

The Luminous Trajectory of Professor Suren Talukder: A Synthesis of Cartographic Precision and Literary Erudition

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Abstract

This article explores the life, academic career, and literary contributions of Professor Suren Talukder. Born in rural Assam in 1943, Talukder established a distinguished career in Geography, serving for over three decades at the prestigious Cotton College (now a state university located in Assam, India). Beyond his pedagogical achievements, particularly in Cartography, he made significant contributions to Assamese literature through translation. This biography traces his journey from a nature-loving child in Batiamari to a recipient of the *Sahitya Akademi* Translation Prize, highlighting his dual legacy in academia and literature.

Keywords: Suren Talukder; Geography; Cotton College (now University); Cartography; Assamese Literature; Translation; *Sahitya Akademi*; Assam; India

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Prolegomenon: The Genesis of a Polymath

Professor Suren Talukder (Figure 1), an eminent figure in the intellectual landscape of the small state of Assam, was ushered into the world on 10 January 1943, in the pastoral confines of Batiamari, a remote village located under the jurisdiction of the present-day Bajali district of Assam, India. His formative years were steeped

in the "enormous treasure of nature," a foundational immersion that cultivated a lifelong aesthetic and intellectual affinity for the natural world. This early communion with the wilderness remained a cornerstone of his character, sustaining a profound appreciation for ecological serenity even into his ninth decade.



Figure 1: Suren Talukder

Source: Collected by the Authors

Academic Foundations and Scholastic Lineage

Talukder Sir's journey through the hallowed halls of academia commenced with his matriculation from Baghmara High School in 1960. He subsequently sought higher enlightenment at the venerable Cotton College, attaining a Bachelor of Science with Honours in Geography in 1964. Though briefly diverted by the exigencies of financial constraints—which necessitated a nascent stint as a secondary educator—he resumed his pursuit of advanced knowledge at Gauhati University in 1965. Under the tutelage of such academic titans as Professors Hari Prassana Das, Minadhar Barthakur, M. Taher (Bhagabati, 2023), D.K. Singh (Routray, 2017), M.K. Bandyopadhyay, M.C. Bhuyan, and N.N. Bhattacharyya (Kar, 2023a,b), he specialised in the intricate discipline of Cartography, earning his Master of Science in 1967.

The Pedagogical Odyssey and Cartographic Mastery

The professional ascent of Professor Talukder began within the administrative aegis of the Manipur Government, serving at GP Women's College and Churachandpur College. However, the siren call of his alma mater, Cotton College, eventually drew him back in 1970. For over three decades, he served this institution with unwavering dedication, transitioning from a former pupil to a peer of his mentors—Professors T.N. Barkataky (Rahman, 2020), Biraj Choudhury, Jivan Bhattacharjee, and Nripen Sarma—until his retirement in 2002.

As a pedagogue, Talukder possessed an uncanny ability to "read the students," intuitively identifying the cognitive hurdles they faced. Indeed, Talukder Sir's approach to Cartography was characterised by a profound pedagogical empathy, recognising that the spatial representation of a spherical Earth onto a planar surface—the core of map projection—is a feat of advanced mathematical translation. Recognising that the mathematical rigours of Cartography—specifically, statistical methods and their complex calculations—often posed an insurmountable barrier for many, he pioneered an innovative pedagogical approach that we

would call the **Talukder Method**. He prioritised disseminating preliminary mathematical concepts before venturing into the complexities of map projections, thereby democratising access to technical geography (Bhattacharyya, 2026a, b). We elaborate on the process of his teaching approach further through the following observations:

The Talukder Method: Bridging the Mathematical Chasm

In the traditional academic setting, many students pursuing a Geography Honours degree encountered significant cognitive dissonance when faced with the rigorous technical requirements of Cartography. Professor Talukder addressed this "mathematical gap" through a structured, remedial instructional strategy:

- **Diagnostic Pedagogy:** As stated above, he possessed an innate faculty to "read the students," identifying specific areas where their comprehension faltered due to a lack of foundational technical knowledge.
- **Mathematical Scaffolding:** Before initiating the standard curriculum, Talukder mandated introductory sessions focused exclusively on Preliminary Mathematics.
- **Prerequisite Mastery:** He ensured students grasped the essentials of statistical methods and their complex calculations, which are indispensable for calculating scale distortion and coordinate transformations.
- **Conceptual Integration:** Only after establishing this numerical fluency, he proceeded to the complexities of map construction, ensuring that the transition from theory to practice was seamless and accessible.

His magnum opus in this field, the textbook *Introduction to Map Projections*, remains a vital resource for both undergraduate and postgraduate scholars.

Thus, by deconstructing the formidable barriers of higher mathematics, Professor Talukder

transformed Cartography from a daunting technical hurdle into an attainable intellectual pursuit for generations of geographers.

Administrative Stewardship and Institutional Influence

Talukder Sir's contribution to the academic infrastructure of Northeast India extended far beyond the classroom. His administrative acumen was harnessed by a multitude of prestigious bodies:

- **Examination Systems:** He acted as the sentinel of the internal examination machinery at Cotton College.
- **Confidential Governance:** He performed clandestine academic assignments for the Secondary Board of Education, Assam (SEBA), Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (AHSEC), and Gauhati University, as well as regional entities like the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU).
- **Leadership in Societies:** He ascended to the Presidency of the North East India Geographical Society (NEIGS) and was a pivotal figure in the National Association of Geographers, India (NAGI).
- **Post-Retirement Service:** For sixteen years following his official retirement, he served as the Controller of Examinations

at the Assam Institute of Management, overseeing state-level recruitment processes.

The Literary Renaissance and Translational Excellence

In the autumn of his career, Talukder Sir underwent a remarkable metamorphosis into a celebrated litterateur. This shift was catalysed by his association with luminaries such as Professor Nabakanta Barua, Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia, and Dr Lakshminandan Bora. His foray into translation was not merely a linguistic exercise but a bridge-building endeavour between diverse Indian cultures.

He translated 13 seminal works into Assamese, making the voices of authors such as U.R. Anantha Murthy, Ruskin Bond, and Khushwant Singh accessible to a local audience. The zenith of his literary recognition came in 2015, when he was awarded the **Sahitya Akademi Translation Prize** for his Assamese rendition of Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay's Bengali masterpiece, *Ganadevatā* (Figure 2). The publications of Talukder Sir can be divided into three categories: **Textbooks** (Table 1), **Translated works in Assamese** (Table 2), and **Others**, which are illustrated below.

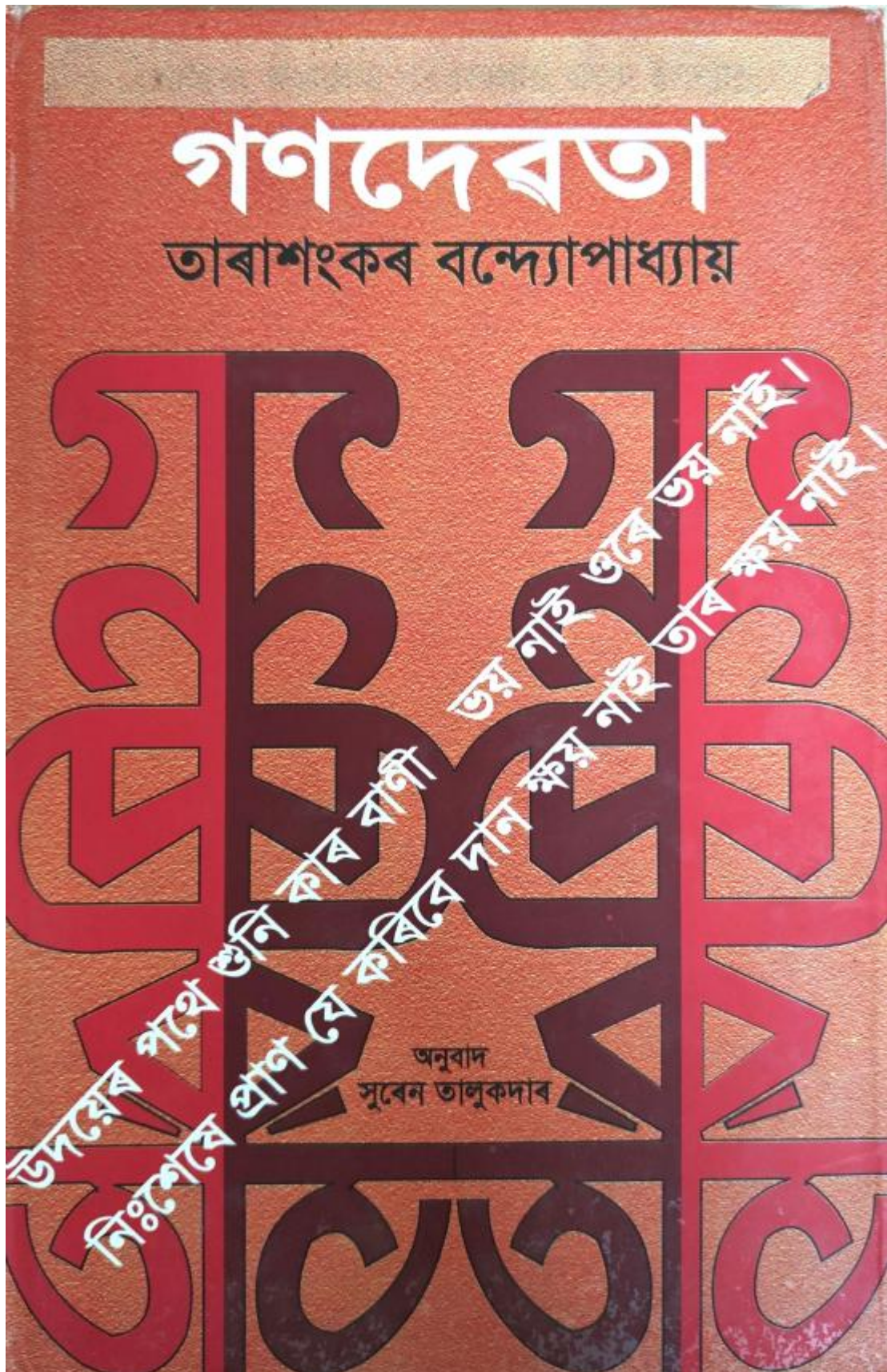


Figure 2: Cover page of *Ganadevatā*

Source: Collected by the Authors

Table1: Textbooks		
Title	Publisher	Place of Publication & Year
Bhugol Bijan for class 8	Balimahi Prakashaw, GNB Road, Panbazaar	Guwahati, 2003
Bhugol Bijan Part II for class 12	Orient Longman, Guwahati	Guwahati, 2000
Geography Practical Notebook for Degree Pass course (co-author)	Niharendra Choudhury, Panbazaar	Guwahati, 1989
Introduction to Map Projections for UG (major) & PG students of GU & DU	EBH Publishers (India), Panbazaar	Guwahati, 2008, 2018

Table 2: Translated Works (in Assamese)				
Title (Assamese)	Original Title & Source Language	Original Author	Publisher	Place & Year of Publication
Samskār	Samskar (Kannada)	U.R. Anantha Murthy (English Tr. A.K. Ramanujan)	Sahitya Akademi	New Delhi, 2002
Ganadevatā	Ganadevatā (Bangla)	Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay	Sahitya Akademi	New Delhi, 2011
Arogya Niketan	Arogya Niketan (Bangla)	Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay	Sahitya Akademi	New Delhi, 2019
Hansuli Pakar Upakatha	Hansuli Bānker Upakatha (Bangla)	Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay	Sahitya Akademi	New Delhi, 2024
Emuthi Anudita Galpa	Short stories (Translated)	Different	Anupam Grantha	Guwahati, 2007
Swikārokti	Translated Short stories	Different	Alibat Prakashan	Guwahati, 2012
Mukoli Akash	Translated Short stories	Different	Alibat Prakashan	Guwahati, 2019
Train to Pakistan	Train to Pakistan (English)	Khushwant Singh	Alibat Prakashan / Banalata	Guwahati, 2014
Naisabdyar Sipāre	The Other Side of Silence (English)	Urvashi Butalia	Alibat Prakashan	Dibrugarh, 2019
The Room on the Roof	The Room on the Roof (English)	Ruskin Bond	Monikut Prakashan	Guwahati, 2016
Māyāz Kareng	The Palace of Illusions (English)	Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni	Banalata	Guwahati, 2023
Mahabir Lachit Barphukan	Assam's Braveheart Lachit Barphukan (English)	Arup Kumar Dutta	Publication Board, Assam	Guwahati/Dibrugarh, 2023

Others

- **Geographical Articles:** Different articles on geographical topics written in English and vernacular languages published in "*The North Eastern Geographer*" and "*Bhougholika*" (published by the North East India Geographical Society, Gauhati University, Guwahati).
- **Literature and Varied Topics:** Different articles on varied topics related to Assamese literature published in journals like *Prantik* and *Prakash*, as well as

vernacular newspapers like *Amar Asom* and *Niyomiya Barta*.

Epilogue: A Dual Legacy

Arguably, Suren Talukder Sir stands as a testament to the harmonious fusion of scientific precision and creative fluidity. From the cartographic delineation of the physical world to the nuanced translation of the human condition, his life's work represents a rare synthesis of intellectual rigour and artistic sensitivity. He remains a paragon of academic versatility, leaving an indelible mark upon the geographic and literary landscapes of India.

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Ethical Approval

This work is offered as a tribute to Professor Suren Talukder, who is also the second author's father. The study does not require separate ethical approval.

Conflict of Interest

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