

GAUTAM PRASAD BAROOWAH



*A SAGA OF LOVE,  
TERROR, HOPE AND GROWTH*



THE LIFE OF THE RHINOCEROS IN KAZIRANGA  
WHERE  
WISE OWLS  
DARE

THE LIFE OF THE RHINOCEROS IN KAZIRANGA  
WHERE  
WISE OWLS  
DARE

GAUTAM PRASAD BAROOWAH

*TRANSCREATED BY*

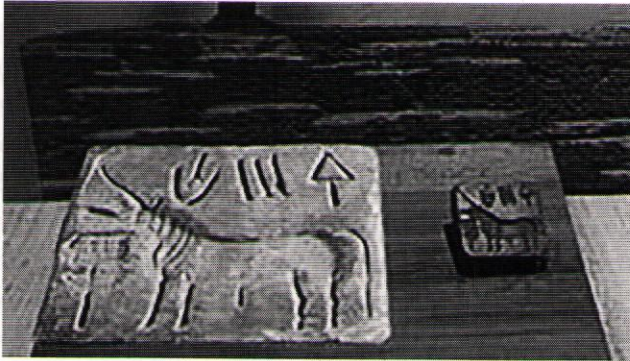
*NAVAMALATI CHAKRABORTY*

*GUEST PROFESSOR, COMPARATIVE LITERATURE DEPARTMENT,*

*CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY.*



## UNICORN IN ANTIQUITY



Unicorn seal of Indus Valley, Indian Museum

Unicorns are not found in Greek mythology, but rather in the accounts of natural history, for Greek writers of natural history were convinced of the reality of unicorns, which they located in India, a distant and fabulous realm for them. The earliest description is from Ctesias, who in his book *Indika* ("On India") described them as wild asses, fleet of foot, having a horn a cubit and a half (700 mm, 28 inches) in length, and colored white, red and black. Aristotle must be following Ctesias when he mentions two one-horned animals, the oryx (a kind of antelope) and the so-called "Indian ass."

In the folklore of Karbi Hills of Assam, India the story of unicorn with wings is mentioned that descended from Haven and never returned back. It lost its wings for disuse and developed armored skin to protect and survive. People called it as "GOR" (Rhino). Rhino has no enemy except Human. And is facing extinction now.



## THE ADVENT

Deeply worrisome as things have grown prior to 2045, the aggrandizement of Assam's social, economic and general patternal sphere, between 2045 and 2050, was reason to rejoice about. It was the month of February 2050, with three months to go for the Assam Unnati Sadhini Dal, to complete their five year term. Their newly planted holistic approach has done wonders. It was not merely a home grown step launched to step up Assam's development, but one that led to Assam's manifest agricultural success. The neighbouring state of Arunachal Pradesh too had generously come to a welcome agreement to give 30% of their electric power generated, at a premium to Assam. Infact they were prepared to supply even further, though that would have to be at the prevailing market price. Beyond this, the development at Kaziranga was promising and salutary. The sanguine angle to it was that, Kaziranga had expanded to thrice its area since 2013.

Such development being afoot proved that Kaziranga can now boast of having 5000 rhinoceros, with more promise in the near future. What with a University at Kohra for the advancement of the Science of Wildlife, under the sponsorship of the University of Edinburgh! The work got ahead to be further reaffirmed with Dr. Henry Faulkner's work. He had opened a Wildlife Research Institute at Bokakhat. His earlier successful research work dates back to England, when he had cloned a giraffe, and was widely famed for it. Wholly dedicated to his enterprise, Dr. Faulkner's enthusiasm has presently resulted in the birth of the "white rhino," in the research institute at Bokakhat. That was the mother of all success stories. It shall lead on to even further historic success from 2045/2049. The white rhino in Assam, that is akin to the species in Java and Sumatra, has been drawing a constant stream of visitors from all over the world, rushing in as though it was the blessed fulfilment of a dream. This is the 'wonder' that the Research Centre at Bokakhat has presented to the world.'

The Assam Unnati Sadhini Dal, has however not rested on its oars. A tunnel from Burapahar to Kohra has enabled transport from Guwahati to Kaziranga

in five star luxury, from not being affected by the seasonal floods. Apart from this, helicopter services have been plying from Kaziranga to Jorhat; and if that is not all, Japanese expertise has enabled international flights to bring in tourists to Kaziranga. All these attractions has rung in such aggrandizement that a Dolphinarium at the Dhansiri bank and a Golf Course at Jorhat, has not only been the major attractions, but has also served to provide employment to nine percent of the local people who were unemployed.

Cynics who had rebutted efforts made by the rhino preservation enthusiasts, now accept the truth that indeed, rhino poaching has finally been brought to a halt. The timespan between 2013 and 2030, had seen a steep rise in rhino poaching, from twelve to forty, almost every year. But sanity has at last prevailed, and what was said to be but a cosmetic assurance, has come here to be an everyday truth. The last case that has been brought to the notice of authorities was in 1945. Following this, nine hunters were accosted and arrested and have done time in prison. Poaching efforts have finally been totally crippled.

The face of the new government damasked with happy relief and positive ebullience has brightened further as the Cincinatti Wildlife Organization has come forth with techniques to adopt and give birth to three absolutely extinct species of rhinoceros in Kaziranga. This has made it possible on the other hand to, gift to various zoos all over the world, the wondrous species of the Assamese one-horned rhinoceros. There has so far, been no dearth of enthusiasm or enterprises. Hence it is an expected gesture that adulation be shown to honour the revered and dedicated, Dr. Henry Faulkner, by the Assam Wildlife Organisation and the entire team of the World Rhino Preservation Groups as well as the Assam Government on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2050. His is indeed a supreme contribution and one feels indebted to him. "There are things in life," he says "that are worth standing up for and I dared to stand up against the blundering, belligerent traders and poachers. A weight lifts from my heart, to bring the place back to life and peace."

The Rabin Banerjee Stadium at Kaziranga is presently awash with tourists, local people, scholars, educationists, wildlife enthusiasts and intellectuals from all over the world. Dr. Faulkner, whose life has been a constant journey as a friend of the "Wildlife," shall be honored dearly with the title of "Assam Bondhu." The CM, Dr. Rafiquddin BrahmaChoudhury, will do the honours at the function.

The scholar from foreign shores, Dr. BrahmaChoudhury, with his self effacing quiet disposition, was elected from Dhubri. He has conducted research at various Universities abroad and has never been distant or vaporous towards Assam. He has always given precedence to Assam in the pace of his life. The communal clashes of 2013, that had assumed the shape of a volatile mass agitation in Assam, didn't really ever end. Instead of dying down, the embers remained as a self-incriminatory proof of unrest and division of minds. It had threatened to flare up again and infact has done so, in the year 2030.

All the rosy dreams, all the hopes and energies, spent to bring peace and harmony to the land, were put off. It was swept away clean, like the golden dream of Assam that lay buried amidst the rubble of hatred and strife. It was a long fourteen year chaotic turn of events. Hatred never breeds peace and the bile surges back.

Dr. BrahmaChoudhury has never known to compromise in life. He took over the reins of correction and contrition. He readily resigned from the Rosalyn Institute in America and returned to the land of his birth. He was resolute in his hope that Assam should not be torn apart by unrest. He was driven to push a bad situation to the edge and spread the seeds of peace and development. He was therefore bent on uniting the separate folds of Assam into one, irrespective of religion, and any other meticulous divisions that political parties wish to create to keep the people apart.

The Bodos, the Karbis the Misings, the Bengalis shall all unite into a major Assamese society. His baptism into politics was, as a crusader, to form the Assam Unnati Sadhini Dal. He swept in with a major win of 60% of the total votes, in a landslide victory. The fact that he was an orphan who had lost his parents when he was really too young to understand the impact of the loss, had made him realise later how ugly communal riots are. Did it not affect his life at an early age so disastrously. It had stolen from him, his parents. He therefore chose to remain unmarried and dedicate his life to the good he can do for mankind. Trite platitudes hence forth did not ever affect him at any point of time.

A frank and forthright activist who had careened into his life unawares, was Dr. Padmini Mahanta. What her very nature had in fact wrought into her life she had only felt unawares within her being. It was a strange pure joy of joining the struggle to fight the poaching of rhinos in their space, in Assam. It was a coincidence that she too like Dr. BrahmaChoudhury had returned to

the land of her birth from America leaving behind a promising job. Marriage had never been on her cards, but a dream to see the cloning of the rhino, was a very real feature of her life. As a young girl from Majuli, she has always lived with her paternal aunt, her Pehi – who was a spinster and lived in Guwahati. After completing her education from Buffalo University, she had neither the lure to remain abroad to further her career, nor to remain in a laid back way in life by entering into matrimonial relations and ignoring the needs of her land. Undaunted in her dreams but focussed in her aspirations, she wanted to have an NGO, that shall fulfil her dream wishes. She did just that, determined to make all her desires a success story.

As the procession led by the CM of Assam, the Forest Minister, and the Foreign Consul Group led by Dr. Henry Faulkner entered the stadium auditorium, the clock struck three in the evening. A rousing welcome of a thousand applause greeted him. The applause simply refused to die down. The crowd hailed Dr. Faulkner with the strange pure joy of finding light at the end of the tunnel. He had become their voice. They just couldn't hold on to their happiness. "Dr. Faulkner jindabad! Kaziranga jindabad! Chief Minister jindabad!"

Padmini who was sitting in the front row, felt the excitement of their exhilaration in her very bones. She just looked on in a daze. A little bit of nervousness was there in her being. She wished that the entire ceremony should pass off safe and well, as many memories from the past came rushing back to her mind. Memories of those days when with near desperation and a heavy heart she had received every week, news of the killing of a rhino at the hands of poachers. How she had weathered life when she received the advice to cut the horns of the rhinos, to save its life! It was the most terrible time of her life. Thoughts fledted past her mind of how she had met Dr. BrahmaChoudhury as a student; of the young Biman so enthusiastic to help; of Lalita and the world she had created around her; of Dr. Faulkner's welcome company; of Chief Secretary, Srimanta Sarkar; of how she had herself spoken in a heated frenzy to the crowd gathered at the southern end of the Dighali Pukhuri.....! That was in the year 2014...a long time ago. Indeed, indeed. The more she thought on all that had happened, she felt, oh...how did she weather it all!!!!

One thing however can be concluded that, just as there are devils looming about, there are angels too! Good is always the final goal of evil.



## ONE

**I**t was the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the month of February, 2014. As she addressed thousands of wild life lovers in her eloquent speech tailored to perfection, on the 'Role of the Assamese in the Preservation of Wildlife,' Dr. Padmini Mahanta, could not hide the feeling of exasperation in her voice. The people had all gathered at the southern end of the Dighalipukhuri, where the statue of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika stood, listening intently to each word she spoke. The Brahmaputra Valley Wildlife Preservation Samiti, had not really expected such an overwhelming response to the small news item published in all the dailies of Guwahati, informing that Dr. Padmini Mahanta shall be addressing the public. By now, Padmini Mahanta has become a household name!

Apart from the Samiti members gathered there, there were also the intellectuals, and doctors, lawyers, writers and teachers, as well as a huge rush of students, businessmen and traders who belonged to the Assamese, Bengali and Marwari community. The Samiti Members were both delighted and amazed at such a whole hearted warm response. The presence of the members of the North East Christian diocese of the Bishopric, as well as the revered Prabhu Ishwar of the Majuli Sattrra with his entourage, was indeed a very pleasing prospect.

Dr. Padmini Mahanta, a well known and established writer, headed the team of Wildlife Preservation Movement. The people of Assam, knew her well as the first class first position holder from Cotton College in Zoology; and her completion of her Master's from Benaras Hindu University; and were at one point of time amazed to find her return back to Assam after completing her Ph d from the American University at Buffalo. This young lady with her oratorical excellence, now had her hearers take in each word she spoke. They loved to hear her speak. Today there was livid fireworks in her speech as she took to task, the Government's apathy at Wildlife Preservation. Sparks flew when she spoke in a measured appraisal about the crisis at hand, though she did not lose her composure. The young and the old gathered there, listened intently.



It won't do to fold your arms and await for the Government to work out matters. Tell me, do you in truth love the birds and beasts...Let's see. Raise your hands if you do.

Almost the entire crowd raised up their hands.

I'm amazed at your response. Do you really love wildlife? Do raise your voice in reply.

Yes, we do. The united voice of a two thousand crowd replied.

She looked point blank at the crowd and said, If you do, than why don't you do anything about it. Don't you think that it is a shame to fold your arms and sit idly at home. Why should we raise a storm in a teacup. Should we permit all these rhinoceros to be killed? Don't you have any feelings for the creature. Do come forward and join the revolution to save the rhinos. You do not have to pick up weapons to fight. You just have to be mentally focussed and alert. Do not forget that it was the thundering voice of Kazi and Rongai, that had led to the formation of the Kaziranga Sanctuary. This pair of young lovers, were exiled for the sin of being in love, by the Village Headman. I'm sure all of you do know about this legend?

Once, as Kazi Ronghampi was out in the forest, looking here and there to procure some food for herself, she decided that the prehistoric animal that had lured her away from heaven, shall have to be taken back to heaven. She had given her word to the Lord. But when the creature heard her speak, it promptly hid itself amidst the vegetation of the dense forest. Kazi was at a loss. She couldn't find the beast. What was she to do. At last she cursed the animal, saying that, as you have belied me, you too shall never be able to live in peace amidst this wild habitat. The rhino had in fact been so charmed by the beauty of the lush forest, that it refused to return to heaven. This is the one-horned rhinoceros and the forest of Kaziranga took its name from Kazi Ronghampi and Rongai Rongpi...Kaziranga!

This may be a legend, but for us the one-horned rhino is a reality. And... it is not the rhino alone that is a reality, but the poaching and killing of the rhino too, that is a bitter reality...We all belong to the present times and it is not merely necessary to see to the preservation of humans alone. We ought to see to the preservation of Wildlife too! The birds and beasts are ours to be protected. We shall have to stop the killing of the rhinoceros. These one horned rhinos are very special for Assam.

A thin voice asked from behind...How do we do that?

Who said that? Who are you? Kindly come forward. I wish to see you. Please don't hide yourself when you put forward a question. If you do so, how can you participate in the efforts to save the animal...how will you save the rhinoceros. How can you stand on those two legs given to you by God and call yourself a human being.

A youth stood up...It's me.

What is your name.

I'm Biplab Borgohain...the youth replied softly.

Yes. I'm happy. You've raised the most pertinent question on behalf of the rest. Yes Biplab, you've a fine name, but you shall also have to live up to the meaning of your name. The answer to the question that you've asked, lies in your name. To stop the killing of the rhinoceros, we shall have to revolt. Even if you were a government forest guard and had a gun in your hand, you would be unable to do anything much.

Then what can we do?

Why I've told you. Rise in revolt! It is not in our country alone, that the rhinos are being killed. Wherever there are rhinos, they are being killed. To prevent this killing we need the compliance of the common man in a joint endeavour. The people are to be educated for they need to know about their land to love it. This bond of love shall have to be created. We shall have to remove poverty too, in a planned way so that the poor people may not be lured easily by the poachers. We shall next have to place our ideas before the government and the NGO's. If we do so, believe me, Kaziranga shall not only be preserved but the one-horned rhino too will be saved from extinction. Besides we shall also be able to fight the curse of the annual floods.

Some students sitting behind, asked if they could ask a question.

Ofcourse, you can. Questions are most welcome. Do ask.

In the forests of Nambia and Rawanda, we have heard that the authorities are removing the horns of the rhinos. Can we not adopt the same policy. It is the horn that tempts the poachers.

Dr. Padmini Mahanta flared up. Who has brought this half baked truth to you. This is a mere half truth...Yes, in Nambia the killing of the rhinos has indeed gone down. But that was only for a year and then it reared up its ugly head again. Do you get me! It reared up its monstrous head again! Rhino horns soon began to disappear as fast as the price shot up in the market. Secondly the

removal of the horns affected the rhinos and 20% of them lost their lives. Third, the politicians leapt forward to line their own pockets and began handing out with greed, for an enormous price, the whereabouts of the rhinos. Those rhinos that had not had their horns removed, were thus killed. And...I come to it..., fourthly..., this is the most pertinent point, remember that the removal of the horn is not the last word. The horns grow back again the way our hair and our nails do. Do you get my point? Hence this way too it is not a foolproof way to save the rhino. Thus Namibia failed. But the killers were relentless. Now, we are in such a position that the government has stopped the removal of the tusks and the number of rhinos in our forests have dwindled. Therefore let us look away from economic, political and religious standpoints, and concentrate only on saving the rhinoceros.

Let us think of the rhinoceros! Its one-horned significance. The horn gives to the rhino, a personality and a beauty. It was in God's plan of things, that the rhino shall use this horn to protect itself. Who has given to men the right to kill the rhino? Can he create a rhino? If the villagers remove the teeth of a lion for killing their cows, will that creature remain a lion. What have we done to it? Do we then have the logical reasoning to remove the horns of the rhinoceros to save them from the hands of the poachers. This would be the most foolish and absurd step adopted by us, who dearly wish to save the rhino.

A youth raised his hand and Dr. Mahanta welcomed the chance to move on to a new suggestion.

The youth stood up and said..., This is not really a suggestion. But I would like to say that I had recently read something in the internet as well as in the newspaper. Can I speak about it?

Ofcourse you may. Do kindly speak.

My name is Bikarna Barua. I'm a Political Science student. Just three days back I had read that the Wildlife Preservation Organization of England has proposed to bequeathe a huge amount of money to preserve the lions of the Mandvi Kutch Wildlife of Gujarat. This 200 crore pound kitty shall be at the behest of Prince Phillip and the Government of England. If the English had during the Colonial Rule devastated our forests by bringing down the number of lions in India, can we not venture forth to ask them to save the rhinos in India. Can we not look about and see to the preservation of the rhinoceros in our Kaziranga.

Ofcourse we can. I welcome your suggestion. I do hope all of you know that Kaziranga was included in the list of the Britishers' hunting grounds as a game sanctuary. That was in the eighties. The British Officers in India would generally relax by indulging in hunting for deer, wild boars and rhinoceros. One day an English gentleman was overheard as he made a vain boast that he had killed five animals that day. What a cruel thing to boast about!

Hence...if we do look back, we shall realise that the present poachers are not new in the line. The path was laid by the English. We therefore do not have to fold our hands in resignation, or hand over the reins to the government. It is we...the common man of Assam, who shall have to pick up cudgels for the cause. Whether it is about the Oil Refinery of Assam, or the Language Issue or the ousting of Foreign Nationals. We shall have to revolt, and revolt we will!

Shall we then have to revolt for the cause of the rhinoceros.

Yes, we shall have to do so! ...Dr. Mahanta's voice was a tad raised.

Who will organize the revolt?

Why, we the people! All of us shall have to do so if we really love our land and its wildlife. We shall have to compel the government to save the forests. NGO's shall have to be set up and modern ways must be implemented to defeat the poachers at their own wily game. The world has five kinds of rhinoceros and Assam has the honour of having the smooth faced grey-black, one-horned rhinoceros. They are a rarity, though they are found in Nepal too.

Will we be able to defeat the hunters?

That is exactly the point. It is not the Assamese who purchase the rhino horn. They are not blind or stupid in their beliefs about the superstitions that runs riot about the horn as an aphrodisiac. If it be so, than where do the Assamese villagers of the Kaziranga locality err. Does he not err in unknowingly being a link, err on purpose, or in his ignorance, to pass on news to the poachers and spies. They know well who these criminals are and yet they do not give them away...And, why pray do they do so? That is because these people are so dirt poor that the poachers easily give them a little money to obtain important information. The money they receive help them to keep body and soul together. They do not realise the enormity of their offence. Nevertheless they remain poor and would readily look forward for further opportunities to earn a little more money. When one is hungry, talks of morality do not make any mark in our soul. Our task at hand is to find

out about these poachers, as well as these people, who do not realise what grave harm they are doing to their own land. These are the first steps to be undertaken to save the rhinoceros. I will on my part, keep the struggle alive for this noble cause. Do please help me.

The genuineness and flamboyance of her speech caught on to the hearts of the listeners and two thousand strong voices cried out...We will cooperate and help. We will assuredly help and be together.

The meeting was over. Padmini Mahanta returned home sad and a bit tired. She had infact spoken at a couple of meetings that very day.

Home is always that, a sweet home at the end of the day. It was where Moromi Pehi awaited her arrival. She entered her own room and eased her body to receive the comfort of the wide sofa and relive the events of the day. Her body wished to relax but her mind was ever active.

