



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, his 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.

Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan was born in January 1894, was educated at Nowgong, Shillong, Gauhati, Calcutta and the School of Oriental Studies in London. He passed M.A. in English Literature, Bachelor of Law Examination in the field of History, Faculty of Arts, London University, and the Examination for the D. Lit. degree of London University.

*Studies in the History of Assam* contains a number of learned papers of historical interest written by the late-lamented historian, Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan, between the years 1925 and 1961. They will throw light on some aspects of the subject. Most of them have been published or broadcast before. But as they lie scattered in different periodicals and journals, the average reader is not expected to have a ready access to them. They are, therefore, here put together and published under one cover. A few pieces on the present state of historical research in Assam have been added to serve as guide and a stimulus.

## WORKS BY DR. S. K. BHUYAN

### ENGLISH :

- ANGLO-ASSAMESE RELATIONS, 1771-1826.  
LACHIT BARPHUDAN AND HIS TIMES.  
ATAN BURAGOHAIN AND HIS TIMES.  
ANNALS OF THE DELHI BADSHAHATE.  
STUDIES IN THE LITERATURE OF ASSAM.  
STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF ASSAM.  
·TUNGKHUNGIYA BURANJI. A CHRONICLE OF ASSAM, 1681-1826.  
AN ASSAMESE NUR JAHAN. QUEEN PHULESWARI DEVI.  
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ASSAM IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. A SERIAL IN *Assam Review*.  
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE WORKS OF DR. S. K. BHUYAN.  
SOME LITERARY REMINISCENCES.  
MEN I HAVE MET.  
AN EDUCATIONAL MISCELLANY. *Ready for the press.*

### ASSAMESE :

- GOPAL KRISHNA GOKHALE. A SHORT BIOGRAPHY.  
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CHANEKI. LIFE-SKETCHES OF EMINENT WOMEN.  
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MIR JUMLAR ASSAM AKRAMAN.  
BURANJIMULAK PRABANDHAVALIR TALIKA.  
HISTORY OF KING RAJESWAR SINGHA, 1751-69. *In the press.*  
TRIPADI. ESSAYS ON ASSAM'S CULTURE AND LITERATURE.  
HARIHAR ATA. A GREAT VAISNAVA SAINT OF ASSAM.  
LACHIT BARPHUDAN. NATIONAL BOOK TRUST OF INDIA.

### ASSAMESE CHRONICLES, EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION IN ENGLISH :

- ASSAM BURANJI, BY HARAKANTA BARUA SARDAR-AMIN.  
KAMRUPAR BURANJI. HISTORY OF ASSAM-MOGUL CONFLICTS.  
DEODHAI ASAM BURANJI. CHRONICLES OF EARLY AHOM HISTORY.  
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JAYANTIA BURANJI. A CHRONICLE OF JAYANTIA RAJAS.  
TRIPURA BURANJI. BY RATNA KANDALI AND ARJUNDAS.  
ASSAM BURANJI, OBTAINED FROM SUKUMAR MAHANTA'S FAMILY.  
SATSARI ASSAM BURANJI. SEVEN OLD CHRONICLES.
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# STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF ASSAM



BY

**SURYYA KUMAR BHUYAN**

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## FOREWORD

When Professor Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan passed away peacefully in the American Baptist Mission Hospital at Chatribari, Gauhati, in the morning of the 5th of July 1964, the most enlightened and scientific brain at work in the field of Assam's history was lost. He was one of the foremost scholars of Indian history, and his was a name of honour and value in noted centres of historical studies in India. Early in his career his works were received with approbation by such eminent persons as Sir Edward A. Gait, Lt.-Col. P.R.T. Gurdon and Lt.-Col. Sir Wolsey Haig on the pages of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, the *Bulletin of Oriental and African Studies*, London, and the *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, Leipzig.

Born in 1894 in the small town of Nowgong, Suryya Kumar Bhuyan had his early education in the Government High Schools at his native place and Shillong and Cotton College, Gauhati. From the last institution he passed the Intermediate Examination in Arts of Calcutta University with credit in 1911. He had his B.A. Honours and M.A. in English Literature from the Presidency College, Calcutta, and his B.L. from the Calcutta University Law College. He was appointed Professor of English at Cotton College from the 4th of July 1918. A serious student of literature, Bhuyan's intellectual interests soon gravitated towards biographical and historical studies. In 1918 was published a small but significant work of his, *Āhomar Din*, a treatise on the Ahom system of administration, which indicated, as it were, the direction in which wind of Bhuyan's life was to blow. A poet of no mean degree, he also published in the same year a collection of his beautiful lyrics, *Nirmāli*, to be followed in 1920 by the historical narrative, *Jaymati Upākhyān* in the traditional metre, style and language of Vaishnava poetry. His *Anūdoram Borooh* (1920) is an important biographical work, betraying

a great deal of painstaking over widely scattered materials about the great Sanskritist of Assam (1851-1889), who died young at the age of thirty-nine. Bhuyan continued his literary pursuit with great vigour, was prolific in his valued contributions to current Assamese journals, and associated himself actively with the Kāmarupa Anusandhān Samiti (Assam Research Society), having acted as its Honorary Secretary in 1921-22 and again in 1926-29. But the work that was to move the tide with great force to make the great historian in him was *Early British Relations with Assam* (1927). The then Director of Public Instruction in Assam, J. R. Cunningham, saw the manuscript copy of this small book, was fascinated to realise its value, and arranged with the Government to publish it. Cunningham, being inspired by the same book, induced the Government to establish the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, with A. H. W. Bentinck as Honorary Director, and Professor Bhuyan and J. P. Mills as Honorary Assistant Directors. But it was Bhuyan who became the life and soul of the Department by putting in all the time he could spare at the service of the Department. With immense labour he collected a number of manuscripts of great historical value, collated and edited some of them on modern critical lines with introductions in English and Assamese, and published them through the new Department. In 1933 Professor Bhuyan became its full-fledged Honorary Director; and in 1936 the Department's house, Narayani Handiqui Historical Institute, built on a magnificent donation of the philanthropist, Radhakanta Handiqui, was formally declared open. The five Bulletins of the Department brought out so far show on what sound foundation Bhuyan was building this fine institution.

In 1936 Professor Bhuyan proceeded to the United Kingdom and joined the School of Oriental and African Studies to work under the guidance of Professor H. H. Dodwell. His dissertation, *Anglo-Assamese Relations, 1771-1826* (1947), which was to be his magnum opus, was approved in 1938 for the Ph.D. degree of London University. At the School he acted as Additional Lecturer in Assamese, and his short stay in England also gave him the opportunity to work at the old Assam records at the India Office Library.

After his return from the U.K. Dr. Bhuyan re-joined Cotton College. He served the Government from time to time in other capacities—as Special University Officer in 1940-41, as Inspector of School in 1941-42 and as Principal of the College for a brief spell in 1946. But all the time he continued to be the Honorary Director of the Historical and Antiquarian Studies, and became its whole-time Director in January 1947, being relieved of his duties at Cotton College. He became Director of Public Instruction for Assam in 1948-49, but having retired from that office on the 31st March 1949, again took whole-time charge of the Historical Department. He was elected Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University in 1958, and steered the course of that centre of learning for a full term of three years. After that Dr. Bhuyan was living a fully retired life ; but he did not, all the same, retire from the passion of his life, history and literature. Even when he was growing physically feeble and finding it difficult to write an easy and clear hand, he plied the type-writer to catch his teeming thoughts, and this piece of modern device remained his close friend till even the last hours of his life. I have not seen a life more dedicated and self-made, more planned and better spread-out. One has to see only the well made out bibliographies attached to his published works and the many files which he maintained for all the different subjects connected with his studies and ordinary things of life in order to be convinced of his neat method of living. Even when, just a few hours before his last breath, he got into the car to go to the hospital, he did not forget to take his personal file with earlier medical records and his small attache case with pen, pencil, knife and other tit-bits. It is precisely because of this method, which he probably picked up very early in his life, that he was able to put up a large amount of achievement packed into the duration of one single life in this distant corner of the world. Even in his Bibliography of Works we must needs have a list of proposed publications, divided into books ready for press, books in the course of preparation and contemplated compilations.

Throughout his busy career Dr. Bhuyan was associated with a number of literary, historical and cultural bodies in the country. He was a Corresponding Member of the Indian Historical Records Commission in 1928-47 ; President of the Com-

mittee for the translation of the Indian Constitution into Assamese, 1949; Chairman of the Regional Survey Committee under the auspices of the Indian Historical Records Commission, 1955. He was a member of the Executive Council of Gauhati University since almost its inception in 1949, and a member of the Committee appointed by the University Grants Commission and the Government of India Ministry of Education to consider the question of setting up a University for the North-Eastern region of India, which is now in the offing. He presided over the Modern History Section of the Indian History Congress held at Gwalior in December 1952, the Local History Section of the Congress held at Gauhati in December 1959 and the Shillong Session of Asam Sahitya Sabha in 1953. Dr. Bhuyan was a member of the Rajya Sabha in 1952-54.

Dr. Bhuyan will perhaps live with posterity as an eminent historian. But he was a poet, as already mentioned, and a 'pure' litterateur too. A few of his poems, written when he was young, strike a high level of sublimity and beauty. He wrote a sheaf of short stories too (*Panchami*, 1927). He took the rôle of a folklorist when he collected and published (1924) with a critical introduction the valuable historical ballad centering around Badanchandra Barphukan, an Ahom officer who invited the Burmese hordes to Assam only to lay it under devastation. He made biography his fortè when he published his works on Gopalkrishna Gokhale (1916), Rabindranath Tagore (1920), Anundoram Borooah (1920), Rani Phuleswari (*An Assamese Nur Jahan*, 1926) and sketches of other eminent women in *Chāneki* (1928), *Asam-jiyari* (1935), and *Ramani Gābharu* (1951), and a sketch of the eccentric Vaishnava saint, *Harihara Ātā* (1960), or when as a historian he made a prominent figure in Assam's past the signal for the study of an epoch, as in *Swargadeo Rājeswar Singha* (in the press), *Lachit Barphukan and His Times* (1947) and *Atan Buragohain and His Times* (1957). His *Mir Jumlār Asam Ākraman* (1955) is a close study of the Mogul invasion of Assam under Nawab Mir Jumla in 1662-63. In all these works, whether in Assamese or in English, his style has the ring of an unmistakable sincerity combined with a sweet literary flourish. His keen dramatic sense, which helped him see the dead past as a living phenomenon, is well brought

out when he pictures the Ahom princes, Ramani Gābharu, married to Aurazeb's third son, Azam Shah, prattling love and politics to her consort, or when he imagines the Macbeth-like general, Laluk Barphukan, soliloquising. It was Dr. Bhuyan, among others, who rendered the historical essay in Assamese into a distinct literary form as in *Āhomar Din* and *Buranjir Vāni* (1951). His *Tripadi* represents three aspects of Assam's literature, history and culture in three straightforward essays. Dr. Bhuyan has to his credit other essays in criticism in English as in *Studies in the Literature of Assam* (1956) and autobiographical sketches as in *The Seven Hindrances* (1953), *Some Literary Reminiscences* (1954) and *Men I have Met* (1962).

Dr. Bhuyan's original research in the field of history consisted of, beside his independent treatises, the modern editions of quite a good number Assamese chronicles, called buranji, and other old records : Harakanta Barua's *Asam Buranji* (1930), *Kāmrupar Buranji* (1930), *Deodhāi Asam Buranji* (1932), *Tungkhungiya Buranji* (1933), *Asamar Padya Buranji* (1933), *Pādshā Buranji* (1935), *Kachāri Buranji* (1936), *Jayantiā Buranji* (1937), *Tripurā Buranji* (1938), Francis Buchanan's *An Account of Assam* (1940), *Asam Buranji recovered from North Gauhati* (1945) and *Sātsari Asam Buranji* (1960). These acquainted the student of history with original materials on which to build a scientific history of Assam. Professor Bhuyan translated the whole of the *Tungkhungiya Buranji* into English (1933) with additional matter bringing the account up to the end of the Ahom rule in Assam in 1826. He himself showed how to reconstruct history on a wide scale in his *Angla-Assamese Relations*. The fresh materials about Mogul India which he discovered from Assamese sources have been marshalled in his *Annals of the Delhi Badshate* (1947).

Yet another branch of useful investigation, which we are generally apt to neglect but cannot afford to, Dr. Bhuyan made his domain. This is bibliographical study. His own views on its utility is worth quoting here : "In a place like Assam, where there are no proper facilities for publication, where there are no libraries containing complete volumes of old periodicals, and where there are no arrangements for preserving traces of an author's writings, they have every possibility of being completely

blotted out of human memory though there may be materials enough in those writings which may prove useful as a source of information and entertainment, as well as a means of edification and inspiration. Some kindred spirit may take up the cue in future and complete the work commenced, suggested or hinted at by a preceding author. Continuity is thus maintained between the literary activities of one period and those of subsequent ages." He has left us the bibliography of his own works as well as very useful ones on the subjects of history and literature of Assam.

In the above I have mentioned only those works of the scholar which have been made public in book form. Quite a large number of his writings, however, lie away from common reach. One reads with avidity Dr. Bhuyan's charming reminiscences of his stay in England in a magnificent English, taken from his unpublished *London Memories* and printed in the columns of *The Assam Tribune*. The autobiogramemoir of his childhood days and of his rambles in the realms of history come out equally magnificently in *The Story of My Life* and *A Historian's Haversack*, which he delighted in occasionally listening to being read out by some intimate visitor to his quiet study.

The present volume represents the learned writer's studies in the field of Assam's history dealing with a variety of topics and spread over quiet a long period, from 1926 to 1961. These are in a way only splinters from Dr. Bhuyan's historical workshop. This is, moreover, a companion volume to his earlier publication, *Studies in the Literature of Assam*, which also includes a few papers on historical subjects.

The Assamese people have the proud tradition "in a branch of study in which India, as a rule, is curiously deficient", as Sir George Abraham Grierson says, meaning history and referring to the "numerous and voluminous" chronicles (buranji). These ancient writings cover not only the annals of Assam, beginning with its early semi-legendary rulers, but also interesting accounts of countries having some diplomatic relations with the local Administration. It is the Ahoms who brought this tradition of chronicles into Assam. Dr. Bhuyan explored the buranjis in

the true spirit of a serious student of history. The essays in the following pages give us the meaning and significance that he found in the past of this part of the country. They also bring to us a panorama, not very comprehensive though, of this past, giving a view of Assam's administrative and military systems, of great events in its annals, of its notable men and women (like Amritaprabha, Lachit Barphukan, Atan Buragohain and Maniram Dewan) and those others who came as invaders (like Mir Jumla and Ram Singha) or as investigators (like Shihabuddin Talish and Dr. John Peter Wade). Of great interest are Dr. Bhuyan's scheme for the creation of an Asiatic Society of Assam (This, it may be noted, was presented at a meeting of the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti in March 1927 while the Assam Government Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies came into being the following June, thus fulfilling at least some of his expectations.) and his survey, 'Historical research in Assam', coming in a line with Sir E.A. Gait's *Report on Historical Research in Assam*. Sometime before his death Dr. Bhuyan was requested by Assam's enthusiastic Education Minister, Shri Devkanta Borooah, to take up the work of writing or compiling a comprehensive history of Kamarupa-Assam with the co-operation of other local writers. He made out a tentative plan, which Time would not allow him to fulfil; but his 'Bibliography of Assam History' is sure to offer the proper guide to such a project, which now devolves on younger scholars in the field. It is thus that the savant would happily project himself into the future scholarship of Assam.

By Dr. Maheswar Neog



**DR. SURYYA KUMAR BHUYAN**

*Born January 27, 1894*

*Died July 5, 1964*

## PREFACE

The present volume *Studies in the History of Assam* contains a number of articles of historical interest written by the author between the years 1925 and 1961. It is hoped that they will throw light on some aspects of the subject. Most of them have been published or broadcast before. But as they lie scattered in different periodicals and journals the average reader is not expected to have a ready access to them. They are therefore collected together and published under one cover. A few pieces on the present state of historical research in Assam have been added to serve as a guide and a stimulus. The details of publication, together with other relevant information, have been inserted in the Bibliographical Notes in Appendix.

The present book is meant to serve as a companion volume to the earlier one *Studies in the Literature of Assam*. The border line between a historical article and literary one being very thin several pieces of historical interest were incorporated in the earlier volume. I hope readers will consider the two books as being of one intent and purpose, namely the unfolding of the culture and history of Assam.

The date of compilation has been noted at the end of each article, to indicate the extent of information available on the subject or the position of historical research at that time. Some repetitions have been unavoidable, as the articles were written at different times, and an attempt was made in each case to make it as independent and self-complete as possible.

Lastly, I embrace this opportunity to acknowledge my indebtedness to the periodicals, organisations and institutions through whose kind instrumentality the studies were first brought to light : Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti or the Assam Research Society, Assam Government Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Indian Historical Records Commission, Hills-Plains Peoples' Week Celebration at Shillong in November 1947, Gauhati University Postgraduate Students Union, Gauhati Centre of the All India Radio, Reception Committee of the 63rd Session of the Indian National Congress held at Gauhati in January 1958, Reception Committee of the 22nd Session of the Indian History Congress held at Gauhati in December 1959: Journal of Indian History, Madras ; Assam Review, Silchar ; Bengal : Past and Present, Calcutta ; Assam Tribune, Gauhati ; Lucknow Herald ; Dainik Asamiya, Gauhati ; Amrita Bazar Patrika, Calcutta ; Frontier Times, Shillong. I am also thankful to the authorities of the Assam Secretariat Record Room and the West Bengal Government Record Room for kindly furnishing copies of papers preserved in their respective archives.

Company Bagan Road,  
Gauhati, Assam.  
*The 15th February, 1962.*

S. K. BHUYAN

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# STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF ASSAM

## ASSAM THROUGH THE AGES

The most curious thing about Assam is the conspicuous ignorance about it on the part of my countrymen in India and my fellow mortals in other parts of the world. This ignorance has persisted since olden times. European merchants trading with Assam in the eighteenth century regretted that they knew very little about Assam as about the interior parts of China. At the present time, the situation seems to be improved to some extent owing to the constant visits of men and women from other parts of India, the publicity given by the press and the Government, and the publication of books in English throwing light on different aspects of Assam. As Assam was a base for military operations during World War II, a great deal of attention was focussed on it in that momentous period.

Those who have seen Assam have been charmed by its natural attractions and the simplicity and candour of its inhabitants. The attractions are so irresistible that an outsider living in Assam for a short time do not desire to go back to his native land which gave rise to the report that the people of Assam can transform a man into a lamb; and serious-minded

persons whom I met in Delhi and elsewhere had asked me whether it was a fact. Stories of witchcraft and magic practised by Assam's men and women are current all over India ; and Ram Singha, the Rajput Raja of Amber, invading Assam in 1669-71, brought with him a number of Muslim saints to undo the effects of Kamrupi black arts. Some years ago, an Urdu book, entitled *Kamrup-ki-jadu*, was published from Bareilly. So, in the popular conception of India, Assam's importance lies in its thaumaturgy. Malaria and general unhealthiness are other factors associated with Assam. It is believed that generals whom the Mogul emperors wanted to get rid of were sent to Assam to die here from the effects of its pestilential climate.

But the story is not like that. Assam is a very ancient country with a distinct culture and civilisation of its own, which if properly studied and understood will be an object of amazement and admiration. The elements of this culture and civilisation have begun to be explored comparatively recently ; and fragments which have come out have never failed to create respect for Assam and its people.

The most outstanding feature of Assam's pre-eminence in the ideals of human perfection reveals itself in an inscription of the eleventh century. Speaking of the capital of Pragjyotishpur, the inscription says,—

“It is adorned by learned men, religious preceptors and poets, who have made it their place of resort, just as the sky is adorned by Mercury, Jupiter and Venus. . . . Here, dullness might be observed in necklaces, but not in the senses of its inhabitants ; fickleness in

apes, but not in their minds ; changefulness in the motions of their eyebrows, but not in promises ; accidents happening to things, but not to the subjects."

The inscription goes on to record the military fortifications of the capital,

"Like the cloth which protects the king's broad chest, its boundaries were encompassed by a rampart, furnished with a fence strong like that used for the game-birds of the Cakas, fit to cause chagrin to the king of Gurjara, to give fever to the untameable elephants of the chief of Gaura, to act like bitumen in the earth to the lord of Kerala, to strike awe into the Bahikas and the Taikas, to cause discomfiture to the master of the Deccan country ; and generally to serve for the purpose of discomfiting the king's enemies. It is rendered beautiful by the river Lauhitya."

The above statements regarding the contents of the capital of ancient Assam remind us of the claim made by Pericles that the Athenians were lovers of beauty without extravagance, and lovers of wisdom without unmanliness. Men who cherished the above ideal about their capital could not be citizens of a mean city. This ideal has influenced their minds throughout the ages. The study of the process by which Assam has acted in consonance with the spirit of this ideal, in different branches of human activities, material, intellectual and spiritual, is an object lesson of the highest value to all mankind.

The factor which has shaped the history and culture of Assam is its geographical situation. Some thirty years ago, a British officer had appropriately

suggested Arva, Flumina, Montes,—cultivated plains, rivers and mountains—as a motto for a coat-of-arms for the province of Assam. The river Brahmaputra, or Lauhitya as it is sometimes called, flows from one extremity to the other. The neighbouring plains have been the home of people from ages past. Here have flourished in full splendour the arts of war and peace. The Brahmaputra has provided a mighty channel for commercial communication. Soldiers going out of Assam, and coming into Assam, have used that river as their means of transport. It has been a sacred outlet for pilgrims visiting the holy shrines of India. It has served as the life-line of Assam, and has contributed to the fertility and verdure of its soil. The tributaries have served as riparian arteries of the main channel. In a sense, the civilisation of Assam can be called Lauhitya Civilisation.

The Brahmaputra plains have naturally been selected as the habitat of its settled population; while the martial races, tribes as we call them, have preferred to live mostly in the hills for their assured immunity from floods and inundations. But their contacts with the plains people have been maintained from time immemorial, necessitated by the law of inter-dependence and mutual benefit. The intimacy of this contact is seen in the invariable practice of a plainsman accosting a hillman by the word *Mita*, which means a friend, being derived from the Sanskrit word *Mitra*. This Mita-hood has served as the symbol of unfailing good-will and understanding between plains people and their brothers and sisters living in the hills.

It should not however be assumed that the tribals live only in the hills. Many of them live in the plains following their own customs and practices. They mix

freely and intimately with their Hindu neighbours, and the history of Assam is replete with examples of their imbibing the manners of their neighbours.

In fact, if the Aryans of Assam were left alone to carve out their destiny they would have cut a very sorry figure. It is a well-known fact that Aryans, engaged in the arts of refinement and in speculations about the life to come, become gradually enervated; and unless the population is constantly reinforced by the enduring muscles of the martial tribal races their position in military conflicts becomes a precarious one. In Assam, the inevitable physical deterioration of the people was checked by the influx of tribal elements. The armies of Assam presented a spectacle of the assemblage of non-tribals and tribals. This combination of intellect and vigour conferred on Assam the perennial prestige of being successful resisters of foreign invasions. While a large part of India had been subject to foreign domination, Assam kept her flag of independence flying throughout the ages. This continued independence enabled Assam to shape its own pattern of society and culture, and to formulate a philosophy of life which is marked by vitality and vision.

Assam's civilisation is catholic and universal. Though living in a sequestered region, the people have received ungrudgingly all the good things that the Gangetic Valley has to offer. This open-mindedness has brought Assam within the cultural hegemony of India without eclipsing its own inherent traditions and ideals. The time has now come when the Gangetic Valley should study the redeeming elements of the civilisation of its Lauhitya counterpart.

As we have said, the first significant feature of

Assam's civilisation is the part that non-Aryans have played in moulding and shaping it. Turning to the epical age, we find the great hero Bhagadatta, king of Kamarupa, appearing in the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the head of his Kirata legions whose array and splendour caused terror and dismay in the hearts of the warriors. In the seventh century A.D., the throne of Kamarupa, occupied so long by princes of the line of Bhagadatta, was wrested by a tribal leader named Salastambha who was succeeded by twenty-one monarchs of his line. The Ahoms who conquered Assam in the beginning of the thirteenth century, and who have contributed so much to the growth of Assam's culture, were of non-Aryan origin. They came gradually under the influence of Hinduism, and became ardent and liberal patrons of that religion.

The necessity to encourage the non-Aryans to enter the Aryan fold, and remain there as faithful adherents, led to the development of a code which would be popular amongst the new entrants. Buddhism had anticipated this necessity and had accordingly modified its practices and rites under the name Vajrayana, which of course denotes a debased form as contrasted with the original tenets. The Hindus admitted the same practices, and gave them a new label—Tantricism. The esoteric and secret character of these practices were viewed with disfavour by orthodox Hindus, though it appears that these concessions were necessary to attract tribals to Hinduism.

In Assam, the Vajrayanic and Tantric forms were labelled under one head—Bauddhachara, which consisted of night-worship, promiscuous gathering and eating. They were resorted to not only by non-Aryans but also by a section of the Hindus.

The continuance of this Bauddhachara was regarded as a menace to the purer form of Hinduism ; and the Vaisnava reformers of Assam, beginning from Sankardeva, 1449-1568, waged a holy crusade to restore the worship of one God, Vishnu. The Adherents of Bauddhachara were called Bodha, though they were miles apart from the code of righteous conduct—right thought, right speech and right action—preached by the Blessed Lord Sakyamuni Gautama Buddha.

Any way, one thing remains prominent that the rigour of Hindu manners and practices had to be relaxed to admit of free and intimate intercourse with tribal neighbours. It led to a process of liberalisation, and a new-comer to Assam will be struck by the cordiality and freedom with which the different elements of the population are mixing with one another. There is no fear of losing one's caste, or forsaking one's primordial identity.

✓ This liberalisation has been further promoted by the long continuance of Ahom domination in Assam, for full six hundred years, 1228-1826 A.D. Though in the beginning, the Ahoms adhered to their Shan customs and practices, they had gradually to give way to those of the neighbouring Hindus. The Ahom rulers patronised Hindu priests, erected Hindu temples, and made endowments for their maintenance and worship. The Hindus in their turn attributed a divine origin to their princely patrons, and brought it in line with the customary beliefs of the Shans and the Hindus.

This compromise between Aryanism and non-Aryanism led to the numerical expansion of the Hindu fold. Many amongst the present-day Assamese Hindus are believed to be assimilations from the tribes.

Mahapurush Sankardeva led the way by conferring upon tribals the privileges of full-fledged Hindus provided they conformed to certain simple practices leading to refinement and a purer way of living. He had among his near disciples two Muslims named Jaihari and Chandsai, and a Garo, named Govinda. After Sankardeva's death, the message of Vaisnavism was carried to the eastern districts of Assam where lived unorthodox inhabitants, or Bodhas as they were called. This mission was mainly under a very pious reformer, named Kathar-sagar Gopaldeva of Bhavanipur, who like Saint Paul, preached among the heathens, softened their ways of living, and brought them gradually to the fold of Vaisnava Hinduism, and they proved to be devoted followers of the faith.

(The influence of the tribals in the development of Assamese culture has been many-sided and significant. Assamese vocabulary has been enriched by introductions from tribal dialects. Assam's music has borrowed many elements from tribal singing and dancing. Spectators and listeners who have seen and heard Manipuri, Bodo, Lushai, Miri, Khasi and Naga dances and songs in the variety performances of the presentday have been impressed by their exquisite rhythm and melody. Manipuri dance has become widely known and even imitated in India, and it has added a new pattern of Indian dancing.

Most of the tribals are neo-literates in the sense that the written word was unknown amongst them till very recently. But there are three races amongst them who possess a varied written literature, which, apart from maintaining its own integrity, gives evidence of its indebtedness to the literature of the Aryans.

First come the Ahoms, the whilom rulers of Assam. They brought with them their canonical classics when they first came to Assam from their Shan homeland. Their literature consists of worship manuals, astrological treatises, chronicles and romances. Living in Assam for a long time, the Ahoms could not but be influenced by the models available in their adopted country. They wrote the story of the Ramayana in the Ahom language, compiled lexicons from Ahom to Assamese and vice-versa. Their greatest book is *Min-mang-phura-lung*, which represents the gospel of Ahimsa in the form of a simple story. Unfortunately, the indigenous literature of the Ahoms is gradually becoming obsolete owing to the paucity of men conversant with the language.

The Khamptis and the Phakials, who came to Assam later than the Ahoms, possess a splendid literature of Buddhism. It deals with Buddhist tenets, way of life, cosmogony and mythology. One Khampti manuscript, recently unearthed, contains a complete criminal code, enumerating punishments for offences both trivial and serious. Several other manuscripts have been found containing miniatures of Buddha in the customary postures. The literature of the Ahoms, the Khamptis and the Phakials constitutes a treasure-house of information about the form and contents assumed by Buddhistic traditions far away from their place of origin. This literature deserves the serious attention of scholars in India and the world, because Buddhism is being studied more widely and closely than before as it is believed to contain the panacea for establishing peace and amity among the jarring races of man.

The tribals have been ignored and neglected on

the plea that they are ignorant and backward, and that we have nothing to learn from them. But it is a very serious mistake. They are good and great in their own way. They possess a marvellous capacity for organisation. They are restrained in their speech, but when they talk they mean business. They have powerful instincts with the help of which they can quickly distinguish between sincerity and simulation. Their straightforwardness, stamina and fortitude, capacity for endurance and hard work, freedom from social inequality, and their onemindedness represent the highest assortment of human attributes.

Turning to the history of Assam, the most striking feature is the people's love of independence. "Death is preferable to a life of subordination to foreigners", declared the Assamese monarch Chakradhwaj Singha ; and it summarises in a way the political idealism of the people of Assam throughout the centuries. In the long history of a nation occasional reverses in military conflicts are inevitable ; but the people of Assam were not accustomed to becoming upset and down-and-out at their descomfitures. Their usual motto under such circumstances was,—“If the sun is once eclipsed, does it not make its appearance again.” This hatred of foreign domination and capacity for recuperation constituted the dominant feature of Assam's foreign policy. The successful pursuance of this policy enabled Assam to maintain its independence in a practically uninterrupted manner.

Foreign rule was always regarded as an abomination. Even female hawkers openly rebuked their rulers if they failed to give protection to their subjects by expelling the enemies from the land. At the sight of the vast array of Mogul forces encamped in the neigh-

bourhood of Gauhati, the Assamese general Lachit Barphukan admitted the seriousness of the situation in the following ever-memorable words,—"It is a tragedy that my country has to face this dire caastrophe during my Phukanship ! How will my king be saved ? How will my people be saved ? How will my posterity be saved ?" This realisation was a prelude to vigorous action which enabled him to crush the invading Mogul army in the naval battle of Saraighst fought on the waters of the Brahmaputra near Gauhati.

The Assamese did not confine their love of independence to themselves. After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the subjects of Mogul India had to face direful consequences of political upheavals. A leader sprang up in Assam who planned to free his countrymen in India from the burden of Mogul yoke. He planned to invade Bengal, and then to proceed to Delhi to unfurl his flag of victory. He was aided by a number of tribal chieftains with their quotas of fighting men and equipments. But as ill-luck would have it, the king died in September 1714, on the eve of his departure at the head of the expedition. He was Swargadeo Rudra Singha the Great, king of Assam from 1696 to 1714. History would have taken a different turn if King Rudra Singha had succeeded in his enterprise. It may be, the centuries of British rule in India would have been a non-existent chapter of its history.

The successors of King Rudra Sigha on the throne of Assam were not men of high military ambition. They perfected the arts of peace, and patronised religion and literature. Most of the Hindu temples in Assam were constructed during this period ; large endowments were made to Brahmans, and the royal

court teemed with learned men, poets and artists. The gorgeously illustrated works, *Hasti-Vidyarnava*, *San-khachura-vadh*, *Gita-Govinda*, and *Dharmapuran*, were compiled during this period. Three queens of King Siva Singha, son of Rudra Singha, reigned successively as co-rulers with their husbands. The first of these, Queen Phuleswari Devi inspired the translation of *Sakuntala* in Assamese verse ; the second, Queen Ambika Devi, was instrumental in the compilation of the magnificent treatise on elephants, known as *Hasti-vidyarnava* ; the third, Queen Sarveswari Devi, was a patron of music and weaving. She admitted to the palace all the girls of the neighbourhood, and taught them to spin, weave and sing. The manuscript of *Salya-parva Mahabharat*, compiled under her auspices, contains on every page exquisite designs of borders, obviously selected from models in vogue in different parts of India. King Siva Singha was himself a songwriter of considerable eminence. His age may be rightly called the Augustan Age of Assamese literature.

The last monarch of this period of peace was Rajeswar Singha, 1751-69. He restored the Raja of Manipur to his throne which had been usurped by Burmese invaders. The grateful Raja Karta Maharaj Jai Singha gave his daughter Kuranganayani in marriage to King Rajeswar Singha ; and it is regarded as a great landmark in the cordial relations between Assam and Manipur. The Ahom king checked the French adventurer and merchant, Monseigneur Jean Baptiste Chevalier, from setting his foot in Assam.

But the political situation of Assam assumed a different turn from the reign of Rajeswar Singha's successor, Lakshmi Singha. In the eastern districts of

Assam there lived a very virile and sturdy race known as Morans. They were followers of a Vaishnava Gosain, the Mahanta of Mayamara. The liberal character of the Mahanta's views and social practices made him highly acceptable to his disciples, who increased in number, and contributed in consequence to their Guru's wealth and power. They even subordinated their political loyalty to their veneration for their spiritual leader, and refused to bow down before the monarch, as they thought their Guru alone was entitled to their undivided obeisance. All this led to a smouldering conflict between the Mayamara Mahanta and other Vaishnava preachers. The Ahom kings also looked upon the pre-eminence and prosperity of the Mayamara Mahanta with suspicion and misgiving. Things came to a head during the reign of Lakshmi Singha when the Mayamara Mahanta and some of his leading disciples were grossly insulted by a high Ahom official who was a disciple of a rival Gosain.

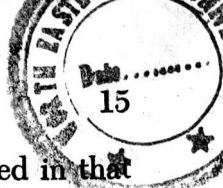
The disciples of the Mayamara Mahanta rose as one man to avenge the insults inflicted on their Guru and their comrades. King Lakshmi Singha was imprisoned by the Morans, and his leading nobles were put to the sword. A Moran leader now occupied the throne and the officials were selected from among his co-disciples.

The royalists could not remain complacent at this grave turn in the course of events, and they planned to restore the ancient regime, and the services of the ex-queen Kuranganayani were harnessed for this purpose. A number of royalist leaders proceeded to offer their customary New Year's Day greetings to the *de facto* head of the Morans, Raha Barbarua, with swords concealed in their cloths, singing songs of the

season. Ragha Barbarua came out to salute the gathering; and as instructed by Kuranganayani, who was there as an unwilling member of his household, knelt down before the audience. The valorous daughter of the Manipuri Raja struck the Moran leader on his calf with a sword, and the royalists gave the finishing touches. The other Moran leaders were similarly liquidated, and Lakshmi Singha was restored to his ancestral throne.

The Moran insurrection was suppressed for the time being, but it raised its head with redoubled fury in different parts of the kingdom, and gradually undermined the fabric of Ahom sovereignty. Other recalcitrant elements took advantage of the disorders and set up independent principalities. The strife became so acute that the British Resident at Goalpara, Hugh Baillie, who had been appointed to superintend the Bengal trade with Assam, suggested the closing down of the East India Company's factory at that place. "The civil dissensions," wrote Baillie in November, 1789, "still rage in Assam to the destruction and ruin of that once opulent kingdom".

To add to the miseries of the people, marauders from Bengal, commonly known as Burkendazes, came in hordes and swept down the villages and devastated the fields and granaries. The Ahom king, Gaurinath Singha, son and successor of Lakshmi Singha, petitioned Lord Cornwallis, the Governor-General of India, for his intervention. A detachment of the Company's troops was sent under Captain Thomas Welsh, who succeeded in quelling the Burkendazes and restoring peace to some extent. But Cornwallis's pacific successor Sir John Shore withdrew the detachment before its task of rehabilitation was completed. Assam



relapsed into chaos and disorder, and continued in that state till the second decade of the nineteenth century.

Political rivalry being the order of the day, the Ahom viceroy of Gauhati, Badan Chandra Barphukan, proceeded to Burma in quest of military aid to suppress the alleged autocracy of the Prime Minister Purnananda Buragohain. The Burmese came, saw and conquered. Their oppressions reduced the country to desolation and ruin from which it was rescued by the British, who drove the intruders from the land and established their own domination.

Peace was restored, and the new British rulers made every endeavour to bring back the country to its pristine prosperity. But the Assamese, who were at first grateful to the British for the restoration of peace and order, became gradually disgruntled at the sight of foreigners occupying their land, for they believed that good government is no substitute for self-government. For the attempts made by the Assamese to regain their independence during the early period of British rule, Piyali Barphukan and Jiuram Duliya Barua paid with their lives. In the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857-58 the attempt was revived, though it did not become successful. The principal leaders, Maniram Dewan and Piyali Barua, were hanged, and their chief compatriots were sentenced to banishment. British rule was now consolidated in Assam, though signs of opposition were revealed here and there in sporadic outbursts.

But Assam could not share the best fruits of British rule owing to its isolation and remoteness, and the absence of educational facilities which were enjoyed in abundance by sister provinces. The Assamese had to wage a regular war to establish the

separate identity of their mother tongue, as attempts were made in influential circles to brand it as a patois of Bengali. The members of the Americal Baptist Mission have earned the eternal gratitude of the Assamese people by coming to their rescue at this critical juncture. The Assamese language became acknowledged as a distinct and separate identity, which is enriched by a literature of great antiquity, variety and vitality.

The people of Assam threw themselves, heart and soul, into India's struggle for independence under the leadership of the Father of the Nation. Its patriots and martyrs, though shining in lesser limelight, are reverently enshrined in the grateful remembrance of the people.

Now Assam is independent as an organic constituent of the Sovereign Republic of India. Occupying a strategic position in the political set-up of India, its betterment and progress will reflect on the corresponding prosperity and well-being of the entire Union; while its neglect will not be conducive to the amelioration of the general cause. Assam is not vocal, and its voice does not usually reach the ears of the Indian public. Assam was previously called a Cindrella province, which is no longer the case, as it has been united with a rich and powerful life-partner. A new designation has now fallen on Assam—a problem-prövince; and its problems are manifold and difficult. A right and sympathetic approach to a solution of these problems, economic and cultural, will alone bring about a change for the better; and it is earnestly hoped that the desired approach will be forthcoming from all quarters.

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