APPENDIX – I

Professor Dr Birinchi Kumar Barua: A Life-Sketch*

By

MAHESWAR NEOG

Birinchi Kumar Barua was born in the famous Kharangi Baruwa family of Nowgong on the 16th October 1908 (Tuesday, the 25th Kartika 1830 Saka). The Kharangi Baruwas, who exercised some civil and military authority in their locality during the Ahom regime, had their original home at Kharangi-chuk in Puranigudam. Birinchi Kumar’s grandfather, Tularam Baruwa, lived there together with his two brothers. Tularam had two sons; the elder of them secured an employment in a tea estate and gave all encouragement to the younger Bijayram’s love for education. Bijayram passed the Entrance Examination of Calcutta University from Nowgong High School, and proceeded to Calcutta, where he studied for the First Arts Examination in the General Institution. But failing to pass that Examination he procured a job at the Shillong Secretariat and then got appointed Inspector of Post Offices and later Postmaster. Bijayram married Lilawati of the other famous Baruwa family of Puranigudam, known as Karhal Baruwas. It was about the year 1904 that Bijayram built his permanent residence in the modern town of Nowgong. He had five sons and two daughters: Lalit Kumar Barua (a very popular physician, a pioneer writer on medical subjects for the layman, and a social worker of infinite zeal, who will be remembered for his great services in building up the Srimanta Sankara Mission), Smt Priyabala Hazarika (wife of the late Trailokyanath Hazarika of Sibsagar), Sushil Kumar Barua (formerly Director of Mining, Jaipur State, and now Director of Geology and Mining, government of Assam), Birinchi Kumar Barua, Kshirod Kumar Barua (publisher and printer), Smt Lavanyaprabha Datta (wife of Hemchandra Datta of Sibsagar) and Dr Prahlad Kumar Barua (Labour Superintendent, Assam Oil Company,
Birinchi Kumar was the loveliest of the children in the family and was loved by all people who met him. Whenever there was any illness in the family or in the neighbourhood he busied himself the most and tried to be of the greatest help.

Birinchi Kumar had his early education at Nowgong Sudder Middle Vernacular School and Nowgong Government High English School. He was attentive and diligent as a student and developed an early love for social and literary activities. As a student of Class IV, he organized a society called Juvenile Association and through it a library (1923 or 1924), which he called Balya-pustakalaya, and collected small public donations for the purpose. The library, consisting of books contained in an almirah, built of wooden sheets taken of packing boxes, was kept in the auditorium of Nowgong Assamese Dramatic Club. The young enthusiast approached for help great persons like Abdul Majid and the Hon’ble Minister, Ghanashyam Barua. The Minister even condescended to pay a visit to the Association’s library and encourage the students with money and very kind words. About this time he also organized a monthly magazine, circulated and run among the boys, of which he was the editor and the principal contributor. The Juvenile Association was also an organization of social service and offered ready help to the families of the sick and the dead. Birinchi Kumar evinced great interest in general sports and gardening also.

As Bijayram Barua had to go from one place to another on transfer on duty, the family remained at Nowgong all the time so that the children’s education might not be hampered. The family made occasional excursions of its own, once in 1921 going to Chittagong, when Birinchi Kumar had the opportunity of paying visits to the Buddhist viharas there. His father retired from Government services and was at Nowgong; but diabetes soon began to trouble him, otherwise enjoying good health, when in 1824 he died. This put the family to great hardship as all the children were at school or college – the eldest Lalit Kumar in Berry White Medical School, and Sushil Kumar in the
First Year Class at Cotton College, Gauhati. But nothing daunted, all of them continued their studies.

Birinchi Kumar passed the Matriculation Examination, Calcutta University, in the First Division in 1928 and got admitted into the Presidency College in Calcutta, and stayed in the Eden Hostel. He passed the Intermediate Examinations in Arts again in the First Division in 1930, continued in the same college with Honours in Pali and took the B.A. Degree in 1932, securing the much-coveted Ishan Scholarship. He got his M.A. Degree (Pali) from Calcutta in 1934, coming out first in the First Class. Just after taking his B.A. Barua was almost getting into Indian Police Service as a D.S.P., when he was reclaimed to the scholastic line because he could not get a ‘riding certificate’! It is at this juncture that he worked as a teacher in the Nowgong Government High School for about two months.

After his M.A. in Pali Barua got admitted into the M.A. classes in Ancient Indian History and Culture and the University Law College, maintaining himself now with private tutorship. His literary activities had already begun, he having started writing short stories (I think his first story was ‘Vidrohi deka’, published in Volume III, No. 3, of the Awahan, which bears his name, but the subsequent stories all came out under a pseudonym ‘Vina Baruwa’) and essays, and editing a children’s monthly, Akan, for about three years. He developed an antiquarian zeal when he discovered a stone inscription at Dabaka (sometimes identified with Dabaka of the Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta) in the Kapili Valley of his native district of Nowgong – later to become a site for many historical finds. Even before this, he, while a school student, used to collect old ballads woven round Assam’s 19th century Quisling, Badan Barphukan, and the patriot, Maniram Dewan. He now interested himself also in the activities of Assam Samraksini Sabha, Asam Sahitya Sabha, Calcutta Youth Welfare League and Asam Chatra Sammilan. It is about this time that he started a small printing-press at Nowgong. He came in contact with great scholars and nationalist leaders of India in general and of Assam in
particular – Dr D.R. Bhandarkar, Dr Hemchandra Raychaudhury, Gr Syamaprasad Mukherji, Dr Stella Kramritsh, Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Tarunram Phookan, Nabinchandra Bardalai, and others.

Barua took his B.L. Degree from Calcutta University. He was appointed Lecturer in the Department of Modern Indian Languages (Assamese) at Calcutta University. In 1938 he joined Gauhati Cotton College as Lecturer in Assamese, and it is with his entry into teaching here that Assamese language and literature became a serious subject for study with the students. Very soon a full-statured course, styled as ‘Assamese Second Language’, was started and could be offered as one of the major elective subjects.

Assam was crying hoarse for some time for the creation of a University of its own. But nothing palpable was done by the then Government and its Ministers in the State. A movement was, therefore, launched in 1944 under the able leadership of the late Gopinath Bardoloi. A body, called Gauhati University Trust Board, was set up, and public donations were collected with Collection Committees working in every sub-division. Barua actively participated in the movement and acted as an Assistant Secretary of the Board.

Barua proceeded to London in 1945 for studies in the London School of Oriental and African Studies and got his Ph.D. Degree from the University of London in 1947, his thesis approved for the Degree having been later published as *A Cultural History of Assam*, Volume I. On his way home Dr Barua visited Europe, particularly Switzerland and Finland, where he observed how folk-lore was being studied in these countries.

Dr Barua on return home rejoined his services at Cotton College. Gauhati University was started on the 1st of January 1948 through the Gauhati University Act 1947, and postgraduate teaching departments began springing up from the middle of the year, that is, 1948. The Postgraduate Department of Assamese was started on the 1st of December 1948 with the present writer as Lecturer. Dr Barua joined as Reader on the 4th of December, and Dr Banikanta Kakati as Professor a few days later. Dr Barua also became the Secretary,
University Classes, from the 1\textsuperscript{st} of February 1950. Although the importance and utility of this office became the centre of a controversy later on, Dr Barua wielded immense power in shaping the different activities of the teaching departments of the University and of the University as a whole. This was found possible because he was a person of great personality and organizational ability. He was, moreover, a member of the first Executive Council of the University. The Department of Assamese was exceptionally fortunate in having both Dr Kakati and Dr Barua as its members. The organization of the teaching in the Department will, I hope, ever bear the impress of their scholarship. The subject could have been called Comparative Language and Literature in consideration of the fact that Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, English and other Foreign languages and literatures were included in the courses for studies. Assam’s social and cultural history also came to form a part of the subject.

Dr Banikanta Kakati died all on a sudden in November 1952. Early in 1953 Dr Barua was appointed Professor in his place from the 1\textsuperscript{st} of February 1953. He was also elected Dean of the Faculty of Arts. Barua organized a collection drive towards the creation of a lectureship to commemorate Dr Kakati. The result is Professor Banikanta Kakati Memorial Lectures, the first two series of which were delivered by Professor Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji, and Professor K.A. Nilakanta Shastri.

Already after his coming over from Calcutta to Gauhati Barua was appointed by the Government of Assam as Honorary Assistant Director of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, of which Dr Suryya Kumar Bhuyan was the Honorary Director. With effect from the 4\textsuperscript{th} August 1951 he was made the Department’s Honorary Deputy Director, which post he held till about 1960.

He was one of the members of the Official Language Commission, appointed by the President of India, which concluded its findings in August 1956.
Dr Barua visited the U.S.S.R. for a few days (leaving India on the 17th November and arriving back on the 3rd December 1961) on a cultural mission sponsored by the Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs, Government of India. He saw Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Tashkent and other places, where his chief interest was to meet writers and artists and feeling by what rapid strides Russia was advancing in the different branches of art and literature.

There was an electric dynamism in Dr Barua’s activities, and he brought the same character to bear upon his association with the University in several capacities, academic and administrative. It was thus that by the middle of the last decade Dr Barua found himself a most controversial person. He contributes to the growth of the university as a very successful teacher and builder of the physical aspects of the university were often over-looked by many, while the concentration of “power” in him became “the talk of the town”. He left the job of Secretary, University Classes, which shed light and power that was a borrow from his personality, by January 1960. “In 1961 the University had a sudden jolt from an overdose of democracy in certain quarters, with the result that the Vice-Chancellor had to resign and Professor Barua lost his Deanship”. Things came to this consummation when the university Court met in a tense atmosphere on the 21st August 1962.

Dr Barua was invited as a visiting Professor by the Folklore Institute, Indian University (Bloomington, U.S.A.) for the Winter Semester of 1963. He left for the States on the 24th of January. At the institute he proved himself to be an effective teacher, taking a keen interest in everything around him. He prepared students from China, Japan, Formosa, Thailand, Africa, Egypt, Turan, Turkey, Israel and the U.A.R. besides those of the States in the subject of Indian folklore. He also travelled across the States for a while and was in hospital for a few days. On his way back he saw Honolulu, Tokyo, Hongkong and Bangkok and reached back home on the 23rd August. Everywhere he established contacts with great folklorists, Orientalists and other scholars.
Dr Barua came back from America with the assignment to prepare an anthology of Indian folk-lore and an encyclopedia of Indian folk-lore in two volumes, but the project, as also his other projects, were left incomplete on his sudden and unexpected departure from the world, which now came so fast. When Orientalists from all over the world collected at New Delhi in the first week of January 1964 to attend the XXVIth International Congress of Orientalists, Barua organized a meeting, which had Professor W. Norman Brown of Pennsylvania University, in the chair, and explained his scheme of the proposed anthology. Coming back from the Congress, Barua found his health first deteriorating and had to confine himself to bed from time to time. But he had prevailed upon Shri Devkanta Borooah, Education Minister, Assam, to invite the twenty-second session of All India Oriental Conference to Gauhati. He now gave his thought to organizing the session and chalked out a plan for that purpose. This plan was discussed in a meeting of a few scholars with the Education Minister in their midst in Dr Barua’s residence on the 17th of February 1964. To start with, a publication Committee was formed in the meeting and he was made its Convenor. But he had to be hospitalized and the work of organization had to be postponed. The present writer convened the first meeting of the Publication Committee again in Barua’s house on the 21st of March 1964. He participated in the discussion that took place. He seemed to be enthusiasm and excitement. The midnight that came within a few hours of the meeting brought him a serious attack of illness of the heart. Although he showed signs of a little improvement, he ultimately succumbed to the disease at 8.30 A.M. on the 30th of March 1964.

Dr Barua married on the 15th of June 1949 and on death left behind his wife, Srimati Shantichhaya Barua, and three children- Boijayanta (Raj), Achintya (Manju), Padmakshi (Rasna).

Dr Barua was a person who could distinguish himself in any company. He showed himself as a leader of men and an organizer of great capabilities. From early childhood he was keen on social service; and later, as a
member of the University he could be seen taking the leading part whenever the last rites of a departed colleague were to be performed. Possessing a great interest in gardening, he was responsible for many a tree which today stands in the university campus in Greater Gauhati. Rising from not very well-to-do conditions, he had always a heart for the poor. He helped a number of students with money and books. When he was lying dead in the morning of the 30th March 1964, a stream of poor neighbours- labourers and bhangis- pressed into his room, bringing many a tear and a sigh. He was warm as a friend or colleague and loving as a husband or parent. Always busy with books and papers, he found time for picnicing and gossiping, marketing and cooking. He was a teacher in the truest sense of the term.

Dr Barua was connected with many a literary and cultural organization in the country. He attended several sessions of All India Oriental Conference. He went to Colombo in December 1957 to join the Conference of Orientalists there. He was member of the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, and Convenor of its Advisory Committee for Assamese. He joined the 26th International Congress of Orientalists, held in New Delhi from the 4th to the 10th January 1964, as a delegate of Gauhati University. His very intimate contact with Professors Banikanta Kakati and Krishnakanta Handuiqu, the two great scholars, brought very deep influences upon his mind and work.

Expressing sorrow at the sad passing away of Dr Barua, his great guru, Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji, wrote to the present writer: “The passing away of Dr Barua a short while ago has been one of the greatest losses sustained by Indian scholarship in Assam, and we all mourn the sad and ultimately demise of such a fine scholar who brought kudos to Indian scholarship.”

A man of imposing personality, keen organizational ability and untiring zeal, professor Barua did everything in his power for the cause of Assamese literature, specially her folk-literature. His scholarly activities not only gave him recognition on a national level- but also raised Assam’s prestige outside.
Dr Barua was an acknowledged scholar of Pail and Prakrit, and a historian of Assamese culture. Numerous are his valued papers contributed to various research journals. He edited Sir Edward Gait’s *A History of Assam* and published a work on Buddhism, *Bauddhadharma aru Sahitya* in collaboration with other scholars.

In the field of study of the Assamese language on a scientific basis, Dr Brinchikumar Barua is next only to Dr Banikanta Kataki. His *Asamiya Bhasa* and *Asamiya Bhasa aru Sanskriti* are two valuable books devoted to the subject. In his *Asamar Lokasamskrti*, with its English version now to be published, he attempted a detailed study of the folk-culture of Assam. His *Assamese Literature (P.E.N.)*, *Asamiya Katha-sahitya, Purani Bhag, Studies in Early Assamese Literature and Modern Assamese Literature* are the three books dealing with ancient and modern Assamese Literature. Another book, *Sankardeva Vaisnava Saint of Assam* acquaints the non-Assamese world with the genius of the great saint-poet Sankardeva. His another great work in the study of Assamese literature, *History of Assamese Literature*, has been posthumously published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. His *Early Geography of Assam* is a study in the history of Assam’s geography.

Besides these, he edited a number of old Assamese classics, including *Ankiya Nat* of Sankardeva, Madhavadeva and Gopaladeva, *Adbhuta-ramayana* and *Satrunjaya* of Raghunantha Mahanta, and *Vabruvahanar Yuddha aru Tamradhvajar Yuddha* (edited in collaboration with the present writer) etc.

Another very notable aspect of Professor Barua’s career was his hitherto unsurpassed creative works; he was a novelist and short story-writer. He began his literary career in the days of the monthly, *Awahan* (1929), and wrote short stories that go by the name of Vina Barua. His collections of short stories like *Aghoni Bai* and *Pat-parivartan*, and the two great novels, *Jivanar Batat* and *Seuji Patar Kahini* (the later under the pseudonym Rasna Baruwa) are read widely with love and interest. Vina Baruwa’s *Ebelar Nat* is an one-act play with superb concentration. He also edited two children’s journals *Akan*
(1935) and Ranghar (1948). Jatak Sadhu and Cuijarlend-bhraman (Travels in Switzerland) are his gift to children.

Dr Barua’s activities were distributed over many fields. An indefatigable worker, he could enthuse other people to work. As a member of the National Sahitya Akademi he organized literary activities among leading writers of Assam. The Akademi honoured him posthumously with the Akademi Award in Assamese for 1964 on the strength of his Asamar Loka-samskrti. During the last few years of his life he took to revitalizing the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti (Assam Research Society) and volunteered to be the editor of its Journal. It was through Dr Barua’s efforts that Governments at the centre and in Assam granted funds to Gauhati University for the production of an Assamese translation of the whole of the original Mahabharata and an encyclopedia for children. He, however, could edit only the first two volumes of the Assamese Mahabharata before his untimely death. He was the father of the Assam Academy for Cultural Relations, which had the noble ideals of bringing about a closely knit cultural integration among various shades of Assam’s population and establishing contacts with peoples and cultures outside. He associated himself with youth activities and established a World University Service centre at Gauhati.

Professor Barua was a sincere worker, he loved labour; and his labour – honest and sincere – gave Assam and its people something that can only be termed great. The death of this versatile scholar and illustrious son of Assam has left a void that will perhaps take years to fill.

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**Source**: The content is a reprint from Professor Birinchi Kumar Barua Commemoration Volume, edited by M. M. Sarma and Maheswar Neog, published by local Committee, All India Oriental Conference, 1966.
APPENDIX – 2

A Bibliography of the Works of Birinchi Kumar Barua*

By

MAHESWAR NEOG

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Asamiya Katha-Sahitya, Purani-bhag, Nalbari, 1872 Saka

Bauddhadharma aru Sahitya, a symposium, edited, with a Forword by Omeo kumar Das, Gauhati, 1956

Asamiya Bhasa aru Samskriti, Gauhati, 1957

Asamar Loka-Samskriti, Gauhati, 1961

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Cuijarland-bhraman (travels in Switzerland), Gauhati, 1870 Saka
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Children’s Books and Text-books

Des-videsar Sadhu, 13 tales of many lands, Gauhati, 1870 Saka
Bharat-buranji, for Matriculation Examination
Buranjir Katha, Indian History, Bombay-Calcutta-Madras, 1956
Sahitya-saurabh, a series of readers

Novels and Short-Stories

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Source*:

‘Professor Birinchi Kumar Barua Commemoration Volume’, 1966, edits. M M Sarma and Maheswar Neog, Published by Local Committee, All India Oriental Conference, Guwahati.
APPENDIX 3
Obituary*

Birinchi Kumar Barua
By
Richard M. Dorson

In the spring semester of 1963 professor Barua lectured on “The Folklore of India” as visiting professor of folklore at Indiana University. He stayed on through the summer on a research appointment, and continued to work with our folklore students. I attended all his lectures and discussed with him projects of mutual and absorbing interest. He participated in our preliminary discussions of the Society for Asian Folklore and served as a member of the Executive Board when it was organized. We negotiated a contract for two volumes he would edit on “Folktales of India,” to appear in the Folktales-of-the World series. He had other, ambitious projects: for an encyclopedia of Indian Folklore, for a book surveying the folk traditions of India.

To us professor Barua appeared imposing, handsome, sturdy, and in continual good spirits. He organized his lectures, the first on their subject in the United States, with logic and clarity, and delivered them with feeling. All his listeners received the impression that Indian civilization was permeated with a folk culture and that her classics dipped deeply into the wells of folk tradition. “In India a child sings before he talks, and dances before he walks,” he said memorably. In one lecture he ingeniously turned around the idea of the caste system, always an obsession to westerners, and pronounced it a truly democratic institution. In place of the racial, class, and nationalist divisions that rent Western society, the Indian community nourished the spirit of brotherly affection, with each member harmoniously interlinked with the other, secure in his role, at peace and on familiar terms with his neighbor.

Professor Barua became our cherished friend. His sudden death is a heavy blow to his American as well as his Indian Colleagues, and to the cause of international folklore scholarship.

Source*
Reprint from ‘Professor Birinchi Kumar Barua Commemoration Volume’, 1966, edits. M M Sarma and Maheswar Neog, Published by Local Committee, All India Oriental Conference, Guwahati.
Boatmen’s oars move in the river;
The pestle pounds the grain;
My heart aches in passion,
Since I am born a woman.
When yonder you blow the pipe,
And your fingers pass over the tune,
My eyes I cast for a passing glance,
Outside the gate;
My hands quiver, the shuttle drops,
Though I sit beside my loom

*An Assamese folksong translated by B. K. Barua was published in The Indian Literature, (a journal of Sahitya Academy) Vol. 2 No. 2, April-Sep, 1959.