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Summary

A biography of the remarkable Indologist, Buddhist Scholar and humanitarian, Professor Dr. Benimadhab Barua. (1888 – 1948)

PROFESSOR DR. BENIMADHAB BARUA

Hemendu B. Chowdhury

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Professor Dr. Beni Madhab Barua, a great Indologist and an acknowledged international authority on Buddhism was born on 31 December 1888 in a well-known Buddhist family at the village of Mahamuni Pahartali in the Chittagong district of undivided Bengal (now in Bangladesh). His father's name is Rajchandra Talukdar and mother's name is Dhaneswari. He abandoned the family title Talukdar and adopted the surname Barua for his national identity.

At the age of about six he was admitted into the village model school and after completing his education there in 1902 he entered Chittagong Collegiate School from where he passed the entrance examination in 1906. He passed the F.A examination in first division from Chittagong. Govt. College in 1908. In the same year he married Pankajsundari Barua. In 1911, he graduated from the Baharampur Krishnanath College with honours in Pali standing first among the successful honours students. In 1913, he passed the M.A. examination standing first class in Pali. He had to struggle hard to educate himself. After completing a brilliant educational career in India, he went over to England in 1914 as a State Scholar with the help of the late Venerable Kripasaran Mahathera, the great Founder of the Bengal Buddhist Association and the late Sir Asutosh Mukhopadhyay, the greatest-and ablest Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University who fostered and furthered the study of Pali and Buddhism. Dr. Barua was the first Asian to revive the study of the almost extinct-Pali and Buddhist studies in India.

As a favourite student of Prof. Dr. T. W. Rhys Davids, the founder of the Pali Text Society, London and also his talented wife Mrs. C. A. F. Rhys Davids, Prof. F. W. Thomas, and Prof. Barnett, Dr. Barua received invaluable help from them in study of Indology, specially of Indian philosophy including Buddhism. Although he used to take interest in different branches of Indology, Dr. Barua's favourite subject was Indian Philosophy and religion. Having received his doctorate degree, he returned to India in 1917.

In the month of December of the same year, he was appointed in the University of Calcutta as a University Lecturer for a term of five years. It will not be out of place to mention here that the department of Pali was strengthened by this appointment. On account of his outstanding merits, he

became the University Professor of Pali for the first time in 1925. Dr. Barua served in that capacity with great scholarship and ability till his death on 23 March 1948. He was also attached with the departments of Sanskrit and ancient Indian History & Culture of the same University. As an external examiner of different universities of Rangoon, Sri Lanka, Dhaka, Bombay, Allahabad, Benares & Lucknow, Dr Barua used to hold a commanding position.

Dr. Barua was associated with many learned bodies and public institutions. He was elected Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal and was awarded Dr. B. C. Law Gold Medal by this Society. He visited Sri Lanka in 1944 and delivered lectures in various institutions including the University of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), the Buddha Sahitya Sabha, the Maha Bodhi Society, Y.M.B.A. Dona Alpena Ratnayake Trust, the citizens of Anuradhapura, Matale and Kandy. The Vidyalankara Pirivena (now University) of Sri Lanka had conferred upon him the title of *Tipitakacariya* in recognition of the conspicuous services rendered by him to the cause of Buddhism and Buddhist studies, a rare distinction with which few Indians (or Bangladeshi's) have been honoured by the Buddhists of Sri Lanka. Dr. Barua also visited Burma four times in 1924, 1927, 1937 & 1938 and delivered number of valuable lectures in different places during his visit.

He was the co-founder of the Indian Research Institute and founder of the Jogendra-Rupasibala Tripitaka Trust Board. He was a member of the managing committee of the Vidyalankara Pirivena of Sri Lanka, Maha Bodhi Society of India, Iran Society, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad and President of Bharati Mahavidyalay of Calcutta. Dr. Barua was elected President of Prakrit section of the All-India Oriental Conference in its Tirupati Session in 1944, President of the Indian section of the Indian History Congress in its Annamalainagar Session in 1945 and also a sectional President of Indian Philosophical Congress held in Delhi in 1946. Dr. Barua had served the Bengal Buddhist Association as its Secretary. It was under the personal initiative of Dr. Barua, the industrialist Seth Jugal Kishore Birla came forward to erect a three-storey building named as Arya Vihara which was inaugurated by Dr. Radhakrishnan in 1937. He was also the President of the Nalanda Vidyabhavan, an institution of Pali and Buddhology founded by the association in 1935.

Dr. Barua was one of the founder-Editors of Indian Culture and Editor of Buddhist India, Visvabani and Jagajyoti (a journal on Buddhism published by Bengal Buddhist Association in 1908). Tribute is due to him for his efficient editorship of these important journals.

The world of scholars knows well of Dr. Barua for his writings but is not so well acquainted with other qualities of his personality and his phenomenal philanthropy for public causes. He shuns publicity on principle. His daily charities are hardly known even to the members of his family. In this connection, a reference may also be made to what was not so much known outside the inner circle of his friends. It was the financial help that he had

been always rendering to his poor students. They had always received liberal contributions from him. He had responded liberally to the call of the sufferings irrespective of caste or creed, to the cry for the relief of the poor, the infirm, the helpless, the destitute and the distressed. He was Secretary of the Chittagong Central Relief Committee, Vice-President of the Burma Evacuee's Association, Hindu Satkar Samity and Hindu Evacuees Reception Committee. He was also President of Chittagong Union, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Chittagong People's Urban Co-operative Bank Ltd., President of Chatra (Srirampur) Co-operative Society and Member of the Board of Directors of Bank of Commerce. He spared no pains for the improvement of all the organisations where he was attached.

A great scholar, Dr. Barua was no less eminent as a fine gentleman in its true term. Sympathetic and catholic in his views, he had a keen sense of duty and responsibility. On account of his genial nature and open-heartedness his circle of friends was wide. He had a sweet relation with Dr. G. P. Malalasekera, another great scholar of Sri Lanka and Founder-President of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. He had also a close scholarly association with Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (former President of India) and Dr. B. C. Law.

Dr. B. M. Barua's learned and monumental works on different subjects of Indological interest especially in the wings of religion and culture, art and archaeology bear ample testimony to his depth of knowledge, critical scholarship and rational thinking. The quantity and quality of his literary output are unique in the annals of letters. He was the author of many learned works dealing with different aspects of Buddhism, Janism and ancient Indian History and Philosophy. He had also attained eminence by deciphering the obscure Brahmi script in the ancient Asokan Edicts. All these works marked him as an Indologist of the first rank.

His outstanding contributions consist of the following books:

- 1 A HISTORY OF PRE-BUDDHISTIC INDIAN PHILOSOPHY.
- 2 A PROLEGOMENA TO A HISTORY OF BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY.
- 3 THE AJIVIKAS.
- 4 OLD BRAHMI INSCRIPTIONS IN THE UDAYAGIRI AND KHANDAGIRI CAVES.
- 5 BARHUT INSCRIPTIONS.
- 6 PRAKRIT DHAMMAPADA.
- 7 GAYA AND BUDDHAGAYA (in 2 volumes) and reproduced in Japanese & Burmese languages.
- 8 BARHUT (in 3 volumes) (an authoritative work on the Stupa of Barhut).
- 9 CEYLON LECTURES.
- 10 INSCRIPTIONS OF ASOKA, Part I (a critical edition of the texts).
- 11 INSCRIPTIONS OF ASOKA, Part II (translations & notes).
- 12 BRAHMACHARI KULADANANDA (a bio-graphy of the Bengali Saint and of

- his Guru Sree Sree Bijoy Krishna Goswami containing incidental references to many other contemporary saints).
- 13 ASOKA AND HIS INSCRIPTIONS.
 - 14 MADHYAMA NIKAYA, Volume I (an authentic Bengali translation of the Pali Majjhima Nikaya).
 - 15 BAUDDHAGRANTHAKOSA, Volume I (Buddhist Encyclopaedia in Bengali).
 - 16 BAUDDHA PARINAYAPADDHATI.
 - 17 PHILOSOPHY OF PROGRESS.
 - 18 STUDIES IN BUDDHISM (collection of papers)
 - 19 MAHASATIPATTHAN SUTTANTA (Bengali)

His last book i.e. Philosophy of Progress was published after his death. A scholar of his contemporary wrote: "The treatise is an enlarged form of an article published in the Calcutta Review (1920) under the title 'Thoughts on Progress'. The author whom, we now miss so much has fittingly dedicated it to the ever-inspiring memory of Mahatma Gandhi to whom the book in its earlier form was sent in 1933.

Death has snatched away from our midst such a candid, bold and original thinker to deprive us of many of his matured thoughts on such an important problem of mankind as that of human progress. We are now in great need of more thinkers of Dr. Barua's calibre with such boldness and originality in conception."

Besides books, Dr. Barua had to his credit numerous papers contributed by him on the basis of strenuous and much original research to different learned journals and also to conferences. The total output of his activities in this field may be known from the list of the following articles:

A CONTRIBUTIONS TO COMMEMORATION VOLUME

I D. R. Bhandarkar Volume, 1940

On the Edicts of Asoka: Some points of interpretation.

II The Cultural Heritage of India (Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Memorial, Volume 1). Early Buddhism.

III Bharata Kaumudi (Professor Radha Kumud Mookerji Presentation Vol.)

The Arthasastra of Kautilya, a blend of Old and New.

IV Orientalia (Sir Asutosh Commemoration Volume)

Mahayana in the making.

V K.M. Munshi Volume, Bombay

Asoka's Examples, Their historical importance.

VI B.C. Law Volume, Part 1 and 11

Pratityasamutpada as the Basic concept of Buddhist thought.

Indus Script and Tantric Code.

VII A Volume of Buddhist Studies in Indology presented to Dr. B. C. Law

Faith in Buddhism.

B CONTRIBUTIONS TO CONFERENCES

- I *Second All India Oriental Conference*
Bhakti Sutras of Sandilya.
- II *Indian Philosophical Congress*
The Role of Buddhism in Indian Life and Thought.
(Subsequently reproduced in the Maha Bodhi and Indian Culture).
- III *All India Oriental Conference, Tirupati Session*
Presidential Address.
- IV *Indian History Congress, Annamali Nagar Session*
Trends in Ancient Indian History - Presidential Address, Section 1.
- V *Fifth All India Oriental Conference*
The Atthakavagga and Parayanavagga as two companions of Pali Anthologies.
- VI *Memorial meeting in honour of Poet Sarvananda Barua, Pandit Dharmaraj Barua & Abhidhammavisarada Ram Chandra Barua, held at Aburkhill, Chittangong, 1946.*
Teenjan Pathapradarshaker Avadan-Presidential Address.

C CONTRIBUTIONS TO LEARNED JOURNALS

- 1 *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*
A note on the Bhabru Edict.
Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal
- 2 The Saugar Copper-plate Inscription of Trailokyavarman.
Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute
- 3 Ajivika and Ajivikism.
Epigraphia Indica
- 4 The Meher Copper plate Inscription of Damodaradeva.
University of Ceylon Review
- 5 Buddhadatta and Buddhaghosa - Their contemporaneity and Age.
- 6 The year of Commencement of the Buddha Era.
Journal of the Department of Letters, Calcutta University, Vol. III
- 7 Valmiki as he reveals himself in his poem.
(Subsequently translated into Hindi by Kumar Ganganand Sinha)
Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art.
- 8 On the Antiquity of Image-Worship in India.
- 9 Buddhist Divinities as embodiments of the Thirty-seven constituents of Supreme knowledge.
- 10 The Celestial Luminaries in Asoka's Rock Edict.
Journal of the Uttar Pradesh Historical Society
- 11 The Barhut Sculptures in the Museum of Allahabad Municipality.

Indian Historical Quarterly

- 1 Inscriptional Excursions in respect of Asoka Edicts.
- 2 The Yerragudi Copy of Asoka's Minor Rock Edict.
- 3 The Sohagbaura Copper-plate Inscriptions.
- 4 The Old Brahmi Inscriptions of Mahasthan.
- 5 The Hathigumpha Inscriptions of Kharavela.
- 6 The Minor Brahmi Inscriptions of Udayagiri and Khandagiri Caves.

- 7 Maskari - what it signifies.
- 8 Message from Barhut Jataka Labels.
- 9 Buddha Gaya Image Inscriptions
- 10 Scribe Engravers of Indrapala's Second Copper plate and Prakrit of Pre-Ahom times.
- 11 The common Ancestry of Pre Ahom Rulers and some other problems of the Early History of Assam.

Indian Culture

- 1 Forms, merits and defects of Asoka's Inscriptions.
- 2 Rastriya Vaisya Pusyagupta and Yavanraja Tusaspha in Rudradaman's Inscriptions.
- 3 Inscriptions.
- 4 Isitala Tadaga in Kharavela's Inscriptions.
- 5 Identity of Asandhimitta and Kaluvaki Dharma Samuccaya. (a critical account of its contents and material, it being the Nepalese and latest recension of the Dhammapada).
- 6 Bhela-samhita discussing its historical importance.
- 7 Cittavisuddhi-Prakarana - its Pali basis.
- 8 Buddha's Doctrine of the Mean.
- 9 Visnudasa - a Vaisnava Reformer of South India.
- 10 Art as defined in the Brahmanas.
- 11 National Shrines of the Vrijis.
- 12 Buddhagaya Sculptures.
- 13 Five Reliefs from Nagarjunakonda.
- 14 Two Buddhagosas.
- 15 On a point of Interpretations.
- 16 Upanisa and Upanisad.

Calcutta Review

- 1 Jinology and Buddhology.
- 2 Thoughts on Progress (containing the dialectics of history and formulation of the author's own philosophy).
- 2 Early Life of Gosala.
- 3 Historical Background of Jinalogy and Buddhology:
- 4 Burma and Burma life.
- 5 Nature in Barhut Sculptures.
- 6 Burma and Burma Treasures.
- 7 Flying Machines in Ancient India. (jointly with G. P. Majumder).
- 8 Buddha of History.

Modern Review

- 1 Asia : Past and Present.
- 2 Asoka's Example and Brahman Animosity.

Baaddha Prabha (Journal of the Buddha Society, Bombay)

- 1 Universal Aspect of Buddhism.

The Nationalist

- 1 India through the Greek Eye, cultural aspect.

Indo-Iranica (a quarterly journal of the Iran Society)

- 1 Asia prior to Western Supremacy.

Sahitya Parisat Patrika

- 1 Bangla Sahitya Satavarser Bauddha Avadan.
- 2 Gojener Lama.
- 3 Shibcharan Geet.
- 4 Bhelsamhitar Prachinattva O Bishesattva.

History of Bengal (published by University of Dhaka)

- 1 Religions.

Twentieth Century India (published from U.S.A.)

- 1 Buddhism and its psychological foundation.

Jagajjyoti

1. Bauddha Darsaner Aaitihisik Tattva: Darsaner Sohit Bauddha Dharmer Sambandha.
- 2 Bauddha Manasttva.
- 3 Bauddha Samaj Gathaner Dhara.
- 4 Bauddha Sahitya Paritransutrer Udbhav O Tantrik Bauddha Dharme Ihar Bishesattva.
- 5 Sakya, Lichhabi O Briji Bangsher Dhangsa Kahini.
- 6 Gupta Juge Tripurai Hindu-Bauddha Dharmer Paristhiti.
- 7 Mahasthavir Kalikumar.