

Benimadhab Barua's Role in Revitalizing Buddhist Studies

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INTRODUCTION

According to a Buddhist tradition, the 'Dharmacakrapravartana' - the turning of the wheel of law - is said to have taken place three times. Historically, the reference is first to the one which took place at **Sarnath**, the second to the resurgence of **Mahayana** and the third to the rise of the **Yogacara** school of **Vijnanavada**. To these a fourth awakening can be added which may be reckoned as co-existent with the period of intensive research on Buddhism in the East and West in the nineteenth century. The awakening was sudden and inspired and it brought about a renaissance in Buddhist studies. This new wave spread through the three continents of Europe, Asia and America, touching almost all branches of the Arts and Humanities, thereby leading to a revival of cultural life in Asian countries and making the world 'Buddhasamjñi' or Buddha conscious.

Renaissance and Bengali Erudite

The nineteenth century, well-known as the golden age of the world, witnessed the world-wide renaissance in all walks of human life - social, political, religions and culture. The mighty wave of the renaissance spread even in India, and Bengal was not an exception. An upheaval took place in Bengal in the nineteenth century, when the currents of three movements met together in the national life namely, the religious, the literary and the national movements. The inquisitiveness towards the Buddha and the Buddhist culture is a memorable feature of this period. With the reawakening of their national life, the Bengalese again came to realize the pristine glory of the Buddha and the Buddhist culture. This was actually quite natural in the background of enlighten movement in Bengal. In our Rabindranath Tagore, we find the culmination of the Renaissance, which had sprung from the contact of the Orient with the Occident and which dawned with the advent of the makers of Modern Bengal, like Raja Rammohan Ray, Vidyasagar, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Keshab Chandra Sen, Sri Aurobinda Ghose, Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose, Sir Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay and others. In the message of Thakur Sri Ramakrishna, we find a synthesis of the ideals of all great religions of the world. And Swami Vivekananda had just begun to spread the immortal message of his Guru - the divinity of the Soul, the non-duality of the God - head, the unity of existence, the humanity, the universal brotherhood and the harmony of religions - unity in diversity.

Benimadhab Barua

In the last quarter of the 19th century the dawn of the Renaissance was turning to a bright morning sun. In such a transitional period Benimadhab Barua was born on 31 December 1888 in the remote district of Bengal (i.e. in Chittagong) which was then burning with the forceful spirit of liberation movement in one hand, and the Buddhist revival movement on the other. Ven'ble Saramedha Mahathera of Akyab (now in Burma) came to Chittagong to preach the original teachings of the Buddha among the so-called Buddhist of Chittagong who survived somehow, but forgot the real teachings, after the total extinction of the Buddhists from the greater part of India. Although most of the Buddhists then were illiterate, yet many of them very promptly responded to the call of Saramedha, as a result of which within a few years a great change was noticed among the Buddhists of Chittagong. The mighty spirit of the Buddhist revival movement moulded the life of many young Buddhists of Chittagong who, in their later life, could contribute a great deal for the furtherance of this movement. Benimadhab Barua was one of them whatever he did for the upliftment of the Buddhist community of Bengal in particular and for the revival of the study of Pali and Buddhism in the Indo-Bangladesh sub-continent in general, is unparalleled. It pained him much when he found that the people of India, the land of the origin of Buddhism, had totally forgotten the Buddha and his noble teachings. He, therefore, had his firm resolve (i) to establish giving authentic historical data that the Buddha was a historical person, (ii) to prove that Ashoka Dharmmaraja, the most noble emperor of India, under whose patronage the propagation of Buddhism reached its peak, was also a historical person, (iii) to

show with thorough and original investigations that the gradual development of Indian Philosophy found its culmination only in the Buddha, (iv) to make his fellow community members realize that they are the true heirs of such a noble tradition, and they should prove themselves worthy of it and lastly (v) to propagate the message of humanity- oneness in man irrespective of caste, creed, religion and nation. Throughout his life he exerted with an earnest zeal to achieve the goal, and he was successful to a great extent. But he became a victim of constant mental strain, due to his involvement in so many laborious and strenuous research works, one after the other, which ultimately cut short the span of his most valuable life.

He died only at the age of fifty nine. His community, his country and the whole scholastic world suffered irreparable loss at his sad and sudden demise. The void left by him would be difficult to fill the years and generation to come.

Dr. Benimadhab Barua, a great Indologist and acknowledged authority on Buddhism, was born on the 31st December, 1888 in a middle class Buddhist family of the village Mahamuni- Pahartali. P S. Raozan, district Chittagong (now in Bangladesh). He was the eldest son of Kabiraj Rajchandra Talukdar and Dhaneswari Devi. In his childhood he joined the village model school at the age of six and passed the M. E. Examination in 1902. Then he was admitted to the Chittagong Collegiate School in the district town and passed the Entrance Examination from the same in 1906. Thereafter, he joined the Chittagong College where from he passed the F. A. examination in the first division. In this period he came in contact with Aggamahapandita Dharmavamsa Mahasthavir who had been teaching Pali in the Chittagong Collegiate School since 1.3.1904 and in the Chittagong College since 1905. Benimadhab learnt Pali from this veteran Pali scholar and also from Mahimaranjan Barua the first graduate in the Bengali Buddhist community of Chittagong, who was also working as a lecturer in Pali in the Chittagong College, although at that time he was not yet an M.A.

In 1908 he married Pankajasundari and came to Calcutta. He studied in the Scottish Church College and as he took Pali as his Honours subject he had a privilege to attend his Pali classes in the Presidency College. Calcutta. But ultimately he passed his B.A Examination with Honours in Pali from the Krishnanath College, Baharampur under the University of Calcutta, in 1911. He passed his M A. Examination in Pali from the University of Calcutta in 1913 and stood first in class I. Then in 1914, with the help of **Ven Kripasaran Maha Thera**, a founder of Buddha Dharmankur Sabha (the Bengal Buddhist Association) and **Sir Asutosh Mookherjee**, Vice Chancellor of the Calcutta University, B.M. Barua obtained a State Scholarship for scientific study of Pali in Europe and joined the University of London. He worked there under the guidance of the veteran scholar of Pali and Buddhism Professor **Rhys Davids**. Among his other teachers included **Mrs. Rhys Davids**, **L. T. Hobhouse**, **F. W. Thomas** and **L. D. Barnett**. He studied Greek and Modern European Philosophy with Professor **Dr. Dawes Hicks**, who had initiated in him in the present historical method of the study of Philosophy. In 1917, he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Literature (D. Lit) by the University of London for his thesis entitled **Indian Philosophy - its original growth from the Vedas to the Buddha** He was the first Indian Buddhist to obtain D. Lit. from the Oxford University.

Dr. Barua began his career as a temporary headmaster of the Mahamuni Anglo Pali Institution in his native village in 1912 He took undergraduate Pali classes in the University of Calcutta in 1913-14. On his return from London, he was appointed University Lecturer the reconstituted Pali Department, Calcutta University, on December 21, 1917. After the sudden and untimely death of Mahamahopadhyay Satish Chandra Vidyabhushana, Lecturer-in-charge of the Pali Department since the inception of the Post-Graduate studies in Pali in the University of Calcutta, on the 26th March, 1920, Dr. Barua was placed in charge of the Department. From Jun 1, 1925 he received the personal distinction of University Professor. In 1930 when a separate Professorship was created for the Department of Pali, Dr. Barua was appointed as the first University Professor of Pali and he served in that capacities with great ability till his sudden demise on March 23, 1948. In recognition of his erudite scholarship in different branches of Indology, his services were respectfully requisitioned by the Post-Graduate department of Sanskrit and Ancient Indian History and Culture, University of Calcutta.

Professor Barua served the University for about 31 years. During his period this University reached the very peak of its eminence under the most able leadership of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, Tiger of Bengal who had foresightedness in picking up the would-be-jewels from all corners of India as teachers for his

growing University. Thus Professor Barua had so many scholastic geniuses as his colleagues, to mention some of them, Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, C.V. Raman, D.R. Bhandarkar, Meghnad Saha. Abanindra Nath Tagore, Suniti Kumar Chatterjee and others.

Professor Barua was the President of the Prakrit section of the **All India Oriental Conference** at **Tirupati** in 1940 and of the Ancient India section of the **All India History Congress of Annamalainagar** in 1945. He also participated at the symposium of the **Indian Philosophical Congress** held at **Delhi** in 1946. He went to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) on March 12, 1944 on a joint invitation from Mr. Ranasinha the Public Trustee acting on behalf of the Dona Alpina Ratnayake Trust and Prof. G. P. Malahasekera acting on behalf of the Buddhist Brotherhood of the University of Ceylon to deliver some lectures on Buddhism. He delivered eight lectures.

He visited Burma four times (in 1924, 1927, 1937 and 1938) and delivered lectures on Buddhist Philosophy. He received the honorary diploma of Tipitaka cariya on March 13, 1944 from the Vidyalkar Parivena (now Vidyalkar University). Just a few months before his death, he was elected a fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1948 in recognition of his erudite scholarship in the field of Indology. He was also awarded the Dr. B. C. Law Gold Medal by the Asiatic Society on February 15, 1948 as he had dominated the stage of Buddhist studies in Bengal for more than quarter of century.

Dr. Barua founded the Nalanda Vidyabhavan (an Institution of Pali and Buddhology) in 1935. Late Bhupendranath Mutsuddy, renowned lawyer of Calcutta, actively cooperated with Dr Barua in this regard. The Vidyabhavan started functioning from March 1935; the Buddha Dharmankur Vihar founded by Ven'ble Kripasaran Mahasthavir, until it was shifted to the adjacent Arya Vihar (in the same compound), the new three storied building constructed in 1937 for the accommodation of Buddhist monks and pilgrims under the munificence of Raja Baldeodas Birla and his son Jugal Kishor Biria and under the initiative of Dr. Barua. Dr. Barua was the first President of the Nalanda Vidyabhavan, while Bhupendra Nath Mutsuddy was the first secretary.

He was closely associated with so many Philanthropic and cultural associations: General Secretary of the Buddha Dharmankur Sabha, Calcutta, for a number of years; an active Governing Body member of the Maha Bodhi Society of India, Calcutta; founder member and Vice President of the Iran Society, Calcutta; member of the Executive Council of the Vangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta and Vidyalkar Parivena of Ceylon; President of the Governing Body of the Bharati Maha Vidyalaya, Calcutta and so on. For some years he was the Editor of the journal like Indian Culture, Buddhist India, Jagajyoti and Asst. Editor of Visvavani. He was also the Editor-in-Chief of the Yogendra Rupasibala Tripitaka Board, Calcutta. He was actively associated with the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Ramakrishna Mission, Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Hindu Mission and Pragati Sangha.

Professor Benimadhab Barua was a dedicated scholar and his complete mastery over ancient Indian history, philosophy and literature gave him a new dimension and depth to Buddhist studies. He felt for example, that in order to appreciate the Buddha and His teachings, one must acquaint oneself with the contemporary ideas and philosophies, beliefs and precepts, rites and ritual of different religious faiths as well as with those which predated and post dated them. He had never been biased by any religious fanaticism. He was always guided by a critical outlook and fair judgments. He said or wrote nothing which had no corroborate and authentic evidence.

His bold statement about Buddhism is commendable when he said that hundreds of years before Buddha's time movements were in progress in Indian thought, which prepared the way for Buddhism and cannot therefore be separated from sketch of the latter.

The summum bonum of human life and the ideal of human conduct and character which the Buddha set forth were shown to be in complete accord with the noble experience and life of all the great contemplatives and saintly personages of the past. To have a clear understanding and realization of the Buddha and His Philosophy, Dr. Barua, therefore, started his investigations Pre-Buddhist Indian Philosophy, and he summarized the net outcome of his lifelong researches in his Ceylon Lectures. Not only in the field of Buddhist Philosophy and Buddhism but also in the field of finding out the authentic historical data, on the basis of the ancient Indian inscriptions as regards the history of Buddhism. Dr.

Barua's investigations achieved an extraordinary success. These original investigations of far reaching importance placed him in the front rank of the Indologists of international fame.

DR. BARUA'S PUBLISHED WORKS

A. Book in English.

1. A Prolegomena to a History of Buddhist Philosophy, Calcutta, published by the University of Calcutta, 1918.

This was Barua's first book, in which he provided an outline for the study of the history of Buddhist Philosophy in the form of an introduction.

2. The Ajivikas, Calcutta, published by the University of Calcutta, 1920.

This monograph deals with the Philosophy of the Ajivikas, a sect of non Buddhist ascetics who believed in severe austerities as a means to attain salvation.

3. A History of Pre-Buddhistic Indian Philosophy, Calcutta published by University of Calcutta, 1921 (reprinted by Motilal Bararasidas, Delhi, 1970, 1981).

This work is substantially based on Barua's thesis "**Indian Philosophy its origin and growth from the Vedas to the Buddha**", though revised, altered and enlarged in light of further research. It consists of four parts, Part I, dealing with Vedic Philosophy, providing a summary of the Philosophy of Vedic seers from Aghamarsana to Visvakarman; Part II, dealing with post Vedic Philosophy, from Mahidasa Aitareya to Yajnavalkya based on a critical study of the Upanishads, Epics, Aranyakas and Brahmanas. Part III, dealing with the Philosophy before Mahavira and the Buddha i.e. (i) Philosophy of Metaphysicians like Asuri, Pippalada and others (ii) of sceptics like Sanjaya Belatthiputta and that of moralists (teachers of erotic morals, political morals and juristic morals) and part IV, dealing with Mahavira's Philosophy.

This work has two fold genetic connection with the study of Buddhism: firstly; "that it embodies the results of an investigation which was at first undertaken, at the instance of the late Rev. Gunalankar Mahathera of Chittagong to ascertain the immediate historical background of Buddhist thought and secondly that the original data for the conception of an chronology of early Indian Philosophy were derived from the Buddhist canon". In the concluding chapter of the book, Dr. Barua summaries the net outcome of his research, that hundreds of years before Buddha's time movements were in progress in Indian thought, which prepared the way for Buddhism and cannot therefore be separated from a sketch of the later. One cannot properly understand the philosophy of the Buddha if one has no basic knowledge of the Pre-Buddhist Indian Philosophy. On the other hand one should not claim that the Buddha contributed nothing new to the development of Indian Philosophical thought and that whatever he said was nothing but the repetition of what his predecessors preached.

Prakrit Dhammapada (a critical edition with translation and notes) with Sailendra Nath Mitra, Calcutta, published by the University of Calcutta, 1921. This is a critical edition of the Prakrit Dhammapada compared with the Kharosthi Dhammapada.

Barhut Inscriptions (a critical edition with translation and notes) with Kumar Gangananda Sinha, Calcutta, published by the University of Calcutta, 1926. This deals with a critical edition of the inscriptions discovered in Barhut (=Bharhut) followed by English Translation and notes.

Ashoka Edicts in New Light, Calcutta, published by University of Calcutta, 1926.

The Religion of Ashoka, Calcutta, Maha Bodhi Society, Mahabodhi Pamphlet series No. 7.

Old Brahmi inscription in the Udayagiri and Khandagiri caves, published Calcutta University, 1926.

(a) Gaya and Buddha Gaya: Early History of the Holy Land (Vol I, Book -- I), Calcutta, Published by Chucervetty Chatterjee & Co. Ltd; 1931.

This contains the Pre-Buddhist history of Gaya wherein the original Pali and Sanskrit sources have been utilized. The previous works done on the subject have also been critically discussed. This book has been rendered into Japanese and Burmese.

Gaya and Buddha Gaya : Old shrines at Buddhagaya, (Vol II, Books II - V), Calcutta, published by the Indian Research Institute, (Fine arts series No. 4), 1934. This is a pioneering work described in detail most of the old shrines at Bodh Gaya, the inscriptions engraved on their walls and railings as well as on the pedestals of various images. It also offers a systematic account of all the base reliefs, images, art and architecture of the old Bodh Gaya Shrines.

Barhut (an authoritative work on the stupa of Barhut in three volumes) Calcutta, published by Indian Research Institute (Fine Arts Series No. 1) 1934-37. The volumes are titled as “**Stone as a story Teller**” (Vol. I), “**Jataks Scenes**” (Vol II) and “**Art and illustrations**” (Vol III).

Inscriptions of Ashoka, Part I (a critical edition of texts) Calcutta, published by the University of Calcutta, 1943.

Inscriptions of Ashoka, Part II (Translation and notes) Calcutta, published by the University of Calcutta, 1945.

Ceylon Lectures, Calcutta, published by the Bharati Mahavidyalaya (Buddhist series No 1), 1945.

This is a collection of extension Lectures delivered by Prof. Barua in Ceylon in March 1944. He delivered eight lectures, three in the History series (i) India and Ceylon: A Birds Eye View, (ii) Problems of Ancient History of Ceylon and (iii) Ceylon's Contribution to Buddhism and five in the religion series: (i) Buddha's Greatness and Role (ii) Buddhism and Buddha's Personal Religion (iii) Buddhism as an Institutional Religion (iv) Buddhism and Early Vedanta and (v) Buddhism - its Modern Appeal. In this book we find Dr. Barua as a different man. Here we find him as a great master of the Buddha's religion and Philosophy - such an exposition of Buddhism is rarely found elsewhere. Here he is a poet, a philosopher and a true lover of nature. Here is a perfect gentleman with a spirit of Universal brotherhood infinite compassion and loving kindness.

Asoka and his Inscriptions Parts I and II, Calcutta, published by New Age Publishers, 1946 (2nd ed. 1955; 3 rd ed. 1968). Outcome of a prolonged study of inscriptions and legends of the great Maurya emperor Asoka in their manifold bearings, this work analyses his personal history, empire, state, administration, personal and public life, dharma, dharmavijaya and his place in history.

The Philosophy of Progress, Calcutta, published by Novelty publisher, 1948.

Studies in Buddhism (ed. B. N. Choudhury), Calcutta, published by Sarascuat Library, 1974.

This is a collection of some articles on Buddhism written by Dr. Barua, edited by his nephew (sister's son) Binayendran Nath Chowdhury, himself a Pali scholar.

The University of Calcutta, in its publication, A Hundred Years of Calcutta University (supplement) describe three more books of Dr Barua.

- (a) **Chakma Taras from Chittagong Hill Tracts**
- (b) **Mss of Dharma - Samuccaya and Karandavyuha.**
- (c) **Burmese Mss, of later Pali works.**

Books in Bengali

1. **Lokaniti**, (a critical edition and translation of the Pali Lokamti), Calcutta, published by the Buddha Dharmankur Sabha in their annual proceedings in 1912.
2. **Maniratnamala** (Bengali translation of a small booklet in Sanskrit written by Srimat Sankaracharya), Calcutta published by the Buddha Dharmankur Sabha in their annual-proceedings in

- 1913.
3. **Grihi Vinaya**, Calcutta (a critical edition and translation of the Singalovada Sutta of the Pali Digha Nikaya) published by the Buddha Dharmankur Sabha in their annual proceedings in 1913.
4. **Satipatthana** (i.e. critical edition and translations of the Satipatthana Sutta of the Pali Digha Nikaya, Calcutta, published by the Buddha Dharmankur Sabha in their annual proceedings in 1914.
5. **Baudha Parinaya Paddhati**, Calcutta, 1923, in which Dr. Barua attempted to reform the marriage rules of the Buddhist community of Bengal.
6. **Bauddha Granthakosa**, Vol I (Pitakagranthavati), Calcutta, published by the Indian research Institute, 1936.
7. This was just the first face of the proposed encyclopedia of Buddhism in
8. Bengal with special reference to the Pali Tripitaka.
9. **Madhyam Nikaya** (an authentic Bengal, translation of the Pali Majjhima Nikaya), Vol. I. Calcutta, published by Yogendra Ruparibala Tripitaka Board, Calcutta, 1940

Articles in English.

1. **Mahayana in the Making** (Sir Asutosh Silver Jubilee commemoration Volume III, Oriental, Calcutta, published by the University of Calcutta).
2. **Old Buddhist Shrines at Buddha Gaya** (I. H. Q. Vol. VI)
3. **A Bodhi Gaya Image Inscription** (I. H. Q. Vol. IX).
4. **Cittavisuddhiprakarana - its Pali basis** (IC Vol. I)
5. **Five reliefs from Nagarjunikonda** (i.e. Vol I)
6. **Two Bauddha Ghosas** (i.e. Vol I)
7. **Bogus Bodhi Gaya Plaque** (I. E Vol I)
8. **Review of "Buddhism -its Birth and Dispersal"** by Mrs Rhys Davids (I.C. Vol. I).
9. **Bodhi Gaya Sculptures** (i.C. Vol III)
10. **Pre Buddhist India** (i. C. Vol III, Jul, 41 -Jun 42)
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12. **Early life of Gosala** (Calcutta Review, C. U).
13. **Historical Background of Jainology and Buddhology** (Calcutta Review, C. U. 1924).
14. **Historical Divinities as Embodiments of the Thirty Seven Constituents of Supreme knowledge.** (JISOA Vol VIII, 1940).
15. **Faith in Buddhism, in Buddhist studies, Vol I** by B. C Law, Calcutta, Thacker, Spink, 1931.
16. **Pratīyasamuttpada as the Basic concept of Buddhist thought**, in B.C. Law Volume, Part I., ed. D. R. Bhandarkar, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona (1945-46)
17. **The Atthakavagga and Parayanavagga as two companion Pali Anthologies**, proceedings of the fifth All India Oriental Conference.
18. **Presidential Address, Prakrit section**, proceedings of the All India Oriental Conference, Tirupati, 1940.
19. **The Role of Buddhism in Indian life and thought** (i. C. subsequently reproduced in the Journal of the Mahabodhi Society, being a lecture delivered in a symposium of the Indian Philosophical congress).
20. **Early Buddhism**, in the cultural Heritage of India, Vol. I. published on the occasion of the birth centenary of Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Committee. Belur Math, Calcutta, 1937 (2nd ed. Pub. By the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta 1958).
21. **Universal Aspect of Buddhism** (Baudha Prabha, magazine of the Buddhist society of Bombay: a presidential address).
22. **Bauddhadatta and Buddhagosa: Their contemporaneity and age** (University of Calcutta Review, Vol. III, 1945)
23. **The year of commencement of the Buddha Era** (University of Ceylon Review).
24. **Buddhism and its psychological foundation, twentieth century India** (Published from USA).
25. **Nature in Barhut Sculptures** (C. Review, 1926).
26. **Ashoka's Examples: Their Historical Importance** (K. M. Munshi volume).
27. **Ashoka's examples and Brahmin Animosity** (Modern Review).
28. **Gosala as an Epithet of Makkhali** (I.H.Q. Vol. IV).
29. **The Yerragudi of Ashoka's Minor Rock Edict** (Subsequently revised, I.H.Q. Vol. IX).

CONCLUSION

Dr. Beni Madhab Barua was highly recognized scholar whose work on Buddhist Studies, Ancient Indian Philosophy and Inscriptions are greatly esteemed today. The credit of reviving Buddhist Studies as a branch of academic study at university level goes to Dr. Beni Madhab Barua with other Bengali erudite. He widens the horizon of knowledge of Buddhist Studies. He had great contribution in the resurgence of Buddhism. We need to highlight these facts for his valuable life philosophy and appreciate this great man as his life itself is a great message to our present society.

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