyan in their scholastic creations. His creations not only inspired the Assamese mass and intellectual, but also *“of the limitations under, which he is labouring, Dr. Bhuyan has been able to rouse in spite interest in Assamese history and civilization among eminent historical scholars in India and Europe.”*⁶

S.K.Bhuyan has been successful in establishing and popularizing some figures and episodes of Assam history as the symbols of patriotism, heroism and national unity. He has been successful arousing patriotism among Assamese people of his age and the posterity. He has been successful in popularizing history reading among common readers with his lucid literary language. He has been successful to draw attention of the many contemporary and posterior Indian and International scholars of repute and fame towards history of Assam through his writings. He has been successful in organizing historical studies of Assam with modern way investigation and research.

⁶ Kakati, B.K.- Dr. Bhuyan's Literary and Historical Output, SKB Comm. Vol. P. 33

S.K.Bhuyan was a disciplinarian in his personal life, in exertion of the official duties in different Governmental services. He did not waste time in idle. he kept a red pencil, a sealing-wax, a piece of linen to wipe the excess ink, blotting paper, postage stamp or such other thing necessary for reading, writing, publishing books, at his easy reach ready for use. He systematically preserved his personal collections of books, magazines, Journals, paper cuttings, personal letters, his writings, biographical records and official documents. He lived amidst and in contact and company of different scholars, researchers, literature, which kept his intellectual urge always active and fresh. All these were stimulants and conducive to his creations, which he accomplished with strenuous labour throughout his life.

He encouraged the students and researchers in their studies and research activities with his helping hand and guidance. It has come to the notice of this researcher that the culture of helping and guiding the researchers is carried on by his family till present days. Several research scholars, scholars were seen to visit his family in search of some old volumes of old books, magazines and other materials for their research work. He utilized all the mediums available at his time to promote the good things of the history of Assam- Seminars, public gatherings, books, magazines, Newspapers, Radio at Assam, other part of India and at foreign countries. Cunningham created a post for Dr Bhuyan in English Department of Cotton College, where in S.K.Bhuyan was appointed, which fulfilled the aspirations of the people for appointment of an Assamese teacher for the College. The career in College, that too in Cotton College, which is situated at the center place of Guwahati, gave him the opportunity to pursue his interest in historical research of Assam. His vast contributions in historical studies of Assam were duly recognized by different sections of people both native and foreign and were honoured both by Colonial and Independent Indian Governments. The later honoured him with

bestowing 'Padmasree', nominating member of the Council of States and appointing him as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Gauhati. Selection as the president of Modern history section of Indian History Congress at Gwalior session (1952) and the President of Asam Sahitya Sabha, Shillong session (1953) are recognitions made by Scholars Community, the littérateur's Community and of the loving common masses.

If the contributions of S.K.Bhuyan as an activist in the historical studies on Assam are compared to his reconstructions, his contributions as an activist, as revealed in this study, are more important, useful and immense. Here in this place, it may be re-quoted the saying of Prof. Browne, the Cambridge Orientalist that "*He who would write a flawless books writes nothing Even the most imperfect book, if it breaks fresh ground, may though itself doomed to oblivion, prepare the way for a better.*"⁷ It cannot be denied that there are some flaws in the writings of S.K.Bhuyan. but his writings broke some fresh grounds and has prepared the way for a better. In spite of the flaws, his writings have not yet doomed to oblivion. The inherent merits of his writings and his other activities in the historical studies of Assam have kept them still alive and monumental.

The unpublished writings of S.K.Bhuyan and his personal files are valuable asset for historical studies on Assam. These should be published and thus these can be saved from being lost forever.

Chronicles were written in Assam as a tradition in the medieval period. Most of them are anonymous. Names of some chroniclers are recorded. In modern times many scholars, contemporary, before and after S.K.Bhuyan, have contributed to the historiography of Assam. Some of their creations, no doubt, more objectives, more scientific, more critical, more informative, but among them the name of S.K.Bhuyan

⁷ Bhuyan, S.K.-LBHT- pp. xii-xiii

still finds prominence. He contributed to the historiography of Assam in such a way that his works stand like the gateway to the historiography of Assam and no research work in the history of Assam in general and medieval period of Assam in particular is possible without taking the help of the creations and contributions of S.K.Bhuyan.
