

Dr. Jyoti Prasad Medhi: An Eminent Assamese Mathematician and my Thoughts

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The list of Assamese scholar who has contributed significantly in the field of mathematical science and is renowned internationally is quite short. Therefore, any news of an Assamese receiving international recognition for their talent and intelligence receives immense importance and attention. They not only make our state and country proud internationally, but their examples inspire our new generation to walk ahead working hard. Today, the person going to be described here is one such eminent Assamese statistician who has established himself internationally: **Dr. Jyoti Prasad Medhi**.

The very first time I heard the name of Dr. Medhi, I developed an instant interest over him. Once, a picture of Dr. Medhi being honoured with Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam in Tezpur University caught my attention. That was the first time I came to know the name of Dr. Jyoti Prasad Medhi. As far as I remember, the picture was published about 6 years ago in the supplement of the Assamese daily; 'Amar Axom' called 'Bohumukh'. **The picture was captured in 2001 when Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam and Dr. Jyoti Prasad Medhi was conferred with D.Litt. and D.Sc. titles in the Convocation ceremony of Tezpur University respectively.** Since then I gave ardently admired Dr. Medhi and was greatly interested in knowing more about him. **I felt proud as an Assamese in knowing that in spite of continuing his work life in Assam, he kept on doing internationally a acclaimed research and publishing books which brought him great fame and admiration.**

Dr. Medhi was born in 1924 in a place called Ramdia of Kamrup district. His father's name was Binondi Chandra Medhi and his mother's name was Kadambari Medhi. He was born in a very literate family which had immense contribution to Assamese literature and field of education. **His maternal grandfather, Kaliram Medhi is a renowned Assamese author. His maternal uncle, Surendra Nath Medhi is also a famous Assamese short story writer and science writer. Renown by his pen name, Sourav Kumar Chaliha, Surendra Nath Medhi has dedicated his book, 'Oxanto Electron' to his nephew, Dr. Medhi.**

Dr. Medhi was extremely intelligent and had a great presence of mind from his early childhood. His student life was also very successful. He went to primary school in Dibrugarh as his father worked there. He passed his matriculation examination in 1940 from Dibrugarh Government High English School. After that he took up Mathematics as his honors subject in B.Sc. at Cotton College, Guwahati. In that course of time, he won a Sudmarson Gold Medal and Rajni Kanta Bora Gold Medal. He completed his M.Sc. from Calcutta University and was awarded with Debendra Nath Gangopadhyya Gold Medal and Post Graduate First Class Gold Medal.

In 1948, he joined Cotton College as a lecturer of statistics. After some days, he was invited to join the Statistics and Mathematics Department of Guwahati University. He joined the Guwahati University in 1949 and helped in taking forward the newly established department.

He was greatly interested in pursuing further education and therefore he travelled abroad. He was conferred the title of Master of Statistics from Manchester University in 1954. At that time, he wrote requesting the French Government to give him an opportunity to work in France and conduct his research. The French Government accepted his proposal and invited him to conduct his research. According to the then rules of France, he had not only to study the materials needed for research in French language, but also had to write his research papers in French. Therefore he had to take up a diploma course in French literature. He was awarded D.Sc. degree from the University of Sorbonne, Paris in 1956. At this point, it will be appropriate to quote a citation by Dr. Chandrakanta Chetia, **“Dr. Medhi is the second Assamese, after Krishnakanta Handique to complete research works in French by taking a French language course.”**

This humble and able personality came back to Assam after his higher education and made his own state his workplace. He joined the Department of Statistics of Gauhati University and later became the Head of Department of the same. He retired from Gauhati University in the year of 1985. His works of Statistics have been published by many international journals and he has established himself as a great statistician internationally. He had been invited as visiting professors by many Universities of America, Canada and Great Britain and also Indian institutes like IITs and research institutes. He had been advisors to many projects of UGC, State Government and the Central government. He was the President of Assam Science Society twice from 1979-81. **He also became the President of the Statistical Department of Indian Science Congress in 1979.**

The brilliance of his knowledge in statistics is very well amplified in the books he has written. His internationally acclaimed books include ‘[STOCHASTIC PROCESSES \(1982\)](#)’ and ‘[STOCHASTIC MODELS IN QUEUEING THEORY \(1999\)](#)’ published by **New York Academic Press** and **Holted Press** respectively. Another two books by Dr. Medhi was published by **New Delhi Willi Easton Publications**. Not being a student of statistics, it will not be possible for me to discuss these books broadly. These books made him a significant statistical writer among international statistical students. **We do not receive any proper information about his life in any language including English and Assamese when we search on Google about his life. This implies that steps are to be taken to make this eminent Assamese known to the world.** However, we can find the books written by him in the internet. Readers of the books have also given many reviews about the two famous books in ‘Amazon.com’ and ‘Goodreads.com’.

However, people have taken steps to make him famous among the new generation by writing one or two books on his life journey. Dr. Chandrakanta Chetia wrote an autobiography named ‘[GLIMPSES INTO THE LIFE AND WORKS OF J. MEDHI](#)’ which is available online. Bandita Phukan, being a part of State Research Centre wrote a small autobiography on Dr. Medhi’s life. However, more effort is needed so that the Assamese society starts knowing the able scientists and mathematicians of our state, the way they know the famous authors and poets.

He also wrote a book in easy words named ‘**EK DUI JUG BIYUG: XOXIM GONITOR AADI KOTHA**’. Till today, I haven’t got the privilege to read the book as I haven’t spotted it in any book fare. **A sad story about this book is that after its publication, more than two hundred copies of the book laid down in Dr. Medhi’s home as there were not enough people to buy those books. Such incidents show distinctly the disinterest of readers to read Mathematics and Science books.** It will be convenient if we can produce a digitalized version of the book.

Dr. Jyoti Prasad Medhi expired on 3rd February 2017 at the age of 93. Even after his death, his family has been able to carry out the legacy of Dr. Medhi successfully. He has two sons namely, Dipankar Medhi and Subhankar Medhi. **Dr. Dipankar Medhi** is a professor of Computer Science in the University of Missouri, Kansas City and **Subhankar Medhi** is an engineer.

Dr. Medhi was awarded with many awards by many institutions for his contribution to the world of statistics. **Personally, I feel that like his uncle Saurabh Kumar Chaliha, he was also a silent worker who did not hanker after fame and awards.** He was awarded the Professor Emeritus Award by Guwahati University in 1987. He was awarded with D.Sc. degree by Dibrugarh University, Tezpur University and IIT Guwahati. Last year the Department of Mathematics, IIT G decided to annually organize the '**JYOTI PRASAD MEDHI ANNUAL MEMORIAL LECTURE**'.

I would like to conclude my article by citing a notable incident. Almost about a year ago, in an episode of the television program 'Kothabarta', eminent author and journalist Homen Borgohain asked his guest Dr. Nirmal Kumar Choudhury, "At this stage you have established yourself as an able Vice Chancellor of Guwahati University. You have also worked for several years as a professor in Assam Engineering College. In my sight as well as the sight of the society, you are a successful person. But do you have any regret regarding your life?" To this he replied in a regretful tone that if I could have been a mathematical researcher and teacher like Dr. Jyoti Prasad Medhi, I would have felt better. This in my view is a simple as well as great appreciation and approval of Dr. Medhi and his mathematical researches by another eminent personality.

[I would like to express my honor and gratitude to Dr. Jyoti Prasad Medhi on this first death anniversary by writing this small article on his life story and works.]

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(This article was [originally published in Assamese](#) and was written by Priyankush Deka; it has been translated into English by Mushahidul Ahmed.)

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