

Uppsala University, he took the initiative to establish a Folklore Archive at Guwahati University in 1955. It was later renamed the Department of Tribal Culture and Folklore Research. He was influenced by western rationalism and his scholarship betrays an embeddedness in the colonial paradigm.

Praphulladatta Goswami (1919-1994) was another Assamese folklorist of international stature. He became the first Indian folklorist to visit the USA as a visiting professor when he was invited by Indiana University in 1963. He was a student and successor of Birinchi Kumar Barua and his doctoral thesis was examined by Stith Thompson and Verrier Elwin. In 1964, he took over charge of the Department of Tribal Culture and Folklore Research, and it was under his guidance that it was granted the status of an independent University Department named the Department of Folklore Research in 1972. He applied motif-index to Assamese folktales and ballads. He was shy of offering interpretation and confined his works to typology, description and compilation. However, there are penetrating sparks of insights in his writings which should be picked up by future researchers. His approach was comparative and he applied the historical-geographical approach in a novel way. His compilation of narratives in his *Ballad and Tales of Assam* is astonishing. The depth of the accompanying notes is very precious for future folklorists. Nevertheless, his strong allegiance to

international classification without accommodating local classification is an example of submission to critical tropes of western academia.

Birendranath Datta, who took charge of the Department of Folklore Research after Praphulladatta Goswami, directed attention to local categories, and introduced the M.Phil course in the department under his tutelage. He facilitated not only the training of future folklorists, but also the generation of a larger database of local folklore materials. Birendranath Datta charted areas like commonality of folklore materials in North-East India, ethnicity, and folklore, functional studies of folklore, folk Ramayanas and folklore in the context of society and politics in North-east India. He wrote a monograph on folklore studies in an Assamese region. This was the first step towards the study of regional folklore in Assam. He has broadened folklore studies in Assam and expanded the engagement with theory. His metaphors are nationalistic, anthropological, and integrative; but his work does not direct attention to issues of difference and conflict.

After Birendranath Datta the department of Folklore Research of the Guwahati University has expanded its activities and is responding to contemporary and emerging trends whereby expanding the theoretical coverage, range of data collection, fieldwork and methodological awareness.*

A Birth-Centenary Tribute to Birinchi Kumar Barua: A pioneering folkloric voice

SUNIL KUMAR DUTTA
Head, Department of Cultural Studies,
Tezpur University

Birinchi Kumar Barua (1908-1964) was a pioneer in folklore research. Born on October 16, 1908, at Nagaon in central Assam, he had his early education at Nagaon Government High School and passed his Matriculation Examination in 1928 in the first division. He went on to complete his graduation from the Presidency College, Kolkata, with Honours in Pali in 1932 that secured him the prestigious Ishan Scholarship. In 1934, he received his M.A. degree, securing First class First position in Pali, from Kolkata University and went on to qualify for the Bachelor of Law degree from the same university.

In 1945, he proceeded to London for his research at the School of Oriental and African Studies on the Cultural History of Assam and received the Doctorate degree in

1947 from the University of London. While returning from London, Dr Barua visited some European countries, particularly Switzerland and Finland. He was immensely influenced by the research activities in folklore that were being conducted in these countries, particularly in the spheres of documentation and archiving. His experiences in Finland converted him to a folklorist, and this found full expression when he joined Guwahati University as a Reader in the department of Assamese in 1948 after teaching stints at Calcutta University and Cotton College, Guwahati. The Guwahati University started the *Folklore Archive* on the initiative of Birinchi Kumar Barua in 1955. It was later upgraded to the *Department of Tribal Culture and Folklore Research*. Path breaking documentation of the folklore and material cultures of the different ethnic groups of undivided Assam, like the Boros, the Misings, the Khasi-Jaintias, the Deuri-Chutias, the Garos and the Assamese Muslims were taken up. This department



was nourished by Dr. Barua till his death. After him the responsibilities were shouldered by his disciple Prof.



Birinchi Kumar Barua

Praphulladatta Goswami who could offer efficient leadership to the study of folklore applying modern scientific methodology and theory. In 1972, this department became a full-fledged academic department of Guwahati University and was renamed the Department of Folklore Research. An important part of Birinchi Kumar Barua's vision was realized.

A creative writer of repute, two of his novels *Jivanar Batat* (On the Road Called Life, 1944) and *Seuji Patar Kahini* (The Story of Green Leaves, 1959) achieved both critical and popular acclaim. His creative writings are infused with the folklore of Assam, and his engagement with it produced the pioneering *Asamar Lokasamskriti* (Folklore of Assam) in 1961. It was the first ever comprehensive survey of folklore material of the state written in Assamese and it fetched him the Sahitya Akademi Award posthumously in 1964. He has to his credit books on the history and development of Assamese language and literature as well as biographical accounts of Sankardeva. Some of his famous works are *Assamese Literature* (1941), *Asamiya Bhasa* (1949), *Studies in Early Assamese Literature* (1953), *Asamiya Bhasa aru Samskriti* (1957), *Sankardeva, The Vaisnava Saint of Assam* (1960), and *History of Assamese Literature* (1964). In 1951, Birinchi Kumar Barua published his magnum opus *A Cultural History of Assam*, Volume I.

Prof. Barua died at the age of 56 on March 30, 1964, after a brief illness. Within the short span of his life, he left behind a legacy of scholarship of the highest order in varied fields like Folklore, History, Literature, Language, Art and Culture, and Sankardeva Study. One would like to conclude with the obituary for Prof. Birinchi Kumar Barua by the famous American Folklorist Dr Richard M. Dorson:

"In the spring semester of 1963 Professor Barua lectured on 'The Folklore of India' as visiting professor of Folklore at Indiana University...We negotiated a contract for two volumes he would edit on *Folktales of India* to appear in the *Folktales of the World* series. He had other ambitious projects: for an *Encyclopedia of Indian Folklore*, for a book surveying the *Folk Traditions of India*. To us Prof. Barua appeared imposing, handsome, sturdy, and in continual good spirits. He organized his lectures, the first on their subject in the United States, with logic and clarity, and delivered with feeling. All his listeners received the impression that Indian civilization was permeated with a folk culture, and that her classics dipped deeply into the wells of folk tradition. 'In India a child sings before he talks, and dances before he walks' he said memorably...Professor Barua became our cherished friend. His sudden death is a heavy blow to his American as well as his Indian colleagues, and to the cause of international folklore scholarship (Dorson 1994:20-21)."

Reference

Dorson, R.M. (1994) 'Birinchi Kumar Barua', *Bulletin of the Department of Folklore Research* No. 2, Guwahati: Guwahati University. ✽

ifrij Indian Folklore Research Journal

Volume Eight, December 2008

Table of Contents:

The Girl in the Rock: A Telangana Tale and Vasistha's Retelling

—KATIKANENI VIMALA & DAVID SHULMAN

Make That Sesame on Rice, Please!
Appetites of the Dead in Hinduism

—DAVID M. KNIPE

American Public Folklore – History, Issues, Challenges

—ROBERT BARON

The Rajasthani Epic of PĀBŪJĪ - A Preliminary Ethnopoetic Analysis

—HEDA JASON

Children's oral literature as cultural story-tellers and relation with modern mass media in India

—LOPAMUDRA MAITRA

Collective Memory and Reconstruction of Ho History

—ASOKA KUMAR SEN

Photo essay on Serpent God Worship
Ritual in Kerala

—SURESH KUMAR

SUBSCRIPTION:

INDIA:

Rs.150 for single issue (Rs.1200 for 8 issues)

OTHER COUNTRIES:

\$10 for single issue (\$80 for 8 issues)

To get our publications send DD / IMO drawn in favour of *National Folklore Support Centre*, payable at Chennai (India)

