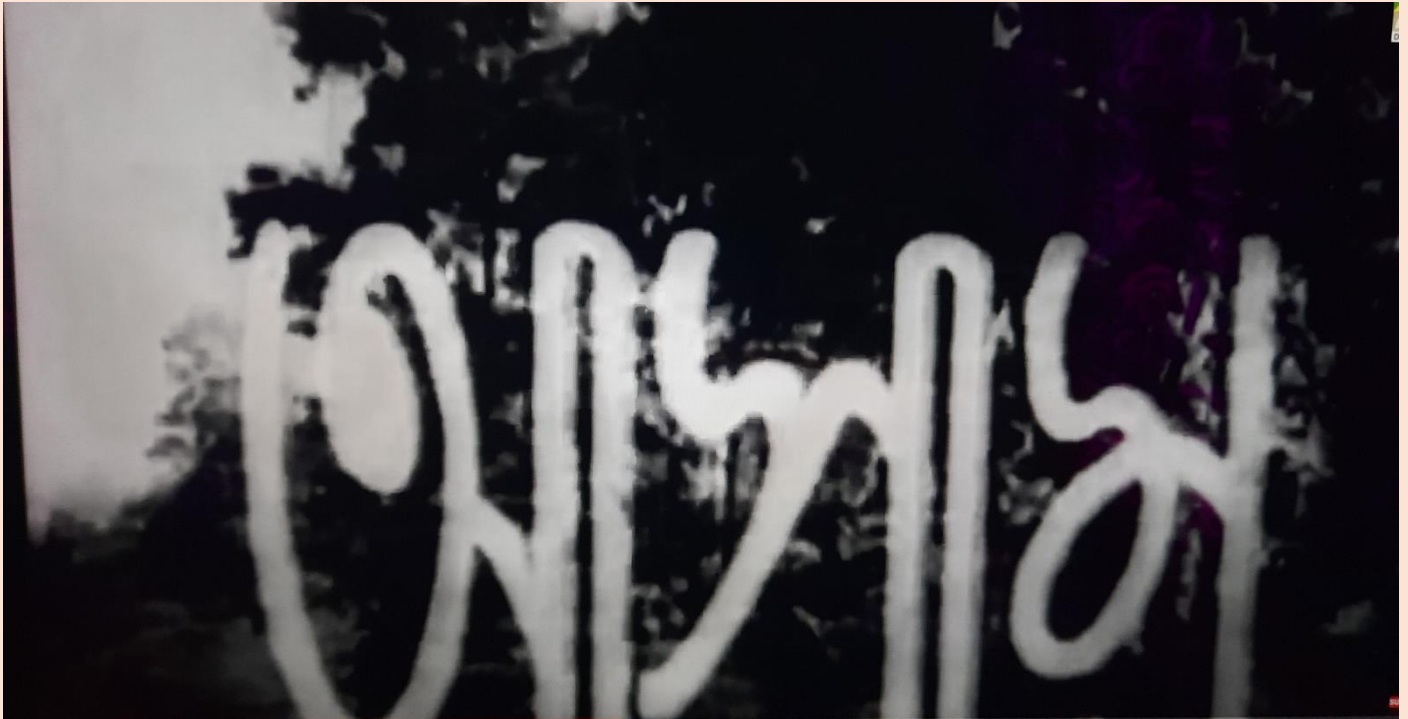


Article  
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## The Question of Assameseness: Cosmopolitan Consciousness of P.C. Barua



*Still from Barua's film Mukti*

An extensive discussion has been made on the biographical sketch and works of Pramathesh Chandra Barua, one of the leading pioneers of India cinema. But the aspect that has hardly been found a space in the writing and discussion at the national narrative is why Pramathesh, being an ardent lover of Gauripur, Assam, did not make an Assamese film in the span of two decades of his cinematic journey. Displeasures across the state of Assam in the 1940s was seen, and many termed Barua as 'anti nationalist' in Assam. Ibha Barua Datta, scion of the Barua family, says that she is disheartened to read the sharp criticism on Pramathesh in the Assamese newspapers for not making an Assamese film.

Some erroneously claim that Barua made three versions of his classic film *Devdas*- Bengali, Hindi and Assamese. This inauthentic information even gets a space in various national and international journals and webpages. The national newspaper *The Times of India* published Priyanka Dasgupta's article on Barua on 4<sup>th</sup> Oct, 2016. It states that Barua had

made *Devdas* in three Languages - Bengali (1935), Hindi (1936) and Assamese (1937). Likewise, *World Heritage Encyclopedia*, [bollywoodirect.medium.com](http://bollywoodirect.medium.com), [amp.blog.shopsnet.com](http://amp.blog.shopsnet.com) and numerous sources carry the same incorrect information stating that Assamese *Devdas* made in 1937 was Barua's last of the three language versions of the film. Wikipedia misleadingly mentions that Bhupen Hazarika was the playback singer of the film. It is pertinent to mention here that when *Jyoti Chitrabhan* film studio was established in Guwahati and became functional from 1968, Dr. Hazarika proposed the Government of Assam to name the studio's shooting floor after Pramathesh Ch. Barua. *Bhadari* by Nip Baruah was the first film, shot at Pramathesh Ch. Barua shooting floor.

Several research papers were written on the basis of these inauthentic information, but this specific aspect of P.C. Barua has remained unexplored. Many speculate from multiple angles, but the question needs to be analyzed deep down to its root.

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, the recipient of Dada Saheb Phalke Award for his overall contribution to Indian cinema, exclusively stated that when Jyotiprasad Agarwala decided to make the first Assamese film in the 1930s, people of this region called him 'crazy'. Well wishers warned Jyotiprasad about the great financial risk as there were no theatres and the distributors in Assam at that time. Moreover, there was hardly any female artistes available in the region. Subsequently, Dr. Hazarika unequivocally pointed out that P.C. Barua of Assam had not started one in Assamese, and he seemed to be more pragmatic.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Hazarika believed that Assam was such a secluded region in terms of acquaintance of film in the 1930s, that it would be a blooper on the filmmaker's part to make an Assamese film. Nevertheless, he accentuated that P.C. Barua did not make an Assamese film because there were no theatres, and furthermore, people of Assam were hardly aware of the changing phase of Indian cinema in the 1930s.

Probably, Dr. Hazarika missed one perspective of his elucidation on P.C. Barua's aversion to make an Assamese film. A little introspection reveals that the cultural, geographical and linguistic distinctiveness of Gauripur from the mainstream Assamese society and culture is the root of all why Barua was apathetic to work on an Assamese film. But deep down at his heart, he wanted to explore Assam through his cinema. Interestingly, when the first Assamese film *Joyoti* by Jyotiprasad Agarwala was premiered at Rounak Mahal, Calcutta on 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1935, Barua graced the occasion as a guest, and congratulated Jyotiprasad.

### **Assam, Assamese and Pramathesh's cosmopolitanism**

Pramathesh became the object of the acrimony of the Assamese people. Many called Barua that he was not a true Assamese. Even after his demise, the bitterness among a section of people in Assam did not go away until and unless Dr. Birendra Nath Datta, a renowned singer, lyricist and an academician of Assam, who married Ibha Barua, a scion of the Barua family, discovered some letters from Madhurilata, the first wife of Pramathesh Barua. These letters changed the

whole perception of Pramathesh from Assamese point of view. Among the letters, Datta found a lecture written by Pramathesh in Bengali. This lecture was delivered at a students' meeting at Gauhati in the 1940s, where Barua was invited as a guest to preside over the meeting. Instantly Datta designed a plan to publish them in the form of a small magazine. Datta and Jogesh Das, Assamese short story writer and novelist named the magazine as *Pramathesh Barua Smritigantha*, and published it in 1963. It carried the Assamese translation of Pramathesh's lecture delivered at Gauhati among the Assamese students. Pramathesh's written lecture was translated from Bengali to Assamese jointly by Datta and Das. This lecture threw a new light in looking at Pramathesh as a filmmaker, and as an Assamese.

Pramathesh addressed the gathering that he thanked everyone for inviting him to preside over this programme. He said that he would like to discuss his works and answer those accusations brought upon him by his people. He lamented that he had been accused as anti-Assamese and again it was alleged that he had least interest in the development of the region where he was born. He was accused as a deserter of homeland. He told the students that they would be the future of Assam and it was not a big deal what people thought of him, but how he would be looked at in future by people that bore significance. He continued that he was a part of politics in Assam. But he decided to leave politics when he found too much self-centeredness in the regional politics. He believed that art is higher than everything and it is universal. According to him, in Art, there is no place called self-glorification, where one can work and think with free mind. In his lecture, Barua said that he shifted from politics to art, and also shifted from the region of Assam to a wider place. If he made a mistake while doing so, then he was guilty. He said, "...I love my village, I love Assam. If there is any reason that people should be proud of me, it's just because of Assam. Still, I assure that whenever I am needed for Assam, I will be here. I love Assam, I love the world."

In his presidential lecture, Barua asked the students to see the world with a cosmopolitan view. He

continued that he saw the world, nation and sub nation and several societies in the world. He said, “Education makes us forget that we are human. The same education teaches us to call ourselves that we are Assamese, Bengali, Bihari etc. We learn to hate one another instead of loving... whenever I am asked if I am an Assamese, I answer them that I am Indian. If I am guilty of it, then I pray God so that I can lead my life with this guilt feeling inside me.”

Datta comments in a conversation with me that Pramathesh was born in Assam, a gift given to India from Assam. Even the Bengal too seems to forget him. But we should have done something for this son of Assam. He says that he feels bad when some even blamed him as an anti Assamese. Unfortunately, till now there are many who have not accepted him as an Assamese. Although Barua spent a large part of his life away from Assam, he loved neither London, nor Paris, not even Calcutta, but Gauripur. Alakesh Barua reads out the lines to Datta from his father’s letter (Pramathesh). Datta says to me that those words still resonate in his ears: "I will go back to Gauripur. To my village Gauripur, to my beloved village Gauripur".

Pramathesh’s lecture given at the students’ meeting suggests that he is an artist and a creator who did not want to confine himself in a geographical boundary, in a narrowly defined territory called homeland or home-state. He undoubtedly loved Assam, and particularly Gauripur, but his creativity carried itself across the boundary of home- state. He chose to step in a wider world of wider culture and artistic consciousness. Pramathesh’s cosmopolitanism reminds one of Stephen Debalus’s desire to embrace a wider culture and artistic world in James Joyce’s *The Poertrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

### **Matiabag Palace and the film *Mukti***

Barua made a huge contribution to the development of Indian cinema since the silent era, and his notable body of work from *Bengal-1983* (1932) to *Iran Ki Ek Raat* (1949) won much critical acclaim. But the only film in which Barua unswervingly refers to Assam and brings the entire crew to Gauripur to shoot, was

*Mukti* (1937). Barua chose his own Matiabag palace and the forest of Gauripur as the location of the film. The structure of Matiabag Rajbari or Matiabag Palace, a stupendous palace at Matiabag hill on the bank of the Godadhar river, was built by Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, father of P.C. Barua. The palace was used as Hawakhana by the Royal family of Gauripur. This palace is illustrious for its magnificent doorframe and roof top of the highest architectural merit. This double storey palace exhibits a distinctive edifice and design and is believed to be built with Chinese engineer and architect. On the top of the palace, there is an arch, where one can see the juxtaposition of traditional Indian art with Mughal and Christian embellishment. It suggests Raja’s secular thought and a broad outlook towards the world. This two storeyed palace has eight rooms each with eight beautifully designed doors.



*Matiabaag Palace in film Mukti*

The opening sequence of the film *Mukti* (1937), scripted and directed by P.C. Barua, was shot at the Matiabag palace. Barua was assisted by Phani Mazumder, his childhood friend from Gauripur, Bibhuti Chakravorty and Saumana Mukharjee. The film begins with the protagonist Proshanto Roy, an artist, opening the door of their house one by one and knocks at the fourth door with a rhythm (The opening sequence of the film was shot at the ground floor of the palace). His wife’s voice comes out from the other side of the room, who asks “Who is it? Don’t open the door as I am changing cloth.” Proshanto teases and says, “I am going to open the door.” Then both of



them exchange jokes and playful words, and progressively the narrative shifts from lighter vein to serious tone when Proshanto refuses to accompany her at her father's party. In fact, she belongs to a rich family and her father does not support of Proshanta's art work. One day Chitra discovers a female model in his studio, and this misunderstanding leads their marital relationship to a break down. Proshanta left behind a letter with a suggestion that he would do away with life and then disappears in the forest of Assam- drinking and spending time with an elephant. He meets Jharna, wife of an innkeeper and the local people.



Author at Matiabaag Palace

When the narrative shifts from Calcutta city life to Assam, Barua shows a large word in the middle of the frame- "Assam". Thus, Barua made the direct link of his film to his root i.e. Assam. Barua as Proshanta roams in the dense forest of Assam with his gun and riding on the elephant. In the meantime, Chitra's family thought him to be dead, and on her father's demand, she married the rich boy Bipul. One day, the newly married couple - Chitra and Bipul and their family circle visit the same forest for a hunt. When Proshanta learns that Chitra is kidnapped by the local Sardar, he rescues her. Proshanta, while trying to save her, dies at her lap. The film uses Tagore's lyrics with the original tunes – *sabar range rang mesate hobe, tar biday belar malakhani*.

In one of the scenes, Pramathesh is seen smoothly stepping up on the elephant and the elephant drags him effortlessly on its top. Baruas had a number of elephants and the elephant shown in the film was

Jung Bahadur. Elephant catching or taming elephant was a part of the tradition of Barua family.

Dr. Hazarika, who shifted his work place from Guwahati to Calcutta in the 1950s, and who considers Calcutta as his second home, shares his experience watching Barua's *Mukti* as retrospective at IFFI, in 1984. "...I could see some natural beauty of Assam's Gauripur only in Pramathesh Barua's film *Mukti*, which was screened as a part of retrospective... Songs in the film were penned by Rabindranath Tagore. I could feel the resonance of *Goalporiya dotara* and the *mahout* song in the background, which made me enthralled." <sup>2</sup>

### Plan for Assamese Cinema

Many speculate if Pramathesh ever wanted to make a film in Assamese or a film on the culture of Assam. While interacting with Datta, he tells me a story how Nilima Barua, Pramathesh's younger sister, told Datta how they wrote a story in London for a film. On his sister Nilima Barua's inspiration Pramathesh decided to make a film on the cultural richness of Assam. When Pramathesh was in London, Nilima too accompanied him. Barua worked in the theatre hall in London for a short stint of time. He was free at eleven at night and he wrote on the film at that time. During dinner time both of them discussed on the film. In this way they completed a large part of the proposed film writing. Datta continued that he even started searching for materials while intending to make a film on *Joymoti*. It is unfortunate for us that both of these proposed film projects were not materialized. Datta further told me that Pramathesh wanted to make documentaries as Nilima Barua told him, on the children of Assam. But the time frame of Pramathesh's plan for the film *Joymoti* cannot be determined: it is difficult to conclude when exactly he thought of making the film.

Even in his death bed, Barua told his son about a story in which he wanted to make a film on Assamese. Shoma A. Chatterji quotes his son's words, "It was about a middle-aged prostitute who is no longer in circulation. She tries frantically to have a baby by a young man who rejects her. She runs away to the

Kamakhya temple in Assam and sleeps with the old priest. She conceives and begins to imagine the child is lord Shiva's."<sup>3</sup>

### Cultural and linguistic distinctiveness of Gauripur

Gauripur, famous for the Barua family, has its own cultural and linguistic distinctiveness. Proximity of Calcutta from Barua's home town, his acquaintance with Bengali language and culture from his childhood, and his schooling and college life at Calcutta brings him closer to the Bengali culture. Prabir Barua, P.C Barua's nephew says in a conversation that the communication from Gauripur to Calcutta was very convenient in those days. If one boarded at the train in the evening at Gauripur, one could reach Calcutta at dawn. The train went via Gulganj, Parbatipur (now these places have gone to Bangladesh after partition). To reach Guwahati from Gauripur was a hazardous journey. Barua family even had a house in Ballygunje Circular road, Calcutta. Moreover, the influence of Bengali in this region was strong than Assamese in those days. P.C.Barua was well versed in Bengali, Hindi and English. But whenever he visited Gauripur, he used to speak in *deshi bhasha/kotha* among the family circle.

The language spoken in the region was initially known as *deshi bhasha*. It is said that when Dr. Bhupen Hazarika came to Gauripur to pay a visit to Barua family in the 1950s, he addressed the language as *Goalporiya*. It has an interesting anecdote. Once Dr. Hazarika came to their Matiabaag palace and in the family gathering, Barua's nephew sang a Bengali song, Dr. Hazarika an Assamese song, and then Pratima Barua, niece of P.C. Barua, sang a *deshi gaan*. Dr. Hazarika was amazed to find the uniqueness of the tune in Pratima's Barua's song because it was neither Assamese nor Bengali. Pratima told Dr. Hazarika that it was a *deshi gaan*. Startled to hear the word *deshi gaan*, Dr. Hazarika expressed, "Do we sing *bideshi bhasha gaan*? We too sing *deshi gaan*." When Pratima was invited for the audition at AIR, Guwahati, she was denied as the language of her song was neither Assamese nor Bengali. Later Dr. Hazarika, Rudra Barua, Purusuttam Das fought to

establish a new name, and then gave the song a new name- *Goalporiya lukogeet* instead of *deshi bhashar gaan*. But at present, the language spoken is specifically called as Kamtapuri/Rajbanshi.

Birendranath Dutta writes in the chapter "A Note on the Dialects of Goalpara" that there was a time when much controversy raged as to whether Goalpara was Assamese-speaking or Bengali-speaking, owing to the fact that some of the dialects spoken in the district differed more or less substantially from those spoken in other parts of the Brahmaputra valley and bore some resemblance to Bengali..."<sup>4</sup> Dutta continued that according to Grierson, the dialect spoken in western and south-western Goalpara is 'pure Rajbangsi'. while the people of Goalpara who speak the dialect call it as *desi katha* (the local speech) or *Goalpariya bhasa* (the Goalporiya language). It is clear that there are several facts of variance between *desi bhasha* and Assamese, but, its similarity with Eastern Bengali can not be ignored.

Historically speaking, the British parted Bengal keeping a political motive underneath. A province-East Bengal and Assam including Chittagong was formed on 16<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1905. This historic partition of Bengal was a blow to the people who as a mark of protest, observed the day as a day of national mourning. Even in Assam too, the anti-partition day was observed, and in Dhubri, for example, there was a public *sankirtan* in the morning, taken part by the different members of communities irrespective of caste, creed and belief. The President of the Assam Association Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, the father of P.C. Barua and its secretary submitted a memorandum to the Secretary of State in 1907 pleading for the withdrawal of the partition. They also urged for placing Assam and Bengal under a common governor, appointment of a separate commissioner with a separate service for Assam and for reservation of a seat for an Assamese in the Provincial Legislative council. Furthermore, they emphasized their earlier demands on the protection of the interests of the Assamese youth and Assamese language. Owing to the huge pressure, the British had to withdraw it, and Assam again became a chief commissioner's province with a Legislative council of its own, at

Shillong, from April 1, 1912. This decision a huge relief to the varied sections of the Assamese intelligentsia, but in Surma valley/ Barak Valley, particularly those of Sylhet, they considered that “a deep injury and a deep wound had been inflicted on the Bengali –speaking population by tagging them to Assam having no affinity whatever, geographical, ethnological and linguistic.”<sup>5</sup>

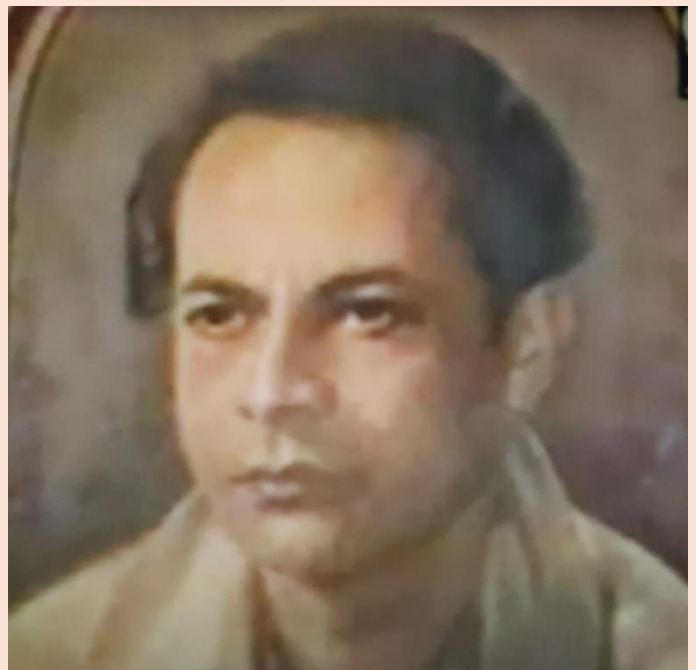
Ibha Barua Datta, says that Pramathesh was a true Assamese by heart and soul. The Barua family never call themselves as Bengali, but deshi manchi (local people). Our culture is quite distinctive from Bengali, as for example, in terms of wearing saree. The fold of the saree worn by Bengali women is different from ours. Pramathesh’s sisters- Niharbala Barua and Nilima Barua, wore saree with deshi fold of the saree.

### The Baruas

Pramathesh’s grandfather Raja Pratap Chandra Barua was a zamindar and shifted the capital from Rangamati to Gauripur in 1850. As Raja Pratap was childless, he adopted Prabhat Chandra Barua, who later became Raja and assumed the responsibility of the Gauripur estate in 1896, as a zamindar. Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua was aficionado in music, drama, sports and indigenous culture of the western part of Assam. Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua married Sarajabala Devi. They had three sons - Pramathesh Barua, Prakritish Barua, Raj kumar Pranabesh Chandra Barua and two daughters Niharbala, Nilima Sundari. Prakritish Chandra Barua, fondly called as Lalji, who shifted from Rajbari to Matiabag palace with his family, was known to be the executive of trust property of the Gauripur Raj estate. Prakritish was a forest man who was fondly addressed as ‘Lalji’. He was skilful in catching elephants, and later his legacy was carried forward by his daughter Parbati Barua. While Nilima Barua, second daughter of Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua, obtained a Diploma in 1945 from Shantiniketan, Calcutta. But she returned to Gauripur and established the ‘Rani Sarojbala Nari Samity’. As she made an immense contribution to the local culture, later, she was honoured by giving the post of Director of the Handloom and Textile Board, Government of Assam. Nihar Barua spent her days in

researching on folk culture and music. Though she spent most of her times in Calcutta, but she spent her days in Gauripur.

Pramathesh Chandra Barua was born and brought up at Gauripur, a small beautiful town located then in the district of Goalpara, but at present located in Dhubri district of Assam. Barua family had two houses – Rajbari and Matiabag palace. Rajbari was in the middle of the town and was their original house where all the children of Barua family were grown up including P.C.Barua. While Matiabaag Palace, situated on the top of the hillock, by the bank of the river Gadadhar, was reserved for the VIP guests. “My bordeuta (uncle) P.C. Barua and our younger uncle Pranabesh stayed in the Rajbari house, while my father Lalaji came to the Matiabaag palace who was also a Member of Legislative Assembly”, says to the author by Prabir Barua, Lalaji’s son. Prabir Barua continued that his bordeuta (elder uncle) P.C. Barua got his primary education at Gauripur under Ashutosh Bandyopadhyay, a home tutor and also a guardian. Later, Barua was sent to Hare school in Calcutta for his formal schooling.



*Pramathesh Barua*

Pramathesh was born on 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1903. Since his childhood, he used to have the elephant ride on their own elephants- Jung Bahadur and Bijoylal. Brought up as a prince in their royal house Rajbari, he liked



hunting, and swam in the Gadadhar river. Since his schooldays, he was fond of drama and participated in cultural activities. Furthermore, he played football, tennis and billiards. Pramathesh's father Raja Prabhat Chandra Barua was interested in education and comprehensive development of his children. Hence Pramathesh was sent to Calcutta to pursue his studies at Hare School, when he completed primary education at Gauripur. And then, he was admitted to the Presidency College of Calcutta, where he met the intelligentsia of Bengal that garnered a new perspective in him to see the world.

While Barua was in Calcutta, he met Sisir Kumar Bhaduri, a pioneer of modern Bengali theatre who made films like *Andhare Alo* (Beam of Light, 1922). Interestingly, coming back to his home town Gauripur during his vacation, he formed a club with his relative and friends- Rabin Adhikari of Pramathesh's uncle's son, Pradip Adhikari of his maternal uncle's son, relatives like Nirod Barua, Sailesh Barua, Prafulla Datta Choudhury and Bibhuti Chakravarty and named the club as "Gauripur Young Man's Association". They made temporary stage at the courtyard of the Mahamaya Mandir, located in the premises of their Rajbari. Barua directed and acted in the plays in deshi bhasha at their Rajbari. Pramathesh directed a drama 'Fulshor' at their Gauripur palace and his father Prabhat Chandra Barua was the music director. "It was as if the beginning of illuminating the talent of an Assamese youth in future Bengali cinema was just begun through the direction and acting in the plays", says Subrate Rudra, author of the book Pramathesh Barua Jibancharit.<sup>6</sup>

In 1921, at age 18, Pramathesh got married to Madhurilata, daughter of the zamindar Birendranath Mitter of Bagbazar, Calcutta arranged by Pramathesh's family. Madhurilata who took the familial responsibility of the Barua family, earned respect as a daughter-in-law in the royal family of Gauripur. "Everyone in the family addressed her as 'bou rani'. She assimilated with the deshi culture. She spoke *deshi bhasa* with so much accuracy that none can say that she was from Calcutta. We called her *jethi maa*", says Ibha Barua Datta.

But, Pramathesh was enamoured with the beauty of Kshiti, a girl from a zaminder family in Dhubri. In fact, she was the sister of Jhunu zaminder of Dhubri. He took her to Calcutta and had a live-in-relationship with her for a couple of years, and then got married to her on 11<sup>th</sup> Feb, 1934. This relationship irked the whole Barua family, particularly his father and the people of Gauripur. "At that time, our society was very conservative. The society of Gauripur did not accept the Pramathesh-Kshiti relationship", says Ibha Barua Datta. As a result of it, Pramathesh decided to begin a new life with Kshiti in Calcutta, leaving behind Gauripur's royal estate. When Kshiti suffered from tuberculosis, she decides to return Gauripur. (she died of tuberculosis in 1937 at Gauripur). She gave birth a baby boy named Arup. Kshiti's son Arup was brought up under the care of his first wife Madhurilata. "Madhuri jethi maa had a strong and lively character. She was like a devi for her generous nature. She took immense care to Arup. In our childhood, we never realized that Arup was her step son", says Ibha Barua Datta.



Again, he married Jamuna Devi, who played the role of Parbati in *Devdas*, in 1934, in the same year in which he married Kshiti. Pramathesh's first wife Madhurilata had two sons- Alakesh Barua and Shyamalesh Barua, second wife Kshiti had one son - Arup Barua and the third wife Jumuna had three sons- Debkumar Barua, Rajat Kumar Barua and Prasun Kumar Barua.

Alakesh Barua studied for a brief stint of time in Calcutta, and then Carmic Michael College, Rangpur, (now Bangladesh) was the professor in Philosophy department and retired as a vice principal from Pramathesh Barua College, Gauripur. He was also the classmate of Mrinal Sen. While Arup Barua studied at St. Edmunds college, Shilling. He worked for a brief period at coca cola company. He was a close friend of Heman Barua. Dr. Hazarika's second feature film *Mahut Bondhure* (1958), made in *deshi bhasha* that depicts the cultural life of Goalpara focussing on the struggle of mahout, who rides and tends the elephants. The story was written by Alakesh Barua, while Arup Barua, son of Pramathesh Ch. Barua acted in one of the roles of mahout.

In 1926, Pramathesh Barua went to England. While Pramathesh was in England, his name was nominated to the Assam Legislative Council as member in 1928. He joined the Swaraj Party of Chittaranjan Das. As he was not interested in political affairs, later he completely leaned to films.

### Familial Conflicts

When Pramathesh left Gauripur's royal estate and decided to embark on a new journey in the world of cinema in Calcutta, he used to write letters to Madhuri, his first wife, his father, his brother Lalji, his childhood friend Bibhuti Chakravorty. His letters bear a clear reflection of his disoriented and guilt-ridden mind. His live-in-relationship with Kshiti and the question of social acceptance of this relationship shattered Barua. In his letters, Barua often mentioned that he did not want to go back to Gauripur as he felt embarrassed. The reason of embarrassment was his relationship with Kshiti, and as his family circle and the society did not approve of this relationship. Later,

Kshiti decided to leave Calcutta for Gauripur. This act worried Barua much. Barua wrote to his brother Prakitesh (Lalji) on 24<sup>th</sup> Aug, 1933, "Kshiti has gone to Gauripur. She is your sister-in-law, and respects her that way. If I die, she will seek shelter at your place. Don't hate her...I am broken. If mother were alive, I would go and cry at her lap... I won't go back to Gauripur- I feel embarrassed." In another letter written to his wife Madhuri, Barua commented that Kshiti was a prostitute in the eyes of the society and the people. But for God and for him, she was his wife. Again, Barua wrote to his childhood friend Bibhuti Chakravorty, "I am forced to leave Gauripur for ever, and my last resort is this Calcutta house."<sup>7</sup>

These letters clearly suggest that the familial conflicts were one of the reasons that Barua could not perhaps stay in Assam in the later part of his life, and could not fulfil many creative projects that he wanted to do in Assam and Assamese language.

### Film Journey

Barua was exposed to the wider perspective of cinema when he was in Paris, learning different uses of lighting in films at the Fox Studios. He was trained in cinematography in Paris. Back in India, Barua formed the "Barua Film Unit" in 1931 at their family house in Ballygunje Circular Road, Calcutta. Under the banner of "Barua Film Unit", the first silent film "Aparadhi" was made, directed by Debaki Kumar Bose, which was released on 28<sup>th</sup> Nov, 1931. The second silent film under this banner was "Ekda" was released in 1932, directed by Sushil Mazumder. The third silent film *Nishir Dak* could be completed under this banner, and later, Arora studio purchased the Barua Film Unit, and completed the film.

Barua made the first talkie in *Bengal-1933*, and was a disaster as far as the sound quality was concerned. In 1932, a reproduction Cystophone set was invented by Mr. Ramdas Chatterjee of Calcutta University, and the machine was installed at Chabighar Calcutta. This locally invented Indian Sound Recording System and the Sound Reproduction System was a hope for the sound film. Barua took a bold decision to experiment this new



sound set for his first talkie. The film, inaugurated by Rabindranath Tagore, was released in the Ruphani theatre. But the sound quality of the film was a disaster. The audience could not understand any dialogue. The audience was so infuriated with it that they damaged the theater, and later, Pramathesh had to pay money for the loss.

After such a disaster, Barua joined New Theatres. At New Theatres, Barua's first film was *Roolekha* (1934). But it was through his classic film *Devdas* (1935) that Barua rose to prominence. The film was based on Saratchandra Chatterjee's novel, Barua played the lead role in the Bengali version, while K.L. Saigal in the Hindi version. The film is set in a feudal Bengali milieu, and narrates the story of love between Devdas, son of a zamindar, and Parbati, daughter of a low strata of the society. They are childhood friends. Devdas's family does not approve of this relationship due to their social position. His family sends Devdas to Calcutta for higher studies. While Parbati is married off to a rich old widower. Devdas tries to stop the marriage, but he could not. Back to Calcutta, Devdas becomes alcoholic, and finds comfort with

a prostitute, Chandramukhi. Finally, he comes to Parbati's village where he dies.

Since the popularity of *Devdas*, Barua continued making films like *Manzil* (1936), *Mukti* (1937), *Adhikar* (1938), *Zindagi* (1940). From *Devdas* to *Zindagi*, there is an impressive body of work. In 1940, Barua left New Theatres in order to freelance, during which time he made several films, of which *Shap Mukti* (1940) and *Shesh Uttar* (1942). When his health deteriorated due to the diagnosis of tuberculosis, he was taken to London, and then to Swizerland. But he passed away on 29<sup>th</sup> Nov, 1951 at the age of 48.

Pramathesh's body of works transcend the geographic, linguistic and cultural boundary of the state. He is above narrow nationalism, and an epitome of filmmaker with a cosmopolitan consciousness. The death anniversary of Pramathesh Chandra Barua should or must be declared as "Cinemar Din" (Day of Cinema) by Government of Assam as a mark of respect for his enormous contribution to Indian cinema.

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