

Kaliram Medhi's Philosophy of Life: A bird eye's view

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Abstract: The essence of fame and its enduring legacy is fundamentally tied to one's actions rather than inherent privilege. A person's lasting impact is determined by their contributions to societal advancement, especially in realms such as art, culture, literature, and science. Those who achieve significant progress in these fields are often remembered with reverence long after their time. Kaliram Medhi is a quintessential example of such an individual. In the late nineteenth century, Medhi made substantial contributions to Assamese literature and culture, distinguishing himself as a pivotal figure in the Assamese literary community. His influence and achievements underscore how dedicated efforts in these areas can cement one's legacy, highlighting the profound connection between individual actions and enduring fame.

Keywords: Kaliram Medhi, Assamese literature, Culture, Philosophy

Introduction:

The concept of fame's greatness and immortality is intrinsically linked to one's actions rather than their birthright. A person's legacy is shaped by their contributions to the advancement of society, particularly in fields such as art, culture, literature, and science. Individuals who make significant strides in these areas are often remembered and revered long after their time. Among the remarkable figures who contributed profoundly to the literature and culture of the Assamese community in the late nineteenth century, Kaliram Medhi stands out as a particularly influential figure.

Kaliram Medhi's impact on Assamese literature and culture was profound, despite the demands of his career as an administrative officer. His dual role as a public servant and a scholar highlights the extent of his dedication and versatility. Medhi's contributions are noteworthy, especially considering the substantial responsibilities he managed throughout his career. His passion for literature and cultural preservation went beyond mere professional interest; it was a calling that drove him to work tirelessly for the advancement of Assamese literature.

One of Medhi's most significant achievements was his role as a linguist and scholar in the field of Assamese literature. He dedicated himself to the exploration and preservation of ancient Assamese texts, many of which had been obscured by time and neglect. Medhi's efforts in uncovering these hidden literary treasures were not just acts of recovery but were pivotal in the broader understanding of Assamese literary heritage. By bringing these works to light, he laid the groundwork for further research into the origins and development of the Assamese language.

Medhi's work was instrumental in bridging gaps between past and present Assamese culture. His scholarship provided invaluable insights into the linguistic and cultural evolution of the region. He did not merely study these texts; he revitalized them, making them accessible and relevant to contemporary audiences. This act of preservation and reinterpretation helped ensure that the rich tapestry of Assamese literary tradition was not lost to obscurity but continued to inspire and educate future generations.

In addition to his academic contributions, Medhi's role as a cultural advocate was crucial. He understood that literature is not just a collection of written works but a living part of a community's cultural identity. By emphasizing the importance of preserving and understanding Assamese literary heritage, he championed the cause of cultural continuity. His work fostered a greater appreciation for Assamese literature and encouraged others to engage with and contribute to this rich cultural legacy.

Kaliram Medhi's legacy is a testament to the enduring power of dedicated scholarship and cultural stewardship. His life's work exemplifies how one individual's passion and commitment can have a lasting impact on their community. Medhi's contributions to Assamese literature and culture continue to be recognized and celebrated, reflecting the timeless nature of his achievements. His story serves as a reminder that greatness is not confined to one's birth but is achieved through meaningful actions and contributions that benefit society as a whole.

In termination, Kaliram Medhi's enduring fame and the respect he commands in the Assamese community are a result of his extraordinary efforts and achievements in literature and culture. His work remains a cornerstone in the study of Assamese literary history, ensuring that his contributions will be remembered and valued for generations to come.

Objectives and methodology:

This research aims to investigate how individual actions, rather than inherent privilege or status, contribute to the lasting legacy and fame of historical figures, with a focus on significant contributions to societal advancement in fields such as art, culture,

literature, and science. Specifically, the study will evaluate Kaliram Medhi's role as a pivotal figure in Assamese literature and culture during the late nineteenth century, examining how his dedicated efforts in these areas shaped his enduring legacy. By analyzing Medhi's impact, the research will highlight the connection between personal contributions and long-lasting fame, and explore how his literary and cultural achievements have influenced the perception of his legacy within the context of Assamese heritage. This paper employs both explanatory and analytical methods as its methodology to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Both primary and secondary data sources have been utilized for this study of society.

Discussions:

Kaliram Medhi was born in October 1878 in the village of Ramdiya near Hajo in North Kamrup. Despite his humble origins in a remote Assamese village, Medhi's life exemplifies how dedication and perseverance can lead to extraordinary accomplishments. His father, Bhukali Medhi, was a simple village farmer who occasionally engaged in commerce but primarily focused on agriculture. His mother, Sontara Medhi, though illiterate, was deeply knowledgeable in Kirtan and Dasham and possessed a rich repository of stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The pious nature of his mother and the religious tales she shared during his childhood profoundly influenced Medhi. These early experiences, shaped by his mother's spiritual stories and his father's hard work, instilled in him values that would later fuel his success as both an adept administrator and a distinguished research scholar.

Before Kaliram Medhi's scholarly achievements came to the fore, he had already garnered significant recognition as a talented student. His educational journey began with his elementary schooling in his village, where he also learned the Kaitheli script. His academic potential quickly became evident, and he pursued further education at the Cotton Collegiate School in Guwahati. There, he excelled and passed the Entrance Examination conducted by Calcutta University, distinguishing himself by earning two silver medals: the "Hemchandra Baruah" and "Hemdhar Baruah" medals. These honors were awarded for achieving the highest marks in Sanskrit among Assamese students.

Following his initial success, Medhi continued his studies at City College in Calcutta, where he pursued his F.A. and B.A. degrees with honors in Physics and Chemistry. His outstanding performance earned him the "Bishnupriya Devi" award, recognizing his high achievement among Assamese students. Medhi's remarkable academic record positioned him as only the fourth Assamese to receive an Honors degree, reflecting his exceptional dedication and intellectual capability.

His pursuit of higher education did not stop there. Medhi furthered his studies at Presidency College in Calcutta, where he completed a Master's degree (M.A.) in Physics. This achievement marked the culmination of his academic journey and laid the foundation for his future scholarly work. Medhi's academic accomplishments were not merely a testament to his individual talent but also a reflection of his relentless dedication to his studies and his drive to excel in his chosen fields of interest. His educational success paved the way for his subsequent achievements as a distinguished scholar and administrator.

Upon completing his higher education at Calcutta University, Kaliram Medhi quickly transitioned into a distinguished career in public service. On April 24, 1904, he began his professional journey as a Sub-Deputy Collector (S.D.C) in the Settlement Camp of Guwahati. This initial phase of his career involved extensive training, which lasted until August of the same year. After this period, Medhi was appointed as a probationary S.D.C in Nagaon, marking the beginning of his active role in administrative services.

Medhi's career progressed rapidly. By July 1904, he had been promoted to the position of Extra Assistant Commissioner (E.A.C). This role allowed him to expand his responsibilities and make significant contributions to various settlements. As an E.A.C, Medhi's work took him to several important locations, including Tura, Golaghat, Goalpara, and Mangaldai. His assignments in these areas involved overseeing administrative functions and addressing local issues, demonstrating his capability in handling diverse administrative challenges.

His service in these roles was marked by a strong sense of duty and effectiveness in governance. In addition to his work as an E.A.C, Medhi also served as a Sub-Divisional Officer (S.D.O) in the Goalpara District. This role further broadened his administrative experience and allowed him to manage and implement policies at the sub-divisional level. His performance in this capacity earned him recognition and respect in the administrative circles.

Medhi's career continued to advance as he took on the role of a temporary District Commissioner in the Goalpara District. This position involved overseeing the district's administrative functions and ensuring that policies and regulations were effectively implemented. His ability to manage these responsibilities demonstrated his leadership and administrative skills.

In the latter part of his career, Medhi served as the Sub-Divisional Officer in Mangaldai and as a temporary District Commissioner in Nagaon. These roles marked the culmination of his long and distinguished service in various administrative capacities. His contributions were instrumental in the efficient functioning of the districts he served, reflecting his deep commitment to public service and his exceptional administrative abilities.

Kaliram Medhi retired from his official duties in 1936. By the time of his retirement, he had made substantial contributions to the administration and governance of the regions he served. His career was characterized by dedication, effectiveness, and a notable impact on the communities he managed. Medhi's legacy is not only in the positions he held but also in the positive changes and improvements he facilitated through his work. His retirement marked the end of an illustrious career, but his contributions continued to influence the administrative landscape of the regions he had served.

Kaliram Medhi married three times throughout his life. As the eldest son in his family, he was expected to marry at a young age while still studying at the Government High School in Guwahati. His first marriage was to Urmila, the beautiful daughter of the affluent Choudhury Moujadar of Ramdiya. Tragically, Urmila passed away at her mother's home before they had a chance to meet. Medhi's second marriage was to Mokhyada, the daughter of Baloram Das and Haldhipriya Das from Barpeta, during his service as an S.D.C in Nagaon. Together, they had five children—two sons and three daughters. Unfortunately, Mokhyada died of cholera in 1918. Following Mokhyada's death, Medhi was encouraged by friends and relatives to remarry. He wed Swarnalata, the daughter of Gendram Bhuyan from Nagaon. Medhi and Swarnalata had six children together—four daughters and two sons. This final marriage provided Medhi with a stable family life and continued his lineage, adding to his personal legacy alongside his professional achievements.

Despite managing the demands of family life and a busy professional career, Kaliram Medhi remained deeply involved with the Asom Sahitya Sabha from its inception. His commitment to the organization was evident when he presided over its third session held in Barpeta on December 26, 1919. During this session, he urged literati to embrace independent thinking, a significant reminder given that India was still under colonial rule at the time.

Medhi's contributions extended beyond his role in the Asom Sahitya Sabha. He served as the editor of the 'Bezbaruah Committee' and was the President of the 'Museum Committee,' all while maintaining an active connection with the 'Kamrup Anusandhan Committee.' In 1948, he presided over the 500th Birth Anniversary celebrations of Sankardeva in Barpeta, reflecting his deep respect for Assamese cultural and literary heritage. Additionally, he presided over the 'Ramdiya Middle School Teacher's Conference' and the 'Mandal Canango Conference' in Barpeta, further showcasing his dedication to educational and community development.

Even after retiring from active service, Medhi continued to contribute to society. He served as the Magistrate of Guwahati for two years and worked as a Special Officer for War Risk Insurance for eight years. His adept handling of his service duties earned him recognition and an award from the Governor. Medhi's extensive experience in regions such as Nagaon, Dibrugarh, Tura, Golaghat, Goalpara, and Mangaldai enriched his understanding of Assamese language, literature, and culture. His exceptional service and contributions were honored with the title of Ray Bahadur, a testament to his distinguished career and impact on Assamese society.

Kaliram Medhi stands out as a distinguished figure among those who have made unparalleled contributions to Assamese literature. His choice to lead a modest life, in stark contrast to the opulent lifestyle that could have been afforded by his high-ranking government position, underscores his commitment to his literary and scholarly pursuits. Medhi's legacy is firmly rooted in his extensive work in Assamese literature, which includes a diverse range of essays and books on science, language, literature, and culture. His versatility as an essayist, critic, linguist, and grammatologist is evident in the breadth of his writings, which are available in both Assamese and English.

Medhi's entry into the literary world came through his contributions to magazines, a common path for writers of his era. Although his early writings from his college and university days are not well-documented, biographer Nanda Talukdar provides insight into Medhi's early literary endeavors. According to Talukdar, Medhi published a short story titled 'Pralay' in the Jonaki Magazine, which was edited by Satyanath Borah. This publication, written during Medhi's time as an MA student, is noted as one of his earliest works.

Throughout his career, Medhi's writings appeared in a variety of Assamese publications, including 'Chetana,' 'Baahi,' 'Awahon,' 'Jayanti,' 'Xurabhi,' 'Asom Sahitya Sabha Patrika,' 'Dainik Asamiya,' and 'Ramdhenu.' His work also reached English-speaking audiences through the 'Journal of the Assam Research Society,' the official publication of the Kamrup Anusandhan Committee. This engagement with both Assamese and English publications highlights his broad intellectual reach and his commitment to disseminating knowledge across linguistic boundaries.

Medhi's contributions to Assamese literature are notable for their depth and diversity. His essays on moral and scientific topics were prominently featured in 'Assam Bandhav,' showcasing his engagement with contemporary issues. His literary output extended to articles on science, criticism, literature, history, and archaeology. These works reflect his intellectual rigor and his dedication to the comprehensive study and promotion of Assamese cultural heritage.

One of Medhi's most significant scholarly achievements is his book "Assamese Vyakaran and Bhashatatva," which is a landmark work in the field of linguistics. This book stands as a testament to his scholarly prowess and his deep understanding of Assamese language and grammar. In the English preface to this work, Medhi offers a detailed analysis of the historical significance and structural elements of the Assamese language and literature. This preface not only underscores his expertise but also provides valuable insights into the evolution and characteristics of Assamese linguistic and literary traditions.

In summary, Kaliram Medhi's contributions to Assamese literature and scholarship are both extensive and profound. His choice to live a simple life, coupled with his prolific writing and research, has left an indelible mark on the field. His work continues to be a cornerstone of Assamese literary and linguistic studies, reflecting his dedication to the enrichment and preservation of Assamese culture.

Kaliram Medhi made notable contributions to Assamese literature through his dedicated efforts in preserving and promoting historical texts. One of his most significant achievements was the collection and publication of the '*Prahlada-Charitra*,' a book composed by Hem Saraswati, which predates the era of Sankardeva. Published in 1913, this work was introduced to the literary world by Medhi, who provided a detailed introduction that contextualized its historical and cultural significance.

In addition to the '*Prahlada-Charitra*,' Medhi edited the '*Ankawali*,' a compilation of one-act plays written on *Xasipaata*, sourced from various Satras. The 111-page introduction to the '*Ankawali*' offers a comprehensive analysis of the elements and techniques found in Sanskrit dramas, as well as those written by Sankardeva and the Bhaonas. This scholarly work included 21 plays, enriching the Assamese literary corpus with valuable dramatic texts.

Medhi's efforts extended to collecting and transcribing numerous old dramas written on *Xasipat*. His commitment to preserving these works reflects his deep engagement with Assamese cultural heritage. Among his most treasured contributions is the book '*Mahapurush Sankardevor Baani*,' which consolidates significant lines from the works of Sankardeva into a single volume. This publication stands as one of Medhi's most invaluable contributions to Assamese literature.

Kaliram Medhi's extensive work in preserving, editing, and publishing historical Assamese texts underscores his immense impact on the field. His contributions are integral to the study and appreciation of Assamese language and literature, highlighting his role in enriching and maintaining the literary heritage of Assam.

A person's philosophy is mirrored in their actions, thoughts, and way of life. As social beings, we all have obligations to society, and those who fulfill their responsibilities with excellence are often remembered for their contributions. Kaliram Medhi exemplifies this ideal. His legacy is etched in the annals of Assamese history due to his remarkable contributions to Assamese language and literature, achieved alongside his demanding role as an administrative official.

Medhi's influence extends beyond his administrative duties; his dedication to enriching Assamese literature and preserving its cultural heritage underscores his commitment to societal advancement. His work, including the collection and publication of significant texts and his scholarly contributions, has left an indelible mark on Assamese literature. By balancing his professional responsibilities with his literary pursuits, Medhi has secured a place of enduring respect and admiration in the hearts of the Assamese people.

Kaliram Medhi's life is a testament to how one's actions and contributions to society can lead to lasting recognition and reverence. His achievements ensure that he will be remembered by Assam and its people for generations to come, reflecting the profound impact of his service and scholarly work.

Throughout his career as an administrator, Kaliram Medhi maintained an unwavering commitment to integrity and fairness. He never condoned corruption and consistently treated his junior officers with respect and equality. His guiding principle was encapsulated in the belief that "Work is my culture," a philosophy that shaped both his professional and personal life. This dedication to his work was not merely about performing his duties but also about upholding a standard of excellence and ethics.

Medhi's devotion to his native language and its literature was a central theme in his life. His passion for Assamese language and literature drove him to focus on its development and preservation. He was deeply committed to the advancement of Assamese, dedicating significant effort to understanding and improving both its standard and spoken dialects. This focus was not only a personal resolve but also a reflection of his broader vision for the linguistic and cultural growth of Assam.

His scientific mindset and studious nature further distinguished him. Medhi's contributions extended into the realm of science, where he applied his analytical skills to write numerous science-oriented essays. These essays were notable for their clarity and accessibility, as he had a remarkable ability to explain complex scientific concepts in a simple and comprehensible manner. His work in this area demonstrated his commitment to education and his ability to bridge the gap between intricate scientific ideas and the general public.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Kaliram Medhi's legacy is a testament to his ethical standards, intellectual rigor, and unwavering commitment to the Assamese language and literature. His adherence to principles of integrity and equality in his administrative role, combined with his significant contributions to both scientific and literary fields, has ensured his lasting impact. Medhi's life and work continue to inspire and serve as a model of how dedication to one's field, coupled with a strong moral compass, can lead to a profound and enduring legacy. His contributions to Assamese culture and science reflect his extraordinary capacity to blend personal commitment with professional excellence, securing his place in the annals of history as a revered and influential figure.

Kaliram Medhi was a multifaceted individual—a student of science, essayist, litterateur, and researcher. Despite the scarcity of biographers during his time, which limits our knowledge of his personal philosophy in his own words, we can glean insights into his worldview through his writings and actions. By analyzing his body of work and his overall life, we can discern his core ideals and philosophy. It is evident that Medhi's subconscious beliefs about life and the world permeated his conscious thoughts, shaping both his writings and his actions.

Medhi held a firm belief that age should never be a barrier to learning, and he encouraged the pursuit of knowledge at all stages of life. He consistently engaged in the discourse of knowledge, recognizing its vital role in advancing both individual and societal progress. His dedication to intellectual exploration and his commitment to the exchange of ideas reflect his view that

continuous learning and dialogue are essential for community and global development.

Through his scholarly work and contributions to Assamese literature and culture, Medhi demonstrated a profound commitment to these principles. His legacy, marked by his passion for knowledge and his influential writings, continues to resonate. Kaliram Medhi passed away on January 24, 1958, leaving behind a lasting impact as a stalwart advocate for lifelong learning and intellectual growth.

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