

## BIODATA OF PROFESSOR SHIELA BORA

A Professor (Retd.) in the Department of History and Coordinator, Centre for Tourism Management in Dibrugarh University, Dr. Shiela Bora is currently the Honorary Advisor, Deptt. of History, the Assam Royal Global University, Guwahati.

Dr Shiela Bora had an outstanding student/academic career. Having completed her Bachelors degree with Major in History from Loreto House College in Calcutta, she was awarded a Master's degree in History and a Ph. D degree from Gauhati University. She is the recipient of the Gauhati University gold medal, as well as the prestigious S.K. Bhuyan Memorial prize, for securing the first class first position in History in the M.A. examination in 1970.

She is **one of Assam's first two-time recipient of the prestigious Fulbright scholarship** from the United States Foundation of India (USEFI) – in 1989 and 1996. These awards took her to Yale University, Connecticut, USA, in 1989 as a senior post-doctoral research scholar on the “Impact of the American Baptist Missionaries on Women of North-East India,”, and again in 1996 as a Visiting Lecturer where she taught Women's History at the Divinity School, Harvard University for a period of one year.

Additionally, she has attended several Conferences abroad and has delivered lectures on issues related to Women's History in foreign Universities like Oxford University, U. K., Yale and Vanderbilt Universities in U. S. A. and the Board of Foreign Ministries, American Baptist Archives, Valley Forge, U. S. A.

She participated as an invitee in the **Global Conference on 'Building a Worldwide Movement for Democracy'** organised by Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, Confederation of Indian Industries and National Endowment for Democracy, Washington, D. C., USA in Feb, 14-17, 1999 : and was a signatory to the Draft Declaration on Democracy and Human Rights along with Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner on Human Rights

Invited by the Royal Government of Bhutan to deliver a talk on The Significance of the Duars in Ahom-Bhutan Relations with special reference to the first Bhutanese envoy to the Ahom Court (1802)

### **Professional academic career**

1. Dr. Shiela Bora joined **Dibrugarh University** as a Lecturer in the History Department in 1967 and went on to become a Professor. By the time she retired from there in 2008, she had several achievements under her belt. By the time she retired from there in 2008, she had several achievements under her belt. She had produced 18 Ph.D scholars, many of whom rose to the position of Principals in various colleges of Assam.
2. As Coordinator, Centre of Management Studies of Dibrugarh University, she set up the University's **Centre for Tourism Management** with a Post Graduate Diploma Course in 2003. She remained in this position till her retirement in 2008. During this period she had the opportunity to train three batches of 15 students in each batch. Each of these students have been well placed in the tourism and hospitality industry as in Jungle Travels and Landmark Hotel both, within the State and outside.
3. She had the unique distinction of winning the **Fulbright scholarship twice** leading to multiple academic assignments
4. Was appointed by the Government of Assam as the President, Special Body, Margherita College: Revived the almost defunct college, appointed a regular Principal, streamlined financial procedures, introduced the Science stream, secured grants for the college. The college has since been accorded the status of a model college by the Dibrugarh University
5. Acted as a member of different statutory bodies of the Dibrugarh University: Member, University Court; Member, Academic Council; Member, Post-Graduate Board; Member, Examination Committee ; Member, Board of Studies, Dept of History; Member, Research Council.
6. Elected President for the XXVI session of the **North-East India History Association** held at Kokrajhar in 2005, of which she is a Life Member.
7. **Life Member of Indian History Congress.**
8. **Life Member of the Institute of Northeast India Studies, Kolkata.**
9. Currently a Member of the Board of international Advisors for **The Journal of Women's History**, published from Ohio State University, USA.
10. Appointed **Adjunct Professor in the Department of Archaeology, Cotton University** of Guwahati in April 2019 till 2022.

11. Since 2012, Member, Advisory Committee, Vivekananda Kendra Institute of Culture Research Advisory Committee, Guwahati
12. Since 2013, Member, Advisory Board, Deptt. Of Cultural Studies, Tezpur University.
13. Appointed **Hon. Advisor in the Department of History, The Royal Global University**, Betkuchi, Guwahati in March 2021 till date.
14. She is the Chancellor's nominee for the Executive Council of Cotton University.

### **Work for Heritage conservation**

Apart from as an academician in the service of the people of Assam, she has rendered yeomen's service to heritage conservation in the State of Assam. Dr Shiela Bora's contribution to conservation of Assam's heritage is undisputable.

- Since 2016, Dr. Bora has been at the helm of path breaking heritage conservation work as **State Convenor of the Assam State Chapter by Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage (INTACH)**. She revived the state activities of INTACH, and also established its **Dibrugarh Chapter**. She has taken the message of heritage conservation to school children via painting, essay and quiz competitions, winning Assam the **Best State Chapter Award** from INTACH headquarters New Delhi. In her role as State Convenor as well as in her private capacity, she has made immeasurable contributions to Assam's heritage conservation. Through her work, she has showcased Assam's art culture, including Sanchipat manuscripts and visual art. Some of her projects include:
- **Conservation, restoration and digitization** of 365 ancient manuscripts of **Narowa Kuji Satra** and 28 manuscripts containing 4136 folios at **Narowa Bali Satra** in collaboration with the S.K. Bhuyan Memorial Trust.
- **Restoration of Berry White Medical School** building, Dibrugarh and conversion into a museum (under way). Familiar to the people of Assam as the benefactor of the Berry White Medical School at Dibrugarh, Dr. John Berry White, a 24-year-old British surgeon, who came to Assam in 1858 to work under the East India Company, can be credited for having single handedly ushered in the era of modern medical care and medical education in the state. It was in reference to his wishes, that the birth of the Berry White Medical School at Dibrugarh, saw the light of day in 1900 A.D., heralded the beginning of Allopathic Medical Education in erstwhile Assam by conferring the LMP Diploma. The Berry White Medical School has the distinction of acquiring perhaps, the two first X-ray machines in 1910, just 25 years its discovery.

- The Assam Tourism Development Corporation has entrusted her with the work of renovating the **Northbrook gate in Guwahati in 2020** before the scheduled visit of the Japanese Prime Minister to Assam. The Northbrook gate is one of the remaining built heritages of Assam of the colonial era. The gates commemorates the arrival of Lord Northbrook, the Viceroy of India (1872-1876) when he came to announce a Chief Commisionership for the Province of Assam.

She has been particularly involved in the **conservation of heritage in the context of floods and other natural disasters** proving calamitous. Her work has garnered international attention and put Assam's immense living heritage at the centre of the discourse of cultural heritage conservation among communities facing catastrophic natural disasters. This won her accolades from Assam, India as well as from international agencies.

- *Restoration, conservation, digitization & documentation of 631 rare manuscripts having 20718 folios at Dakhinpat Satra. The Dakhinpat Satra, also known as the Raj Satra, apart from being central to the life of the Assamese community, is a storehouse of thousands of rare painted manuscripts belonging to the medieval period, corresponding to the period of the Ahom rule in Assam. Manuscript painting was patronised by the Ahom monarch, Siba Singha (1714 A.D.) in the royal court. The zenith of the visual and textual tradition in North-east India was reached in the manuscripts, prepared in the post medieval period with the use of languages such as Sanskrit, Assamese, Tai Ahom, and Tibetan. The collection of manuscripts in Dakhinpat Satra are particularly rich, as they are the primary source of databank from the middle-ages of the history of Assam and are related to historical events, scriptures and songs. Most of these manuscripts have been written on sanchipat or the bark of the aloe wood (Aquilaria Agallocha) and are centuries old. Some of the rare manuscripts include:*
  - the rare illustrated book of Bargeets composed by the two saints, Sankardeva and Madhavdeva;
  - the illustrated eleventh and eighth chapters of the Bhagavat;
  - the illustrated story of Kurukshetra and the Bhagavat compiled and written on sanchi leaves by Shreedhar Swami and gifted to Prabhu Damodar Dev by Matta Prabhu Sankardeva.

The ravaging floods of 2017 called for immediate attention of all conservationists and heritage lovers towards saving the trove of ancient manuscripts housed in Dakhinpat Satra, from the danger of being lost for posterity. It was at this juncture that the attention of the Assam State Chapter of Intach was drawn to the urgent need of saving the manuscripts, it decided to initiate a project entitled, Manuscripts of the Dakhinpat Satra (Monastery) in Majuli, with the following objectives in mind:

1. To save and safeguard the sanchi-pat and tula-pat manuscripts of Dakhinpat Satra and to prevent further physical damage being caused to the manuscripts.
2. To undertake preventive conservation of the manuscripts.
3. To list and document the manuscripts.
4. To digitize the manuscripts following completion of the conservation work.
5. Safe storage of the conserved manuscripts in acid free boxes and almirahs, which till this point of time had been stored in an unscientific humid condition.

*At the end of the project a total of 631 number of manuscripts having 20718 folios have been conserved, listed and documented. Intach's timely intervention has helped us to save the country's heritage for posterity and has brought certain very interesting details to light which till now had remained unknown. During the process of documentation seven manuscripts (puthis ) written by Mahamahopadhyaya Krishna Mishra Dev in Sanskrit language, have been recovered from amongst the collection of manuscripts in the library of Dakhinpat Satra. These Sanskrit puthis include, Adhbut Ratna, Ahnikachar Ratna, Vivah Ratna, Shraddha Ratna, Suddhi Chandrika, Suddhi Ratna and Tithi Ratna. Prior to the recovery of these puthis neither the author, whose place of residence as stated in one of the manuscripts was in Dichiri Gram (village), nor his writings were known to the people of Assam. The documentation also brought to light that the manuscript, Tifh Ratna, written in Sanskrit by Mahamahopadhyaya Krishna Mishra Dev was translated in 1886 A.D. by a highly educated lady named Subhaneswari Devi. It is interesting that till date there is no available information of any female writer translating a Sanskrit manuscript preceding her.*

- **“Catalogue of Manuscripts preserved at Dakhinpat Satra, Majuli,”** –The idea was conceived following the successful completion of a project undertaken by the Assam State Chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) for listing, documenting and conserving the valuable manuscripts at Dakhinpat Satra in Majuli. The project was funded by the Prince Claus Emergency Fund for Art and Cultural Heritage and the Whiting Foundation, Netherlands. The Catalogue of Manuscripts Preserved at Dakhinpat Satra, Majuli was published in 2021
- **Documentation and cataloguing of nearly 1700 important artefacts of Dakhinpat Satra.** The idea of starting the project of documenting and listing the artefacts of Dakhinpat Satra in Majuli, Assam, first came to her mind when she was stationed there to work on a project sponsored by Prince Claus, Netherlands, for documenting and listing nearly six hundred manuscripts housed in the Satra. During the course of her stay in the Satra, she visited the Bor Bhoral (store house) of the Satra and was amazed to find that this Satra, patronised by the Ahom monarch, Jayadhwaj Singha (1648-1663), is a storehouse of precious and valuable artefacts belonging to the medieval period in Assam, corresponding to the period of the Ahom rule. Sadly enough, the valuable wealth, including numerous gold and silver artefacts, together with gold and silver coins, had not been preserved in a scientific way. The dust-laden artefacts were haphazardly piled in a store house with no electric lights which made it vulnerable to burglary. Floods have been an annual and regular occurrence on the site for centuries and there was every likelihood of the store house being washed away by the floods any time. It is unfortunate that there had not been any attempt for proper study and documentation of the artefacts housed in the store house of the Satra. Under such pressing circumstances, as Convenor of the Assam State Chapter of INTACH, she felt the need for initiating urgent steps for saving the antiquities presently stored in the three hundred years old dilapidated, wooden store room. She also felt that in addition to ensuring the preservation of the valuable cultural wealth of Assam, it was also necessary to record this wealth for posterity. With this aim in view, INTACH, Assam State Chapter, decided to undertake the work of listing and documenting the artefacts housed in the Bor Bhoral of the Satra on an urgent basis. This work, catalogued via “Documentation of Artefacts of Dakhinpat Satra, Majuli, Assam” was published in two volumes in 2021

- **Reconstruction of the Manikut of Dev Damodar Satra built in 1860 in Barhampur, Morigaon** This namghar, has been a spiritual centre for local tribes as well as other residents across 6 villages in the Mayong area. Flood waters have damaged this structure, and valuable manuscripts and artefacts have been destroyed. This initiative will help the community in their efforts to renovate/rebuild this important heritage and community spiritual centre
- which serves six villages inhabited by Tiwa, Kachari, Karbi and Lalung communities, has immense historic value as one of the only Satras in Assam to be headed by a female Satradhikar
- **Renovation and revival of the Museum and Research Centre at Mayong.** -- The idea was first mooted when she was approached by members of the community to help in conserving a few artefacts housed in the Village Museum cum Research Centre, constructed on a plot of land donated by the Government of Assam and managed by a Museum Committee comprising of members from the community under the Chairmanship of Shri Lokendra Hazarika. The objective of the project, supported since its inception by Gerda Henkel Stiftung, Germany, had been to safeguard the glorious history, culture and civilization of the mystical land of Mayong a venerated, mysterious centre of black magic and tantric practices in North-east India, with links to Tibetan Buddhist tantrism and sorcery in the age of the Mughals in India's medieval history. It was hoped that the display of the Mayongian culture and civilization would narrate the great historical events and stories of bygone days and provide all necessary information about Mayong, its community and its rich civilization to the younger generation as well as to curious visitors. The project was initiated with the aim of adopting a new strategy for solving the problem of a gradually disappearing cultural identity of heritage communities due to the waves of globalization and modernization and to review the cultural significance of intangible cultural heritage, especially the manifestations of the rural, socio-cultural heritage practices, which could contribute in particular, to reviving the cultural identity of the rural community and safeguard the folklife. It was intended to narrate a comprehensive story about Mayong's mythical power and integration with magic as a way of life and make this story available for the benefit of both, the community and the external observer. It would also help to help a community struggling to keep its heritage alive. The work which began in 2020 has been completed and the museum has been handed over to the Committee. Her contribution here includes

restoration, conservation and documentation of 240 manuscripts, many artefacts and photographs. She has enriched the Museum immensely by tirelessly leading the collection of sculptures, artefacts and manuscripts from various locations for the museum.

- Preparation and publication of “**Catalogue of Manuscripts from Mayong, the Land of Magic**”, 2021. The idea of publishing a catalogue of the documented manuscripts of the Mayong region in Assam entitled, “A Catalogue of Manuscripts from Mayong, the Land of Magic,” was born following the successful completion of a project entitled, Restoration, Conservation and Documentation of the manuscripts, artefacts and photographs in the Museum and Research Centre at Mayong, Assam, India, by Intach Assam State Chapter. The sum total of the manuscripts documented and digitised is as follows:
  - Total number of Manuscripts conserved in bundles: 240
  - Number of Manuscripts digitized : 210
  - Number of folios digitized: 5317
  - Number of images digitized: 9131

### **Passionate conservation of Assam’s wildlife heritage**

As the progeny of the first Assamese Chief Conservator of Forests of undivided Assam, Dr Bora has dedicated herself to charitable work in the space of wildlife conservation via her role as **Managing Trustee in a non-profit Trust named Prabhakar Barua Memorial Trust.**

The trust works closely with the Forest Department and forest based communities to reduce man-animal conflict and improve quality of human life around wildlife habitats. Some of the mentionable projects under Dr Bora’s leadership include

- Provision of **potable water for villagers in Chanaka village**, Morigaon District by constructing 5 ring wells benefitting 60 families living on the fringes of Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary
- Construction of a **barrack for elephant mahouts** at Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary built as a model of **sustainable design** principles



- **Welfare measures for forest personnel** including **accident insurance, rechargeable torches and winter jackets** across Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary and Kaziranga National Park
- **Flood relief measures for forest personnel** including **health camps, ration distribution and donation of water rescue equipment** across Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary and Kaziranga National Park
- **Compensation to forest communities and personnel** for loss of life and property stemming from floods and encounters with wildlife across across Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary and Orang and Kaziranga National Parks
- **Bravery awards** (including monetary compensation) for temporary forest staff for exemplary bravery at work done in community forest conservation work across Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary and Kaziranga National Park

Prof. Shiela Bora is a She is a Trustee of Seneh, a home for destitute women since the inception of this Home in 2015. The Home shelters 22 women who have no one of their own, some suffering from stigmatised diseases

### **An invaluable treasure trove of published work**

Dr. Bora is a prolific author and editor in various topics spanning History, Culture and Heritage. Some important books to her credit are listed below.

<b>Publication name</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Observations</b>
Translation of 13 ancient buranji texts written in various languages	Current	S.K. Bhuyan Memorial Trust	4 have already been published 1. Deodhai Assam Buranji 2. Assam Buranji 3. Kachari Buranji 4. Jayantia Buranji
Reflections on Philosophy, Literature and History: Dr Suryya Kumar Bhuyan, by Banti Bhuyan (ed.)	2022	S.K. Bhuyan Memorial Trust	XXXXXX

Kanaklata Barua	2016	National Book Trust India	XXX
Europor Buranji (1815-1939)	2016	Gauhati University Press	
Emergence of Feminism and Feminist Nationalism in Assam: Role of Chandra Prabha Saikia And The Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samiti (1926-47)	2013	Modern Offset, North East India History Association, Shillong	
Destination Meghalaya (co- authored with Mr MC Bora)	2011	IGNOU	Course material for the IGNOU for their School of Tourism and Hospitality Services Sectoral Management (SOTHSSM)
Destination Assam (co-authored with Mr MC Bora)	2011	IGNOU	
Youth at the Crossroads: A Study of North East India (ed with Prof. SD Goswami)	2007	DVS Publishers, Gauhati	
Paryatanar Ruprekha: Uttar Purbanchalar Itihas Aaru Sanskritir Patabhumit	2005	Banalate Press, Dibrugarh	
The Story of Tourism: An Enchanting Journey Through India's North-East	2005	UBS Publishers' Distributors Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi	
Student Revolution in Assam	1992	Mittal Publishers, New Delhi	
Adhunik Europe (1815-1930)	XXX	Gauhati University Text- Book Coordination Committee	A textbook for the under-graduate course in History Major in Gauhati and Dibrugarh Universities

Besides the above books, Dr. Bora has numerous research articles to her credit both in national and international journals.