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Janajati Gaurav Divas

It is a well-known fact that Bharat, our motherland, is one of the most diverse countries in the world. It has various communities belonging to different languages, religions and cultures. Both the Janjati and non-Janjati communities of our country performed their different traditions, beliefs, and practice without any interference or opposition. All of us were at peace and happy with the all embracing sense of oneness. For millions of years we have upheld the sanctity of tolerance, belongingness to our national identity, respect and obedience to our ethics and our cosmopolitan behavior. Diversities could not deter us from pursuing the path of unity. There was always 'Unity in Diversity' and the feeling of 'we' amongst all of our compatriots. But everything changed when the British colonized our motherland and we lost our independence.

The holistic plans of the colonial British regime were to consolidate its hold over not only the natural resources of Bharat but also over its inhabitants. The tools they applied to perpetuate their rule over the people of our country were anti people administration, anti-people taxation and land laws, evangelization and substitution of our very own education system with western education. The most atrocious project of the British was the 'mission to civilize the most backward, savage or semi savage population fit for nothing but for carrying burdens and serving as serfs.' This mission was specifically applicable to tribal communities mostly living in or near the forests. This Christianity induced elements upset the old way of life of the tribal communities and interfered with their social customs.

Birsa Munda understood the designs of the evangelist forces who were nothing but the extended hands of the colonial British regime. He also realized that the missionaries provided information to cut down any resistance from the janajatis in time for continuation of the British Raj. To combat this impossible situation Birsa Munda decided to go for

complete independence, both political and religious. This is a very important aspect of Birsa's movement that needs to be understood in correct perspective, which ultimately earned him the title of Bhagawan. Birsa led his movement one step beyond agrarian agitation and incorporated a religious movement almost complete in its institutional, theoretical, prophetic, and regulatory aspects. Birsa provided a clear cut and positive politico-religious direction and content to the armed movement. Birsa led down strict ethical code. Birsa's ideal order aimed at complete overthrow of the British raj, European missionaries and officials who had dishonored ancient customs and rituals of the janajatis. Birsa's movement aimed at the recreation of the old society which was fading away due to British onslaught.

The politico-religious movement of Birsa Munda not only attracted the attention of the Munda community of Chotanagpur but also inspired other Janajati and non-Janjati communities living in other parts of the country. The contemporary resistance movement against the oppressive British regime started to come closer to Birsa Munda's struggle for freedom. This was evident from the armed struggle in Bastar in 1911, Tana Bhagat's movement in Bihar in 1914, Bhill movement of Mangarh in Rajasthan, Koya tribal uprising of 1922 under the leadership of Alluri Sitarama Raju, Haipou Jadonang and Rani Guidinliu's struggle for freedom in Naga areas, united fight by Gond and Kolam in 1941 in Telengana. The list is long but one thing is certain that Birsa Munda was an inspirational leader and he was accepted as such by all including Janjati and Non-Janjati communities. He was considered a Bhagawan because of his qualities and his urge to better the future of the tribal as well as non-tribal communities of our country. Anointing Birsa Munda as the Pride of Janajati is least we could do to honour this extraordinary freedom fighter. □□

Romen Chakraborty
Chief Editor



This article is HERITAGE EXPLORER's tribute to the great freedom fighter Bhagawan Birsa Munda, the spiritually oriented savior of the oppressed Janajati communities of Bharat striving for freedom from the enslavement of the offensive British colonizers

BIRSA MUNDA

The Bhagawan of the Janajatis

India is soon going to celebrate the Janajatiya Gaurav Divas on 15 November, the birth anniversary of one of the most heroic freedom fighter mother India has ever produced, to honor the sacrifices made by the janajati brethren in the freedom struggle of our country.

The birth anniversary of Bhagawan Birsa Munda is a day of pride not only for the janajtis but for the entire country. Noble personalities do not and should not be shackled by the boundaries of caste, tribe, region and religion. They fulfill their inner callings and complete their lifework in the prevailing context of the society and the country. Their acts and thoughts become a pathway for others and the larger movement gains strength and reputation. Birsa Munda's life story is such an example. Birsa became Bhagawan Birsa Munda because of values that he cherished and sacrificed his life for. We have to understand deeply his inner urgings to understand why people revere him as Bhagawan.

Birsa Munda is seen as a Bhagawan, a freedom fighter, a martyr, a social reformer who championed the cause of the suffering fellow beings against the grinding maladies of an offensive British rule and other abuses and led a humanitarian campaign of relieving the misery of masses and securing justice for them.

Birsa was born on 15th November, 1875 in Ulihatu village on Thursday and was named after

the day he was born according to Munda custom. Birsa's birth ceremonies were performed at Chalkad, his father's mothers' village. Birsa's early years were spent in Chalkad. Driven by poverty Birsa was taken to Ayubhatu by his parents where he stayed for two years. From this place he went to Kundi Bartoli to his elder brother and stayed with him for some time. There he passed his lower primary examination. For Upper Primary education he went to German Mission School at Chaibasa. This period is marked by intense activities of German and Roman Catholic Missions in janajati areas of Chotanagpur. Here he coined the slogan Saheb Saheb Ek Topi (all whites, missionaries or the British wear the same cap) when he realized that missionary interests and the British rule are supplementary to each other.

Around 1890 Birsa went to Bandgaon. He participated in agitations stemming from popular disaffection at the restrictions imposed by the British laws imposed upon the Mundas upon traditional rights in protected forest. Around 1893-94 waste lands in Munda areas were constituted into the protected forest categories under Indian Forest Act VII of 1882; at some places forest settlement operations were launched and measures were taken to determine the rights of the forest dwelling communities. Villages in forest were marked off in blocks of convenient size sufficient for the villagers. Outside of the blocks lay the protected forest areas

in which old ancestral rights of janajatis were regulated, even curtailed by the British laws. Birsa led number of groups with the petition of resumption of forest rights. But nothing came of it. By 1894 the Chotanagpur Protected Forest rules framed under Indian Forest Act had come into force. Birsa was not a passive spectator but an active participant in the movements going on in his neighborhood.

In 1895, at the age of 20, Birsa rapidly evolved through a sequence of events into a Prophet. Spiritual awakening and experiences brought out new divine qualities in Birsa, earned the reputation as a healer. British and mission officials reported that large numbers of people were visiting Birsa to get cured. Gradually he began preaching as well. He called it Birsaism. He called upon his followers to attend his prayer meetings every day. Gradually his followers started calling him Dharati Aba, the father of the Earth. He started bringing in reforms in the old system of puja, prayers and rituals and introduced simple system of praying and offerings. Slowly the prophet was identified with God himself. People approached him as their Singbonga or the Sun God. Contemporary folksongs commemorate the tremendous impact of Birsa on his people, their joy and expectations. The name of Dharati Aba was on everybody's lips. There was an undertone of protest against the missionaries as they denounced Birsa's reforms. But these reforms were slowly growing into popular independent movement. In 1895 out of this religious beginning emerged the agrarian and political character of the movement. The complexion of the movement changed. Birsa provided positive political program to the Mundas who were discontented due to land and forest laws. His objective was attainment of both religious and political freedom. Birsa and his followers used to proclaim that the Sarkar Raj will end and his Raj will begin. The British administration wanted to arrest Birsa at this point of time as a suspected lunatic or as person whose activities were likely to create breach of peace. They issued warrants under section 353 and 505 Cr P C, the first related to assault or use

of criminal force to deter a public servant from discharge of his duties and the second to making, publishing or circulating any statement, rumor or report conducive to public mischief. Birsa was charged with inciting the crowd to disaffection to the British Government with obstruction and assault of the government police in execution of their duty, and spreading propaganda which seemed to have been intended to cast odium on her Majesty's government. He had exhorted the people to refrain from paying rent to or rendering any further obedience to the Government and its officers. The British government charged him for his connection with the agitation on forest issues and land problems. Birsa was arrested for first time in August 1895 in Bandgaon village. After his arrest more than 7000 Mundas gathered in Chalkad with their weapons. The British authorities expected outbreak of hostilities. The British Commissioner recognized the intentions of Birsa's followers to be revolutionary and took precautionary measures to calm down the tension. The British administration had initially taken Birsa's movement very lightly. But later they realized that they were sitting on a powder magazine. The missionaries sent the report that it was extremely dangerous to allow Birsa to return back with his people as it will take very little for him to ring them together and start the movement afresh.

Birsa was sentenced to prison for two years and was released on 30th November, 1897. He was warned to not to start his revolutionary movement. Birsa undertook to give no more trouble. The movement had gone underground gaining in depth and emerged as more powerful and potentially more dangerous than before. The two famines of 1896-97 and 1899-1900 created more trouble for the people as well as for the British government. Five to ten percent of population spread over 700 miles were affected. Within few days of his release his followers met him at Chalkad and pleaded to set up an organization which will secure their lost rights and to drive out the British. Preparation for larger movement were set in pace by visiting ancestral places and launching

an intensive propaganda campaign to boost the morale of the people. The disciples were divided into two groups: a group concerned with the faith and another to organize the movement. There was a political slant to the propaganda. The main theme of the propaganda was on constant reminder to the people of the golden age of their ancestors, of the need to revive the old manners and customs and regain their land, forest and rights. He visited three ancestral temples and picked up sacred thread from Naw Rattan, Tulsi leaves and Prasad and sandal paste from Jagannathpur. The psychological preparation for the struggle was complete.

This phase marks the shift of activities from Chalkad to Dombari. Dombari was more secure, surrounded by hills on all sides. It was inside the heart of Munda area where as Chalkad was on the fringe along the route to Ranchi or Chaibasa. Dombari was the place associated with the Kol armed struggle. It had once resounded with triumphs of the powerful combination of Mundas and Laraka Hos against the British, commemorated with pride in Munda folksongs. Dombari became the nerve center of the armed struggle. A representative gathering of all Munda areas was held in February 1898. Another meeting was held in March 1898 on Sambua hill. The decision for armed struggle was taken unanimously. Meetings were held in all Munda area usually on hillocks and inaccessible sites. Birsa visited many places where he was welcomed with great enthusiasm. The next representative meeting was held on Dombari hills in November 1899 which marked the beginning of intensive preparations of armed struggle. There were 16 meetings held in different places of Munda areas. Area in charges were deputed with strict orders of preparing for armed struggle. Birsa's ideas penetrated even the remotest households within one and half years of intense efforts.

The establishment of Raj under Birsa became the ultimate political aim. The series of events is really long and exciting. The struggle spread in many

places in Ranchi, Singhbhum districts targeting the British government. The incident particularly needs a mention is that of arrest of Gaya Munda and his entire family in Bandgaon village. The courage shown by him and women of his family deserves a heroic chapter in school books for students as an example of how spirited they were, even women who fought holding small baby in their one hand. On 3rd February 1900 Birsa was caught by the British police second time. He died in Ranchi jail on 9th June 1900 due to cholera and dysentery. However no other prisoner had any symptom of cholera in the jail. Hence a strong belief was that he was poisoned inside the jail.

Birsa and his movement should be evaluated in the context of the national freedom struggle for freedom against the British. The rise and establishment of the British Empire saw the beginning of the first phase from 1795 to 1857 of janajati resistance movements which was spontaneous, elemental and widespread involving not only janajatis but many. It was led by the traditional chiefs who foresaw the effects of British colonial system. It was resistance to the new system forced upon the people by the British colonial rule and new classes of the people who were inducted by it namely the system of local administration and taxation, evangelization, the new land lords, moneylenders and government officials, all of whom were to be expelled in a violent upsurge. This formulation would generally apply to all the movements of this period i.e. the uprisings among the Pahariyas from 1756 to 73, in 1784-85 Mahadev Koli tribe in Maharashtra and Tilka Manjhi of Santhal tribe raised the sword; the Chuar revolt from 1795 to 1800, Kurchiyas under the leadership of Talakkal Chandu attacked British in 1802 and then led organized struggle against the British invasion in Wayanad in 1812; in the North East Singphos attacked British forces in Sadiya in 1830s; Kol tribe in Chotanagpur area raised the armed struggle in 1832; the Khonds in Orissa fought in 1850; the Great Freedom Struggle by Sidho-Kanho in Santhal region was in 1855; Nilambar-Pitambar of Kharwar tribe

have immense contribution in the freedom struggle of 1857 in Jharkhand, Bhagoji Naik led the struggle of Bhils in 1857-58; Raghunath Shah and Shankar Shah sang revolutionary songs before being torn asunder into tiny pieces by cannon balls for leading Gondwana's battle against the British; the Lushai janajati people of Mizoram attacked British forces in 1860; the Sentinelese janajati people of Andaman and Nicobar island attacked British in 1883; Shambudhan Phonglo from Dimasa janajati fought in 1883 against the British in Dimasa areas of Assam; the Angami Nagas revolted against British around 1880s; the British government was afraid of Tantya Bhil's revolutionary activities in late 1890s.

The second phase from 1860 to 1947 was characterized with violent struggles as well as the agrarian-cum-revivalist movements. This phase coincided with the onset of the intensive period of colonialism which saw a much deeper penetration of British administration and laws in janajati and peasant life and economies which intensified the exploitation of janajatis. As a result of this far complex type of movement represented a curious mix of agrarian, religious and political issues. It was demonstrated through janajati resistance movements against the assaults on their traditional systems. It was followed up by the socio religious or revitalization movements which were expressive of the janajati's urge to create new order. These two lines of the movement throughout the country revealed striking similarities, a basic unity of response to almost the same kinds of British laws and administration.

It was evident in the armed struggle in Bastar in central India in 1911; in Tana Bhagat's movement in Bihar from 1914 to 1919; more than 1500 Bhils were massacred gruesomely in hills of Mangarh in Rajasthan on 17th November, 1913; supreme sacrifice was offered by the Koya tribal community in 1922 under leadership of Alluri Sitarama Raju; from 1926 to 1931 Haipou Jadonang raised the banner of struggle in Naga areas; British cruel force could not melt iron resolve of a delicate 14-year old young

lady, Rani Gaidinliu; the Gond and the Kolam fought in collaboration in 1941 in Telangana; Lakshmana Nayak in 1942 raised the struggle at Koraput in Orissa. These are some of the glorious golden chapters of janajati armed movements against the mighty British forces. The Birsa movement belonged to this phase and was undoubtedly its most outstanding representative.

The opening up of janajati areas through the establishment of British administration which was far from beneficial to the Mundas upset the traditional system. The general ignorance and neglect of rights and customs of janajatis by the new laws were fatal to the janajati interests. This led to the process of the transformation of corporate ownership of villages of the Munda communities into individual ownership, mostly under non janajatis. The British policy was of isolation on one side and creating enemies within the societies on the other. Hence petty police and forest officials, for Mundas became synonymous for arrogance and meanness. The agents of the breakdown of the janajati agrarian system, the aliens, moneylenders could be identified in Munda imagination with a snake, a witch etc. The combination of these factors spelt alienation of the land that dealt a cruel blow to all that the Mundas cherished in their life. This disaffection was made worse by the regulations governing the reservation of the forest which came directly in conflict with the traditional rights of janajatis on forest land. The breakdown of the agrarian order entailed social consequences. The incidence of liquor drinking and migration of Mundas as laborers to tea gardens and elsewhere weakened the traditional authority. The famines made the situation more explosive.

The British had allowed entry of Christian missionaries creating an impression of a potential ally of the British in perpetuating their rule over the janajatis. The contempt was seen in ideas such as 'mission to civilize the most backward, savage or semi savage population fit for nothing but for carrying burdens and serving as serfs. The western education that was brought along with Christianity

were totally alien to the social system of Mundas. Three missions were working in Munda areas, German, Anglican and Roman Catholic missions. Anglican mission which was known as the Government's church kept completely away from the movement. Christianity introduced new elements which upset the old way of life and interfered with their social customs. Birsa had come to the conclusion that the missionaries always had deep and personal connections with the British and provided information to cut down any resistance from the janajatis in time for continuation of their rule. Roman Catholics not only attacked Birsa's personal life but also pleaded for the most stringent punishment against his followers. The choicest epithets were used to describe Birsa. For them he was a young monkey, more a fool than a knave, a fanatic, an infatuated youth with dubious moral character, etc.

The Christian missionaries played its role to further its own interest by assuring the Mundas that they will get back their land and forest that they had lost if they follow their directions and remain Christians. The British made every attempt to misinform about the movement. Initially the British opinion was that it was merely an agrarian movement. However subsequently imposed a religious character after some period. The divide and rule policy was again evident when they dictated that the movement was not only against the zamindars and their petty officials but also against Hindus in the tribal areas. The Indian national congress underlined the political character and described the movement as anti-missionary and anti-government. But Birsa was far more concerned with the British rule that rendered the tyranny of the zamindars possible. He underlined the agrarian and forest land issues in his deliberations preparatory to the violent struggle. Birsa would go to the zamindars and their petty officials to persuade them to mend their ways and if he failed in his mission they were supposed to be expelled from the area. The movement was agrarian in its roots, violent in its means and sought political solution in

its end by throwing out the British rule and establishment of his rule.

Birsa aimed at complete independence, both political and religious. This is a very important aspect of Birsa's movement that needs to be understood in correct perspective, which ultimately earned him the title of Bhagawan. Birsa led his movement one step beyond agrarian agitation and incorporated a religious movement almost complete in its institutional, theoretical, prophetic, and regulatory aspects. Birsa provided a clear cut and positive politico-religious direction and content to the armed movement. Birsa led down strict ethical code. Birsa's ideal order aimed at complete overthrow of the British raj, European missionaries and officials who had dishonored ancient customs and rituals of janajatis of the area since 1850s. Birsa's movement aimed at the recreation of the old society which was fading away during the British rule.

The movement so wide and simultaneous testified to the extra ordinary craft and secrecy in strategy, planning and organization. It was spontaneous, sudden in its eruption, elemental in its character like volcanic outburst, violent in its fury and passion, unrestrained by any qualms and scruple. It has grown out of forty years of the Mundas' frustration caused by the expropriation of their land and forest by the British.

The Mundas were hardly any match for the British army; the counter offensive against the Birsa and his group was a simple walkway. There were however instances of stubborn resistance expressive of the Munda's contempt and defiance of authority and of their unfounded faith in their master. Birsa and his team evolved new techniques of communication with their people. They held meetings at secret and selected sites, composed prayers and incantations and prescribed and practiced rituals to destroy their enemies and put an end to the British Raj and Queen's kingdom. They also employed new symbols and conveyed ideas allegorically through folksongs.

The major feature of the movement was the absence of any hostility against the non janajati elements who were socially and economically integrated with the Mundas. They did not look upon these communities as exploiters. The social reforms that Birsa introduced were clearly evident here. Birsa introduced social reforms that are brought through spiritual advancements among Mundas. He had deeply grasped the core of Vaishnavism which was in the heart and spirit of the people in the region. In *Sri Chaitanya Charitamrit* we find references of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu while travelling from Nilachal to Mathura went through the forests of Jharkhand blessing evolutionary reforms in the society. No Birsa's religious ceremony would be complete without the participation of the barbers and washermen. The interaction between janajatis and non janajati communities was an accepted fact by the janajati leaders. The janajatis were never completely isolated from others in our history. Their isolation has been relative and never absolute. We can study reformative changes that Birsa initiated among the Mundas were in tune with reforms that were brought by social reformers in other parts of the country. Birsa's reforms rose from the loam and the soil of the Munda land. The reforms that Bhagwan Birsa urged for were encompassing every aspect of janajati life stressing more on spirituality and unfolding the strength of *atman*. Hence we find canonical insistence to live human life free from any addiction so as to keep the precious soul and body healthier for dedication to the almighty God; old customs of wearing of a sacred thread (janeu) and sacred paste, offering prayers instead of sacrifices to spirits were restored, ancestral ceremonies of purifications were revived, wearing of wooden sandals, every house should be kept neat and clean and should have a Tulsi plant in its courtyard; every household should diligently care for cow; the mother earth should not be tilled on Thursday, and many such simple and universal principles. The reforms were introduced not only to preserve tribal integrity but also to establish an equation with the peasant castes

that were integrated with the Mundas. The interaction of the janajati and non janajati groups had imparted a fullness to their socio economic system. In large perspective, the Munda movement ran parallel to the Indian renaissance and partook its verities: the stress on the past, social reforms and internal purification.

The Birsa movement halted the rapid breakdown of the agrarian order and led to the creation of more manageable administrative units. An immediate result of the Birsa's movement was that the British government felt the urgency of the need for preparing a record of rights for the lands of Mundas. Birsa's movement jolted them into a clear perception of the issues involved. What the Mundas essentially needed was the security of their tenure, recognition of their rights in land and the preservation of the Mundari customary system of land holding. Only a settlement operation could provide the basis of agrarian security, bring to light the variety of local customs and tenures, determine them with precision and thus secure them. The Commissioner strongly felt that the troubles would continue if a complete survey and record of rights was not prepared throughout the Munda country and the beth bigari system abolished. This system had reduced the Mundas to extreme poverty and thrown hundreds of thousands far away as laborers. Immediately after the Birsa's death new settlement policy commenced. The new reforms brought in relative relief to the Mundas. The most visible change was in the fall of number of cases, both in civil and criminal in title suits in Munda areas. Suits for the arrears of rent were easily disposed of. The Tenancy Amendment Act of 1903 contained first recognition of the Munda traditional system which ensured the safe enjoyment of their tenancy and protection of rights of Mundas. Subsequently Chotanagpur Tenancy Act VI of 1908 was passed which marked the end of a century of agrarian strife. It safeguarded number of points which Mundas claimed as central part of their social system. The time honored right of the janajatis to reclaim land was recognized. The DC was empowered to eject forcibly any alien

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GENESIS OF LOKPARAMPARA

A DISCOURSE ON NORTH EAST

► Dr. Ranga Ranjan Das

The vastness of the north east in terms of area, ethnic diversity, diverse cultural expressions where 'Lokparampara' is still very much vibrant and cannot be confined within a periphery of limited words. Still an attempt is being made to provide a genesis of 'Lokparampara' in a concise manner where all the features continuity co-exist. This essay particularly focuses on the conceptual understanding of 'Lokparampara'- the materials in socio-cultural context, scholastic content, continuity, changes, contemporary issues and concerns.

The term Lokparampara, can be spelled as Lokaparampara, a Assamese word- with equivalent English word 'Folk Custom' or 'Folk tradition', folk tradition, being the most suitable word. Folk means people, tradition as denotes- practice that has been continuing since time immemorial. Folk tradition is a core part of any folk group/cultural group/tribe/community. The north eastern region, often referred as a land of ethnocultural mosaic, 'ethnic museum', a paradise for anthropological and folkloric research- an area with seven politico-geographical unit- housing more than 200 ethnic groups and sub-groups- the ancestors of which came from different directions in different waves, now exemplified with their vibrant heritage that referred as culture or folklore under different academic domain. They have been categorized as 'tribe' under the state specific list of Indian Constitution, who still maintain folk tradition with more or less extend as they really know it is the hallmark of their ethnic identity.

The concept of folk tradition is broad and wider ramifications. In folkloristics, from the four fold classification made by Richard M. Dorson, we can refer to 'social folk custom'. It is precisely more comfortable zone to discuss the folk tradition of diverse groups, yet folk tradition apparently reveal all the diverse field of folklore that include oral

literature, material culture and performing folk arts. There is no any group without own folk tradition. Colonial scholars during pre-independence period explored most of the folk traditions while constructing tribal ethnography of this region. The works of JH Hutton, JP Mills, Shakespere, Haimendorf, Sindy Endle, Major Playfair, Ursula Graham Bow, Rafy were a few of them. Many Indian and north eastern scholars joined them during pre- and post Independence period. In Assam, we must appreciate the efforts of Birinchi Kumar Barua, Prafulla Dutta Goswami and Birendra Nath Datta for exploring diverse facets of folk tradition of north east in General and Assam in particular. It is through their efforts people have got the sense to explore the rich dimensions of folk tradition scattered in this region within the academic domain. The various departments and institutions like folklore research of Gauhati University, cultural studies of Tezpur University, Anundoram Barooah Institute of Language Arts Culture further help to study the folk tradition in scientific manner parallel to the growth and development in other countries across the world. There are various narratives and discourses particularly related to origin, growth and development of the disciplines of folklore.

In north eastern context, there is inormous scope to trace out folk tradition among different groups. Sharing a common space, there are certain common elements of folk tradition. Agriculture being the mainstay of most of the communities, and as many as rituals and festivals associated with agriculture. Rice as the common food item also share a part to develop rice culture. Cultivation is done both in the plains and the hills. Every cultivation is associated with various steps and processes. There is difference from wet rice cultivation of the plains to jhum cultivation in the hills. Kati, Magh, Bohag,

Katri gosha, Baisagu, Bishu, Si-Doyni (Tagin of Arunachal Pradesh) are some of the festivals that are related to agriculture. Most of the festivals among the ethnic group are related with rituals related to folk gods and goddess. Bathou Barai, Mainau, Baikho, Grimbuda, Rangphra, Rang oo are some of them. Among the different group, there is also tradition of appeasing benevolent and malevolent gods, goddess, spirits and deities. Offering rice beer and sacrificing animals are part of their folk tradition. Religious world view mostly covers nature worship that we find among different groups of Arunachal Pradesh. Doynipoloism, worshipping sun and moon as principal god is seen among many groups. There is an attempt to restructure the folk tradition relating to religion as seen among many groups, for example Bathouism among Bodos, Heraka religion among Zeme Nagas, Rangfrasim among Tangsas, Seng Khasi, etc. It is done to withstand the onslaught of Christianity and modernization. It is two main factors that makes an impact on the folk tradition of the north east particularly related in religious beliefs and practices.

Most of the folk tradition are associated with folkways or folklife or socio-cultural life. Nowadays, we are able to see the written literature of many groups. Still there exists a tradition of oral literature among many groups that encompass oral narratives relating to their origin, migration, settlements, oral histories, myths, legends, folk tales, ballads, riddles, proverbs. They are handed down from one generation to the next. Within the ambit of folk tradition, we also found the nexus between classical and folk tradition. The Karbi Ramayan, Sabin Alun is a wonderful example. Prior to advent of modern education and regular justice system, there are some traditional institutions that really served the need of the society. Schools and colleges are now available in the nook and corner of the region. Institutions like Murung (Naga), Nokpante (Garo), Jirkedam (Karbi), Samadi (Tiwa), Pang (Nocte) did the same functions earlier. They train their youth to become a man of perfection for their own societies.

Likewise, the service of modern court and police is available to the people of north east. But their folk tradition provide them customary laws and

practices that acts as a social control mechanism since early days. They rule themselves within the ambit of folk tradition. In the north east, we can divide the entire society into two broader divisions: matrilineal and patrilineal society. Descent, inheritance and succession are passed through female line in matrilineal society vis-a-vis male in patrilineal society. Garo, Khasi, Jaintia and Hill Tiwas are a few groups who still maintaining the norms of matrilineal tribe. On the basis of customary laws, we can found various traditional body who provide the platform to settle their disputes and personal laws within, without the intervention of modern court. Such arrangements are found among different groups: Kebang (Adi), Nyelle (Nyishi), Darbar Shynong (Khasi), Rabha National Council, Hoda (Jamatia of Tripura), are a few of them. Customary law also referred as 'folk law', has been recognized by our Indian Constitution when they frame the arrangement of Six Schedule, and special provisions for the states of Nagaland and Mizoram. In Mizoram, it is also codified as Mizo Hnam Dam. It is very much interesting that our folk tradition has been recognized. While reviewing the folk law of the north east, it is found that oath, ordeal, omen examination by eggs, examination of chicken liver relating to any dispute, punishment in the form of kind, cash, ex-communication from the village, are key components. This is still maintained in a modified form.

There are various other salient features of folk tradition. It includes tradition of weaving, preparing rice beer, house making, and various customs associated with birth, marriage and death ritual. One may see the tradition of weaving if examines beautiful and artistic mekhela sador (traditional attire of Assamese women) manufactured at Sualkuchi (the silk village of Assam), other ethnic textiles of Mishing community, dokhona and aronai of Bodos, dakmanda of Garos, gales of Arunachali tribes, riphun of Rabhas and others. These ethnic textiles have different designs reflecting motifs which is part and parcel of their community life and their immediate environment. Some of the communities are represented by some ethnic symbols. The Jambeli Athon and cross spear represents the Karbi and Naga community respectively is pertinent to mention in this regard.

Performing arts are part and parcel of folk tradition. Cheraw- the beautiful bamboo dance (Mizo), Bagrumba (Butterfly dance), Bihu, Hojagiri dance (Reang) with a synchronization of heap movement and balancing act, Bhailum dance (Halam) are eye pleasing folk dance prevalent among different groups. Similarly folksongs (Lokageet) are also popular in various parts of the region. In Assam the efforts of Pratima Pande Barua and Rameswar Pathak in popularizing Goalparia and Kamrupi Lokageet is known to all.

There is also tradition of making rice beer where we find the involvement of traditional knowledge- where leaves of various plants are utilize as fermenting agent. Folk healing is also an important part of folk tradition or loka parampara. Two ways of healing is found: socio-religious healing and herbal healing. In the rural context, the medicine man (ojha, bez) still play an important role in curing various diseases and ailment. Folk healing ways by undertaking various rituals such as seen in curing small pox, by appeasing folk goddess Sitala; and also administering decoction of various leaves, bark, root, etc are common.

It is observed that the folk tradition of the north east is still survive in its' purest form mainly in the rural areas. However, the urban dwellers also

try to maintain their tradition in the neo-environment. In Guwahati, we have seen the organization of Madam-Mefi (Ahoms), Ali-Ai Ligang (Mishing), Bathou puja (Bodo), Manasa puja (Rabha), Dehal puja (Karbi), Rangali bihu at the stage, ethnic food fare during festive times. Government have also provided space for ethnic textile and handicrafts item as part of trade and commerce. The main problem of preserving folk tradition is associated with the attitude of new generation. There is a tendency of rural-urban migration. People are disassociating from their roots due to compulsion of economic needs. Their successors are unable to witness and adjust with folk tradition that is available in the village. In town, how can a young see the tradition of ceremonial bath of cow during bohag bihu? What is dighalati and makhioti leaves used during garu bihu (Cow bihu)? During sat bihu, (part of Rangali bihu), there is a custom of eating 108 number of leafy vegetables? How can one know? However, a group of ethnic intellectuals are trying their best to introduce folk tradition of own group to the new generation. Besides, the issue of ethnicity also make people aware to understand and aquire knowledge on own lokaparampara. They really understand that without lokaparampara, their identity will be lost. □□

BIRSA MUNDA : The Bhagawan of the Janajatis

(Contd. from Page 8)

who may have acquired lands in Munda villages; and with provisions for restrictions on the sale and transfer of lands. However it came too late and could secure the traditional system in very few villages.

The Birsa movement was followed by the institution of a number of administrative measures aimed at bringing the people and administration closer. In 1902 the Gumla sub division was formed to facilitate the administration of justice enabling the British to keep close watch on the Munda areas. Khunti sub division was established on 1st December 1905 creating a seat of administration in the heart of the Munda area.

Birsa's movement contributed to a growing consciousness among the janajatis of the

Chotanagpur area. He came to be identified increasingly with the aspirations of his people. Socio religious movements that sprung up bore close resemblance to his movement. Birsa was the Bhagawan not only of Mundas but of Chotanagpur as a whole. His influence reached in to Oraons. Tana Bhagat movement among Oraons which played an important role in the national movement in 1920s bears close resemblance with Birsa' movement including ethical codes for his followers.

Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav is the most appropriate time to pay our tributes to the unheralded janajatis heroes of our freedom struggle by taking up serious research initiatives to unearth the contributions made by them for preserving the unity and integrity of our nation.

The Tiwa and the Khasi-Jaintia Relations : A Historical Perspective

► Dr. Raktim Patar

The Tiwa are an Indo-Mongoloid tribe and descendent of the Bodo family of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan speech family. Settled in Morigaon, Nagaon, Kamrup, Jorhat, Dhemaji and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam and Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya, the Tiwa have long been referred to as “Lalung” or “Laloo” by other neighboring groups. The *Buranjis* (Ahom chronicles) used terms like ‘Lalung’, ‘Garo’ and ‘Dantiyalias’ interchangeably to denote the Tiwa people. The people in question however, refer to themselves as Tiwa. They are divided into two socio-cultural groups, those settled in the plains who speak Assamese and follow a patrilineal descent system bearing Assamese patronyms, and those residing in the hills, speaking a Tibeto-Burman language of the Bodo-Garo group, that follow a matrilineal descent system. Thus, the Tiwa follow a *bilateral descent* system which recognises that descent may be traced from either the father or mother, depending on the decision taken at the time of marriage. In most cases, the husband goes to live with his wife’s family (*matrilocality*), and their children are included in the mother’s clan. However, if the woman goes to live with her husband (*patrilocality*), the children take the name of their father. Thus, the Tiwa follow the ambilocal or biolocal marriage residence rule where a newly married couple is free to choose whether they will live with, or near to, either the parents of the bride or the parents of the groom. B.C. Allen also reiterates the point that a Lalung (Tiwa) woman may enter either her husband’s clan or the husband may enter the wife’s clan, but the right of property and lineage goes to the clan which was agreed upon at the time of marriage.

The Tiwa and the Khasi-Jaintia tribe of Meghalaya have been living side by side since the

remote past. Both the Tiwa and the Khasi-Jaintia have a long history of political and cultural relationship. Both the tribe has some cultural affinities. Despite the fact that the Tiwa speaks a dialect of Tibeto-Burman language and Khasi-Jaintia speaks Mon-khmer, both the groups follow a similar descent system. Though the Tiwa have now considered being follower of *bilateral descent* but the ethnohistory of the origin of the tribe suggests that they were matrilineal in the past. Moreover the Tiwa rule of inheritance also found to be identical with the Khasi-Jaintia. Among the Tiwa daughters inherit mother’s property and major share goes to the youngest one called *Shodya*. She is also called as *Nomul* or the inheritress as she holds the right to claim major portion of her mother’s property including the *Nobaro* (foundation house) of the family. However, if she decides to move away from her ancestral house, any daughter whoever lives in the parental house gets the major share. Among the Khasi the youngest daughter whom the Khasi refer to as *Ka-Khadduh* inherits all the properties including the *Kaling Seng* (foundation house).

According to the ethnohistory of the Tiwa, the political relation with the Khasi-Jaintia is very ancient. A popular legend on the origin of the Tiwa chief of Gobha mentioned that the ancestor of the Gobha *raja* was born out of a stone at a place called Thulimoslong or Timowflong. He was born in the Malewa Khul (Clan) and named as *Soddonga raja*. His successors were also known by the same name. According to the story after staying for several years at Thinimoslong one the Tiwa king moved to Amsai and settled there. The legend further states that at Thinimoslong the ‘Jaitha’ *raja* (Jaintia) was born from the ground and the ‘Khrem’ *raja* (Khasi king) was born from a hollow tree and thus these three political figures are considered as brothers. The *Jayantia Buranji* refers to a similar myth of the Jaintia king. The appearance of *Soddonga/Suttanga* as a

prominent figure in both the Tiwa and Jaintia story undoubtedly tells about the parallel origin of both the Jaintia and Gobha *raja*.

Because of the cultural and historical relationship with the Khasi-Jaintia, the Gobha chief used to invite the Khasi chief of Khyrim state as the chief guest of the annual Jonbill fair held at Jagiroad. According to Deepsing Deoraja, the present incumbent of the erstwhile Gobha principality, the Jonbill fair was started by his ancestors in the 13th century in order to bring both the Hill and Plain Tiwa in a common platform to exchange their love and affection through bartering of goods. The Khyrim chief used to come for the fair by a trail through Kutusi-Mokoidharam near the old village of Amsai in the West Karbi Anglong district of Assam. Continuity of the tradition of attending Jonbill fair by the Khyrim chief is evident from the fact that at Kutusi Mokoidharam twelve megaliths were erected where he used to take rest while going down to the Plains to the fair. Until recently the Khyrim Chief was the chief guest during the opening day of the Jonbill fair. A documentary produced by the Tribal Research Institute, Assam in 1984 filmed the Khyrim chief Balajied Sing Syiem as the chief guest of the Jonbill fair. Such a narrative shows the close socio-economic and political relationship between the Tiwa and Khasi-Jaintia people.

Another very important historical relationship between these two tribes is the continuity of megalithic traditions. Both Tiwa and Khasi-Jaintia people have been practicing the tradition of erecting large stones for commemorative and religious purposes since a very remote past. It is to be noted that no research has been done on the megalithic traditions of the Tiwa except one paper published by the author in the Proceedings of North East India History Association. Our fieldwork on the megalithic tradition of the Tiwa suggests that they have been practicing it since the inception of their settled village life. On the other hand there has been a lot of research on the Khasi-Jaintia megalithic tradition. During our research we have come across a very interesting story associated with the megaliths of Nartiang in the Jaintia Hill district of Meghalaya.

One of our informants shared a popular story connected with the Laloo clan of the Khasi-Jaintia. According to the story once the Jaintia king wanted to erect huge flat stones at Nartiang to propitiate their deity. But it was too heavy and hence they could not erect even after many attempts. Later the king came to know about the Tiwa of Amsai whom they called Laloo who were expert in erecting big stones. Hence he sent messengers to meet the *Loro* (village priest) of Amsai for assistance. However the Amsai *Loro* didn't show much interest and gave the messenger a pumpkin creeper to pull the stones up. The Jaintia king got angry after he discovered that the rope sent by the Amsai *Loro* was just a pumpkin creeper. Then he ordered his messengers to convey the Amsai *Loro* about the serious consequences if he does not provide necessary assistance. When the messengers again came to the Amsai *Loro*, he asked the messengers, whether they offered sacrifice and played drums while erecting the stones? The messenger replied that no such offerings were made. Then the *Loro* said that without giving offerings and playing drums nobody can pull the stones and erect it. Hence he sent some *ojha* or divination man along with a rope made of the bark of the *odal* tree and few drums to be played during the installation of the stones. Accordingly Tiwa *ojhas* made it possible for the Jaintia king to erect the megaliths at Nartiang. Consequently the Jaintia king requested the Tiwa of Amsai whom they addressed as *Laloo* to remain within Jaintia territory. Later these people were incorporated as a Laloo clan of the Jaintia. According to our informants till 1952 when the Amsai was separated from the Khasi-Jaintia Hills district and brought under the Karbi Anglong district, the Tiwa of this village used to visit Nartiang every year and offer one *odal* rope and some flat rice to the Jaintia chief. While travelling they used to spend one night at a place called Patta Laloo or the place where the Laloo (Tiwa) used to take rest. This story suggests that both the Tiwa and the Jaintia had the tradition of megalithic culture and technical knowledge of erecting megaliths. □□

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‘NAA-MIN’ Name Giving ceremony of Nocte

► Dr. Watsen Bangsia Yekar

In the life cycle of any human being, birth and death are two events which are the ultimate truth of life which make the cycle of living complete. Every individual who takes birth has to leave this earth one day. He and his name will be remembered only in the memories and deeds. Thus the name of every individual is vital and hence the naming ceremony is another very significant event in any person's life.

Marriage brings the expectations of bearing children. Married woman is anticipated to give birth to a child. Pregnancy is a happy period for any woman and her health is matter of care. As soon as women confirm her pregnancy, she approaches ‘ASHA’ worker who is the medical helper in any village. She arranges every possible care to the mother and her child. She reports regularly to the doctor and plans monthly visits to give mother all possible medical care and medicines like T.T vaccination, Vitamins, regular checkups and assistance during child birth. Throughout the pregnancy, the health or expected mother is taken care by ASHA and Doctor along with her family. They are alert about the wellbeing of the mother and child. Some restrictions are followed by the pregnant lady for the interests of the unborn child. She is expected to prohibit alcohol and other intoxicating food which may bring harm to the child in womb.

The expecting mother is confront from visiting the places of contagiously ill, unnatural death, accident prone areas, forest or other bad places to safeguard the child. She is refrained from going out of the premises of the house after sunset to prevent any misfortune. Along with expecting mother, the father too is expected to follow some rules. Father should avoid doing certain inauspicious things like digging a hole, killing of animals, cutting of trees, tying of

ropes etc. The dos and don'ts are followed after the birth of child for few months.

Prior to the due date, family starts preparation to welcome the new born. Collection of fire wood, drying to paddy to remove husk, preparing medicine from the rice beer, arranging livestock for the feast etc. are some of preparations the expected parents and the family does. Only the female folks are allowed during the child birth. When the child is born, the family has to follow some dos and don'ts. As soon as the child is born the placenta of the baby is cut and wrapped in Nyaplin leaf. It is then tied to a tree at the back of the house. The tree on which placenta is tied is kept sacred. It is neither cut down nor the fruits of the tree eaten. Mother is fed with boiled rice called ‘chamti’ to gained strength. As soon as the child is born, a flowery plant called ‘tampang’ or khato is tied on a support to signify the child birth. Tampang plant is used for sons and khato plant for daughters. Seeing the leaves people know the gender of the Child born in the family. After cutting the placenta the child is cleaned and laid down on a mat called ‘ham’ near the fire place. Fire is considered as powerful energy to drive all the bad spirits.

On the very next day, one person from the household goes to collect a leaf called ‘lungnyen’ for a ritual called ‘Naa-Dat’. During the time of Naa-Dat no one is allowed to enter the house except the family members. In this ritual the leaf of the plant is rubbed all over the body of the child especially the legs and hands by every member of the family after meal. It is believed that by doing so the child grows healthy without any disease especially the skin diseases. The Lungnyen plant is used in this ritual as the leaves of the plant is lubricious, healthy and juicy. This process of rubbing leaves is repeated on three

consecutive meals like dinner, breakfast and lunch. During Naa-Dat ritual the family follows some restriction like avoiding washing of hair and cloth as it is believed that squeezing of cloths or drying of wet hair may have an ill effect on the secretion of mother's milk. After the completion of Naa-Dat the family can wash the cloths or hair. On the third day, the child is taken down to the courtyard for the first time. A member from the family follows according to the name joted by a man called 'Taan-Wa', an expert priest who studies the position of banana leaves and select the person. This is known as 'Na-Jabah'. On that same day, the child's ear is pierced and the ritual is called 'Naa-Nathot'. Porcupine thorn is used to pierce a hole in the ear of a new born and ginger is used along as antiseptic to prevent infection. On this day a necklace made of white beads is tied on the neck of the new born as white colour brings soothing effect and keeps away the bad things. After three to four days, the family members get busy for the preparation of 'Naa-Min', the name giving ceremony of the child. To start with family starts looking for livestock like buffalo or Pig and Cock which is very essential for the ceremony. Some of the maternal aunts of the new born are invited to grind the milled for beer and it is prepared by ladies of the clan. The preparation of the millet beer known as 'Kham' should be done before or after a new moon day as new moon day is considered inauspicious by Noctes. Prior to the ceremony on some day few paternal aunts of the child are invited to grind the paddy needed for the feast. The rice beer is prepared couple of weeks in advance of the name giving ceremony so that the kham(rice-beer) bears the beer juice called 'Jumin" which is very essential for 'Rang Tam", offering prayers to God. Two days prior to 'Naa-Min' the nephews of the clan are called to collect the Nyaplin dak, wild banana leaves, which is the most essential things for the ceremony. By using this leaves the name of the child is decided by Taan-Wa. The nephews who were assigned the task of collecting the leaves will decide amongst themselves about whom to collect the Nyaplin Dak, wild banana

leaves. Along with the nyaplin dak healthy nyaplin leaf is also selected which will be used for purifying the wild banana leaves during the ritual. After plucking the nyaplin dak the whole plant is destroyed so that no new leaves can grow on that plant. The plant is destroyed as the Noctes believe that if the new leaves bloom from the same plant then it will bring inauspicious incidents in child's life for whom they are plucked. The care is taken that the plant from where leaves are plucked is not grown in Marshy or water logged area or filthy areas as people consider that it will have a negative impact on the health of the child. Besides this, other nephews of the family go to collect vegetables for the special day. They bring them on the day of ceremony. The family has to arrange buffalo or Pig and cock for the day of ceremony alongside with other necessary items. It depends on the wellbeing and the status of the family whether they arrange the pig or buffalo but a cock is obligatory. If the family is poor, only cock is arranged along with the rice and rice beer. Just before the feast, family members personally invite the people from neighbourhood. On the day of Naa-Min the old ladies and old men are invited separately for special task. They are called Romnyu and Romwa. Along with them two 'Taan-Wa' are invited who play very important role. The child gets the name through them. Two Taan-Wa see the position of Nyapkhak dak and decide a suitable name among the names suggested by family members. While suggesting the name it is mandatory that no other person with the same name is alive in the particular village. If two person bear same name is given locality then they both will have hard lives. The two Taan Wa are very important and hence for preparing their meals paternal aunts are invited to cook. It is called Taan-Wa- Champuan . A day before Naa-Min the oldest amongst the paternal aunts is called to perform the ritual called Naa-Taaphum. In this ritual the Nyaplin Dak will be used. At the time of performing Taan-Phum no outsider is allowed in the house. The leaves which are used during Taan-Phum are not supposed to be thrown away immediately.

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Studies on Folklore in Northeast India As an Academic Discipline : The Beginning

► Dr. Sunil Kumar Dutta

Folklore, Folk Culture, Traditional Culture, Ancient Customs and Traditions - all these terms are generally used synonymously. The word folklore denotes multiple meanings. The oral literatures such as songs, ballads, tales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, blessings, curses, wishes, chants etc., traditional ceremonies, festivals, rituals, customs, beliefs, traditional tools for cultivation, fishing, hunting, weaving, traditional musical and other instruments, traditional house patterns, granaries, religious practices, superstitions, music, dances, dramas, puppetry, and even the language, religion and many more such things which have been in practice since time immemorial (that is why-traditional) and to be found in oral form are covered by the term 'folklore'. Again the term 'folklore' indicates the *study* on those aforesaid items. This single term 'folklore' was first coined by a British antiquarian, namely, William John Thoms in 1846. Earlier tautological descriptive terms were used to mean these items. So, the term 'folklore' is of recent origin but the items indicated by the term are all originated in remote past but to be found in recent time. All the communities of the world do have their folklore. A community is in fact distinguished by its folklore. It is their identity and tool of assertion. Again folklore is a medium of education and knowledge besides being things of amusement and socialization. They teach the practitioners ethics and morality, formulates the world view and ethos in them. Their presence makes life colourful, vibrant and meaningful. Social inclusion is made possible by accepting these items. Folklore is called as 'living fossil'; they are not static or rigid but dynamic. They change with the passage of time but the changes are not rapid or intentional but natural and slow. Naturally some of the old items of folklore become

obsolete or 'die' due to lack of practice and some others are born anew.

It was in eighteenth - nineteenth centuries that scholars of the world became aware about the nature and importance of folklore. They noticed that many items were going into oblivion for ever silently and as because they were not in recorded mode, retrieval was not possible. Therefore, to document them, extensive works of collection and preservation in written form had been undertaken. The fruits of such endeavours were, to mention a few, the collections of tales such as Sanskrit *Panchantra*, *Hitopadesh*, *Kathasaritsagar*, Grimm Brothers' *German Fairy Tales* (1812) etc. In our part of India, G.H.Damant published two Manipuri tales in *Indian Antiquary* in 1875 and 1877 and this was the example of earliest work of collection of folk tales in Northeast India. C.A.Soppitt's *A Historical and Descriptive Account of the Kachari Tribes of North Cachar Hills with specimens of Tales and Folklore* published in 1885 was another example of collection of folktales. J.D.Anderson's *Kachari Folktales and Rhymes* (1895) was a significant example of such collection of tales. P.R.T.Gurdon's *Assamese Proverbs* compiled and published in 1896, was a noteworthy work in this field. These were all examples of works in English. In Assamese language, *Ramcharit* (1899), *Phulkonwar* (1903), *Manikonwar* (1903) were examples of earliest collections of proverbs and ballads respectively. *Asamiya Patantarmala* (1900)-a collection of proverbs, by Gopal Chandra Das, Laxminath Bezbaroa's *Burhi Air Sadhu* (1912), and *Kakadeuta aru Natilora* (1912) both collection of tales, Jogeshchandra Tamuli's collection of folksongs *Nichukani* (1916) were some works on folklore of Assam in the early twentieth century. Hemchandra

Barua's *Marriage Customs of the Peoples of Assam* (1892) and Benudhar Rajkhowa's *Assamese Demonology* (1905) and *Assamese Popular Superstitions* (1920) were three publications on folklore in English. These works can be cited as examples of folklore studies because collection and publication of folklore material too are considered as activities of folklore study. There is no doubt that these are the works of self-trained people who were driven by patriotic zeal into this field. We do not find any theoretical essays on folklore written by native writers of the time. But fortunately, Laxminath Bezbaroa's *Burhi Air Sadhu* (BIS) provides us a full essay on folklore in the form of Introduction appended in the book. In that essay he discussed about the nature of folklore, its importance and functions in short. He felt the necessity of documentation of the folkloric material particularly the tales. He introduced the word Folklore, perhaps for the first time, to the Assamese readers in that essay. From the Introduction of BIS we understand that Laxminath Bezbaroa kept himself informed with the latest development of folklore studies. Following his example, many enthusiasts took up the work of collecting and publishing folk tales, folk songs, proverbs, riddles etc in Assamese subsequently.

But, folklore study in academic level started in Assam in 1955 at Gauhati University when under the aegis of Dr Birinchi Kumar Baruah (1908-1964) a project, namely, *Folklore Archive* attached to the Department of Anthropology was started. The activities started under this project were - collection and publication of folklore material particularly the songs of various tribal and other communities of Assam. We know that to start with- three dedicated and sincere young men, namely, Syed Abdul Malik, Tarun Chandra Pamegam and Bhaben Narzi were engaged for collection of traditional songs of their respective communities to which they belonged. The fruits of their hard works and sincere efforts - Syed Abdul Malik's *Jikir aru Jari Geet* and Bhaben Narzi's *Boro Kacharir Samaj aru Samskriti* - are still considered to be pioneering works. The activities of

this project were looked after by Dr B.K. Baruah himself who was then a Reader in the Department of Assamese until his death in March, 1964. Although a humble beginning, it was perhaps the first endeavour of folklore study in academic level not only in Assam and Northeast India but also in our country. Another noteworthy matter is- in 1963 Dr B.K. Baruah was invited as a visiting Professor to the Folklore Institute, Indiana University, Bloomington U.S.A. for the winter semester to deliver lectures on "Folklore of India". The invitation was at the initiative of none other than the famous folklorist Dr Richard M. Dorson. The students who attended his classes there at Indiana University were drawn from China, Japan, Thailand, Africa, Egypt, Turkey, Israel, U.A.R etc. Even Dr Richard M. Dorson himself attended Dr Baruah's classes. During his sojourn Dr Baruah travelled several European countries where Folklore was studied at University level to know more about the discipline which was till then quite new in India. On his way back to Assam from USA, Dr Baruah visited Honolulu, Tokyo, Hongkong and Bangkok. During that period he established contacts with renowned folklorists of different countries that helped him to enrich his mind. Dr Baruah was inducted into the Executive Board of the Society for Asian Folklore. The Society had an ambitious project of preparing a multivolume book of Folktales of the World and Dr Baruah was made the editor of 'Folktales of India' volume. Dr Baruah had another ambitious project for an Encyclopedia of Indian Folklore a book for surveying the folk traditions of India. But due to his untimely death in March, 1964 all these plans remained unfulfilled. In the year 1955, Prafulladatta Goswami (1919-1994) was awarded the D. Phil. Degree by the Gauhati University and he was the first scholar to have been conferred the D.Phil degree for the first time in Arts faculty by the University. Most interestingly, the thesis was prepared on a subject of folklore, i.e., Ballads and Folktales, two major items of folk literature.

After Dr B.K.Baruah's demise, Prof Prafulladatta Goswami took over and carried forward the mission set by Dr Baruah. It was again a matter of happiness that like Dr Baruah, Dr Prafulladatta Goswami too was invited to the Folklore Institute, Indiana University, Bloomington U.S.A. as a visiting fellow for two years (1966-68). It was indeed a great thing that two scholars from this remote corner of India had been invited to one of the famous universities of U.S.A. Folklore Institute was started in 1920s in Indiana University, U.S.A. In 1962 the Folklore Institute became an academic department within Indiana University's College of Arts and Sciences. The names of renowned folklorists like Stith Thompson, Richard M Dorson were associated with this department and two international journals, namely, *Journal of Folklore Research* and *Folklore Forum* had been published from this department. Although two folklore scholars had been invited from Assam as visiting professors by the Indiana University, in Assam till then there was not a full-fledged department of folklore in its only university, Gauhati University. Another important point is to be mentioned here. On the death of Dr Birinchikumar Baruah, the famous folklorist Dr Richard M. Dorson paid rich tribute in an obituary note published in the departmental journal. The note is a proof that the international community of folklorists of that time acknowledged Dr Baruah's folkloric scholarship. No doubt, he enjoyed high esteem from his peers. The obituary note written by Dr Dorson was re-published in the Volume II of the Bulletin of the Department of Folklore Research, 1993-94. Again, Dr R.M.Dorson himself visited Assam and met folklore scholars of this region. His visit certainly served as moral booster to the study of folklore in this state of Assam. No doubt it was due to Dr B K Baruah and others Guwahati must have earned a name as a centre of folklore studies in the sixties of the last century itself. It is not a mean achievement. After the small but steady beginning by the name *Folklore Archive*, a full-fledged department called *Folklore Research* came into being in 1972 in Gauhati university. This was the beginning of folklore

study in academic level in a university not only in Assam but also in India. Folklore Research was perhaps the first ever department of folklore in a university in India. It was in the fitness of things that Assam a land with chequered folklore material and myriad folk communities both tribal and non tribal should have the first university department of folklore. Prof. Prafulladatta Goswami was given the charge of the new Department to nourish it as per his vision. He was in charge of the Department until 1981 when he retired from his service at Gauhati University. In fact Prof. Goswami took Folklore Studies in Assam with his manifold contributions to a respectable high position. Prof. Goswami himself was like an institution. He had to his credit eighteen books on different aspects of folklore - ten of them were in English and eight in Assamese. He wrote four books – three in English and one in Assamese – exclusively on the major festival of Assam i.e. Bihu thus exploring the different hues and significance of Bihu festival in its proper perspective. After Prafulladatta Goswami the responsibilities of the Department was soldered by Prof Birendranath Datta (1933-) and then Prof Nabin Chandra Sarma (1942-2022) respectively with the same zeal and commitment. With their individual contributions to the folklore studies, the Department was progressing in its path steadily. The Department was designed basically to be a research oriented Department and all these years the Department has been living up-to its expectation producing a good number of Doctoral scholars. From time to time, it organizes national and international seminars, workshops and conferences taking the lead role in disseminating the folkloric knowledge in this region. In 1997, the then Department of Traditional Culture and Art Forms (TCAF) of Tezpur University and the Department of Folklore Research jointly organized an International Workshop on Folkloristics where international scholars, namely, Prof Stuart Blackburn from SOAS(The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London), Prof Kirin Narayan (Professor in the College of Asia and the Pacific, at the Australian National university) and Dr Jawaharlal

Handoo (Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore) attended as resource persons. Several invited research scholars and students of folklore studies from Assam, Odisha, Meghalaya and Manipur attended the twenty one day long workshop and fully exploited the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the latest developments in folklore studies from the international scholars. It is indeed a matter of pleasure that this Department has of late established academic exchange program with the University of Tartu, Estonia. This Dept. could fulfil the need of the Ph D aspirants not only of Assam but of the adjoining states of Manipur, Meghalaya, and Mizoram etc. Of late all these North Eastern states have established their own centres of folklore studies in their respective state Universities thus helped in proliferation of folklore studies in the entire Northeast India. But the credit for introducing the folklore studies in this region will remain with the Department of Folklore Research of Gauhati University. It is a matter of happiness that in Assam alone now there have been several Departments and centres of folklore studies. Tezpur University takes the lead by offering post graduate programme in Cultural Studies where folkloristics covers a major part in the syllabus. Though courses on folklore of

Assam are offered in the graduate and post graduate syllabi in Assamese, no University of the state offers a post graduate programme exclusively in folklore studies yet. Elsewhere in India, many a universities of Meghalaya, Manipur, West Bengal, Karnataka and Kerala - folklore programme in M.A. Level has been running successfully. Here in Assam, there is definitely the need of Post Graduate programmes in Folklore as well as introducing the subject in undergraduate programmes in the universities and colleges of the state. In several European, American and Asian universities folklore is being taught as a subject for last hundred years or so. Unlike those European and American societies, here in India folklore or traditional culture is still a dominant and living practice in the lives of the people. Folklore is our identity, it is indispensable in our day to day life and it shapes our psyche and world view and is a great tool for socialization. It is a lamentable matter that such an important subject is missing in our college and university level syllabi in India. It is now high time to give a serious thought about this matter. ☐☐

(The author of the article is retired professor from Tezpur University. He can be reached at drsunkumardutta@gmail.com)

‘NAA-MIN’ Name Giving...

(Contd. from Page 15) They are kept inside the house till the reconstruction of the house. At night the eldest paternal aunt will purify a wild banana leaf which is used to indicate the name of the child called Naa-Min Taan Phum. The purification is done with the rice beer juice called Jumin. Maternal aunt prays to her great grandparents to bless the child.

“ Rang o kathak rang

Evi Ete he,

Enyong Eva he

Ajet orian, hungchit minyan, hungphen-rakphen,

Khopo tongte

Aare tanko minsen senpe chap kaat thuk ro”

Meaning Goes as- “ O God like great grandparents, parents and the spirit of the house, send the best of soul; with intelligences, bravery, considerate, hard

working, and soft heart to love and help others, to uphold the sanctity of the clan, the one with long life, fortune and perfect soul.”

Taan Wa comes early in the morning as morning hour is considered pure and blissful. It is believed that during this hour the ritual of selecting the name for the child can be performed without any obstacle. On arrival of Taan-Wa the paternal aunt give Nyapkham-dak to him to decide appropriate name for the new born. The Taan-wa will be offered Jumin for Rangtam. Rangtam is praying to almighty to bless the child. After Rangtaam, Taan-Wa will tear the leaves in a proper way, then tie them again and later spread out the knotted leaves. He decodes the process to reach an appropriate name. This is how the ritual of naming the infant is performed.

(To Be Continued)

Bell-Metal Industry of Sarthebari and its challenges

► Aditi Bhattacharjee

The cottage industries have always played an important role in the Indian economy – it has helped not just in increasing exports but also providing employment to a huge rural population.

The contribution of the indigenous bell metal industry of Sarthebari (Assam) as a cottage industry is significant, generating annual revenue of approximately ¹ 3.79 Crore during the pre-pandemic years and supporting 2400 craftsmen who produce 5 tonnes of artifacts a day.

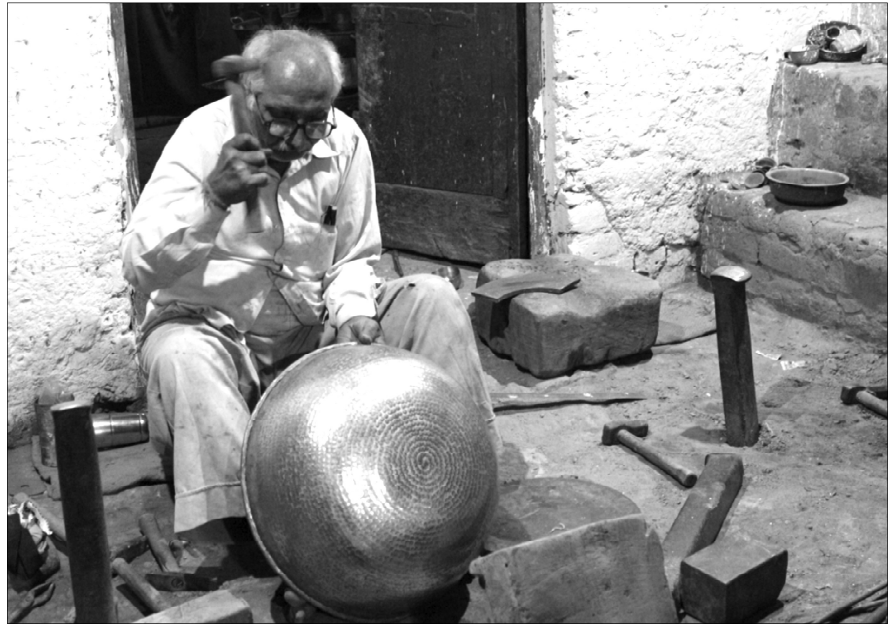
The bell metal industry of Assam is the 2nd largest cottage industry in the state. The artifacts are made from an alloy of copper and tin, and they possess both utilitarian and aesthetic value.

Products include *xorai*, *bhoghora*, *dugdugi*, *pikdani*, *bankahi*, *banbati*, *Buddhist taal used for prayers*, and *dofola bati* that are sold not only in India, but exported across European and Asian countries.

The significance of this industry can be equated to that of the silk industry of Sualkuchi (Assam) or the carpet weaving of Bhagohi (Varanasi), that produce unique to region-products with a high artifact value.

This article traces the unique history of the bell metal industry, how it braced the pandemic and other challenges and how best can it survive from extinction in the years to come.

The origin of bell metal industry can be traced back to 7th century. “The industry flourished during the Ahom rule, especially during the rule of



Swargadeo Siba Singha,” said Manoj Bhuyan, Secretary, Assam Cooperative Bell Metal Utensils Manufacturing Society Ltd.”

During the Ahom rule regime, the royal families decorated their palaces with bell metal décor and even ate their meals in bell metal utensils as it is considered to have medicinal properties. A cottage industry in nature, around 40% of Sarthebari residents are engaged in the bell metal industry, with most craftsmen taking up the profession from their forefathers. Like all other cottage industries, the bell metal industry is also badly hit by the pandemic. Said a local artisan, Bhaskar Tamuli, “Pandemic has taken the Sarthebari artisans behind by 20 years. This industry even at normal times has a hand-of-mouth existence. The government stopped production completely during the lockdown, and we sat idle for a year forcing us to dip into our meagre savings and many of us ran into debts. There were cases of suicide too.” There were major supply chain disruptions too

with no transport, added Bhuyan. The annual revenue diminished in 2020-21 to ¹ 28 Lakhs due to the pandemic crisis. To add on to this misery, the price of raw materials has also increased drastically due to implementation of GST. The traders have asked us to produce less as there is limited demand post the pandemic. An artisan who could make 20 kgs ware is now forced to produce only 10 kgs. Out of the 400 units, only 260 units are running at present, lamented Tamuli. The pandemic may be the last straw, but the bell metal industry was already reeling under various challenges:

- The industry is dependent on raw materials imported from Kolkata and even Bangladesh and Pakistan that are stocked in Guwahati. The market is under the control of traders and the craftsmen are forced to pay high prices.

- Being dependent on coal to run their furnaces, the rising prices of coal and its scarcity proves to be a deterrent in production.

- The use of primitive tools and techniques by the artisans consumes more time and fail to create a

- The newer generations are losing interest and take up this profession as the last option. They are disinclined to learn the intricacies of the trade.

The ancient art of bell metal craft holds recognition both at local and global level and the products are exported to countries like Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Germany, Italy, Japan, etc. However, the industry needs firm handholding in order to survive and flourish. Definite measures need to be taken to promote the craft. The government and social welfare organisations need to work towards the survival of this industry. Promotion of the artifacts through seminars, workshops and exhibitions will create awareness of this traditional craft at the national and international level.

- Solutions for alternative and affordable raw material would help the artisans to concentrate on their trade better. The craftsmen at present are forced to focus more on quantity rather than quality. This leads to compromise in designs. Imparting training on quality and design will also help in creating contemporary products to attract the new generation.



fine finish. “The COVID-induced lockdown damaged our tools. The craftsmen need new tools, but money is scarce and hence, cannot afford them, explained Tamuli. Duplication is a major challenge of this industry. Machine-made goods from places like Moradabad have inundated the market. Handicrafts are more expensive. Customers are beginning to prefer the machine-made ones due to newer designs and competitive prices.

- An important step that needs to be adopted is application of Geographical Indication (GI) tagging. It is a proven fact that GI tagging has been a saviour for many manufacturers. The GI tagged Kashmiri carpets are exported to at least 25 countries today with

carpets worth ¹ 115 Crore exported to only Germany. Said Tamuli, “We are urging the government for similar trade marking. But no step has been taken so far. I fear with rampant duplication and lack of support to artisans, the bell metal industry will perish.” □□

(This article is previously published on online platform of Tata Nexarc.)

India's future hinges on high-quality education : Assam Governor

Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi has said the country's future would be determined by the ability to provide high-quality educational opportunities to youths over the next decade. "India is going to have the highest population of young people in the world over the next decade. In this context, our ability to provide high-quality educational opportunities to them will determine the future of our country," Mukhi said while attending a book release function on 'National Education Policy (NEP) 2020: The Road Ahead (With Special Focus on North East India)' at National Law University and Judicial Academy (NLUJA) campus. Speaking at the book release function, he said, "We all know that education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society. Universal high-quality education is the best way forward for developing and maximising our country's rich talent and resources for the good of the individual, society and country." Mukhi said that the NEP 2020 was a futuristic manifesto that could bolster the growth and progress of the nation. "The policy lays forth a comprehensive scheme towards re-engineering of the Indian educational system, from the pre-primary to higher education," he said. "However, the implementation and

adaptation of the policy require earnest pursuit from all stakeholders. Higher educational institutes ought to build their strategy to ascertain the implementation of the NEP, in letter and spirit," he added. The Governor further said NEP was the first education policy of the 21st century that aimed at re-engineering the educational ecosystem of the country. "NEP 2020 is a step towards realising the fourth goal of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030," he said. Lauding the efforts of NLUJA, the Governor said that the book 'National Education Policy, 2020: The Road Ahead (With Special Focus on North East India)' is a commendable initiative by the academy. The book focuses on the Northeast region and is expected to deliberate on implementation mechanics suited to the regional dynamics. Another promising aspect of the book is that it has endeavored to gather interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary perspectives to help understand different issues of the Northeast and give their solutions to stimulate the growth and development of the region. □

Arunachal to get Northeast India's first fish museum

A fish museum, the first-of-its-kind in the Northeast, would soon be built in Arunachal Pradesh, Fisheries Minister Tage Taki said. The museum would be a part of the Integrated Aqua Park (IAP), sanctioned by the Union Ministry of Fisheries. The existing Tarin Fish Farm (TFF), located at high-altitude Bulla village, would be upgraded as the IAP where the museum would come up, he said. It will have all fish species of the state and serve as a training centre for fisherfolks. "Three years ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced one IAP for each state and Union territory under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampad Yojana (PMMSY) for bringing blue revolution," Taki said. "I had gone to Hyderabad-based National Fisheries Development Board twice to seek guidance of experts on the project which was originally proposed for Rs 100 crore," the minister said. An amount of Rs 43.59 crore was sanctioned for the project in the current financial year as the first installment, he said. □

Centre committed to development of eight jewels of NE : President

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday said that the central government is committed to undertake development of the North-Eastern (NE) region. She described the eight states of the region as 'Ashtratnas' (eight jewels) of India. "The Government of India has launched infrastructure projects to boost connectivity, education and agriculture sectors among others in the NE states, she said after virtually inaugurating and laying the foundation stone of a number of state and central projects in East and South Districts from here. Murmu, who is on a two-day visit to the northeastern state from Friday, said these projects will have a tremendous bearing on the economic growth and development of Sikkim, particularly the tourism sector which generates a lot of employment opportunities. She inaugurated the 1.13-kilometre-long Atal Setu connecting the Himalayan state with the rest of the country via

West Bengal. It is a key strategic infrastructure for the country, Murmu said. Lauding Sikkim's picturesque landscape, the President said that she was glad to know that the border state was doing well in education, health and power sectors, besides organic farming. She wished for further progress and prosperity of the state and its people. Murmu said that she has inaugurated and laid foundation stones for several projects in five states of this region so far. Earlier, she was received at Libing helipad by Governor Ganga Prasad, Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, besides senior civil and army officials after her arrival from Mizoram. Murmu was given a guard of honour on her maiden visit to the state. The chief minister sought the President's intervention for resolution of various outstanding demands, including reservation of assembly seats for the Limbu and Tamang tribals. □

Manipur's Liangmai community celebrates 'Chaga Ngee' in Mumbai

Liangmai community in Maharashtra celebrated the auspicious 'Chaga Ngee', a festival of blessing and sanctification at Andheri East in Mumbai. This is the first such festival celebrated in the city under the theme 'Chengriak si Apui-e' meaning 'my culture is my mother'. Chaga festival is one of the biggest festivals of the Liangmai Naga Tribe, beginning after the first full moonshine in the month of October. The festival reflects the rich culture, traditions, foods and lifestyle of the Liangmai people. It is a festival of victory, of abundance and fortune. The rituals of rekindling fire in the hearths of Liangmai homes and sanctification of the body and household and starting everything anew. It is a month-long festival after the harvest. The event was graced by Dai Remmei, Additional Central

Commissioner, Provident Fund, Ministry of Labour as chief guest and Ngonamai Lydia Keishing, Proprietor Chun Cham Fashion Saloon Mumbai as the chief host. Addressing the gathering, Dai Remmai conveyed that such a festival is essential for preserving the culture and tradition, and at the same time sensitise the general public about their history and origin about how the Makuiluangdimai brethren people share the same attires, language and most importantly the feeling of brotherhood.

Dr M Maisuangdibo, assistant professor of Union Biblical Seminary, Pune also expressed that religion in relationship with culture and tradition giving thanks to our Almighty God is very important to have a progressive life. □

Retrieved from Internet (East Mojo)

Guru Nanakdev birth anniversary- 8th Nov.

Not necessarily be Guruputra for Gurupada

□ Er. Rajesh Pathak

- 'Know the light within the man, not his caste. At the time of death when your destiny would finally be determined, nobody would ask your caste then. (*janhu jyoti, na puchhahu jaati, aage jaati na hai*).'

One to preach this was Guru Nanakdev, the Founder of Sikhism .Going ahead according to what he preached, he initiated the tradition of *sangat*[religious mass-congregation] and *pangat* [religious mass-feast]in order to eliminate the distinction made on the basis of rich and poor; and, high and low caste. Former president Pratibha Patil was once invited in the ceremony organised on occasion of Maharana Pratap Jyanti in the premise of Udaipur Municipal Corporation on 17th June, 2007. Addressing the crowd she said-'The practice of putting on the veil came into being to protect the women folk from the Mughal invaders'. What initiated to deal with the exigency of the time rooted as a so-called indelible injunction of some 'sacred' scripture with the time. But this inequity could not escape from the divine vision of Nanakdev , and he disapproved the *parda pratha*[practice of keeping women in the the veil) Sikh-philosophy. Guru Nanakdev held idol-worship as an aberration from the true Dharma. However, he believed in the existence of God, and esteemed 'Harinama' as a basic mantra [hymn]- Guru Grantha Sahib P-1040. He was strongly opposed to the begging, no mater whatever be the circumstances. Not only he but all the other later Sikh Gurus laid great emphasis on the significance of physical- labor, and held it on high esteem. It is because of this no Sikh is found to be a beggar. Guru Nanakdev was predominantly a singer adopting Samvedic [a branch of Veda consists of religious teaching in verse form]ways of composition. Guru-Vani is more notably based only on Samved genre, which later gained the form of holy book , Shri Guru Granth

Sahib. Shri Guru Granth Sahib begins with 'Oum' preceded by 'One', preaching that God is one.

When he entered the last phase of his life he felt the need for his successor. In quest of which he took the tests of his disciples and sons several times. Among the disciples was Lahinaji who always emerged successful in the tests. Therefore, giving precedence to him over his own eldest son Shri Chandji, he decided to consecrate him as the next Guru of Sikhism. Twenty days before his death, after having elevated him [Lahinaji] to his seat, he ritually placed 5 paisa coin and coconut before him and, after taking a round of him, lay bodily on the ground to pay salutation to him. Then, he took the rosary out of his neck and garlanded new Guru with it. Bhai Buddaji, an associate of Nanakdev, marked a *tilak*[sacred-mark] on his forehead. Lastly, fulfilling the last rite of the ceremony, Nanakji uttered to Lahinaji- "You are Angad born of my body." The ceremony so adopted for the consecration of the *Gurupad*[seat of master] was in accordance to that one followed in Hindu practice. Not only this but all the later Gurus elevated to the seat of Guru by following the same ritual of consecration.

Shri Guru Nanakdev, thus, proved that the criterion of achieving *Gurupad* is not one to be a *Guruputra*[master's son] but one to possess required ability. Unmarried and detached, Shri Chandji was free from worldly bondage, yet Nanak offered the *Gurupad* to Angadji[Lahinaji], who was married but possessed all the virtues required to be the Guru.

Note: Please refer, 'Hindu Pratibha ke Darshan': Ravi Kumar ; 'Guru Nanak Se Guru Govind Singh'- Dr. Arvind Godbole. □□