

Wednesday, June 8, 2022

Daily Current Affairs



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Important for GS-5 (Assamese Literature)

Jonaki Mel and the legacy of Geetikavi

■ Arundhati (Loni) Agarwala

Parvati Prasad Barua is aptly called the Geetikavi of Assam. Equally gifted in composing poetry, songs, music and prose, he is essentially a lyrical poet and even his songs are poetry in motion. The characteristic feature of his compositions is the use of simple everyday words, imparting to them a sweet poetical melody. In 1981 the Assam Sahitya Sabha published *Parvati Prasad Barua Rasanawali*, a compilation of his varied compositions.

The compilation includes *Mou Tukari* (first published in 1926), a collection of songs that use 'earthy' words, familiar, homely rustic words to express the poet's love for his motherland, the 'eternally beautiful divine', etc.

The compilation has *Lakhimi* (first published in 1931), a dance drama set in autumn where Nature is personified in the characters of Sarat Konwar, Kohua, Dawor and Sewali. *Luiti* (first published in 1951), a collection of 23 melodious songs set to the tune of *bongot*, celebrating the beauty of Nature and the intimate relationship between man and Nature, also forms part of the Sahitya Sabha's compilation.

The songs of *Gungunani* (first published in 1953) deal with the poet's relation with Nature, his love for his motherland, his philosophy, the sounds of the countryside and his dialogues with the unseen divine. A few songs betray the influence of Tagore.

The compilation includes the Geetikavi's second dance drama *Sonar Soleng* (first published in 1955) which, like *Lakhimi*, also has characters that find place in many of his poems, especially the Been Boragi (The Minstrel), the eternal seeker characterising the poet himself. The flock of geese, young children, an old woman and the dancers are reminiscent of Tagore's *Raja*.

Bhonga Tukarir Sur (first published in 1959) is a collection of poems that express the feelings born of personal loss: loneliness, frustration and hopelessness in the cruel hands of fate. These poems were composed after the accident in which he lost his friend and mentor, his elder brother Bhagavati Prasad, the latter's wife and son and their young sister.

Also included in the Sahitya Sabha compilation is *Sukula Dawor Oi Kohua Phul* (first published in 1963), a collection of lyrical poems, primarily odes to *sarat* or the pre-autumnal season, personified sometimes as Lakhimi Aie or the bountiful mother and sometimes as a beautiful youth called Sarat Konwar.

Khel Bhonga Khel (published in 1969) is a collection of the poet's later compositions, in the period before his death in 1964. Although Nature finds a place in this collection, it is different in that it deals with modern ideas and experiences like social consciousness, uncertainty, fear and turmoil. *Mayapee* is a collection of melodious songs that best display the lyrical poet's craft, his adeptness in

using familiar rustic words and imparting to them a musical quality.

Bhonga Kabita is a collection of 20 poems that include the poetry of Shelley, Byron and Hafiz, translated by the poet from English to Assamese, retaining the feelings of the original while at the same time bearing the



unmistakable stamp of the lyrical poet.

When Parvati Prasad passed away, his songs were known only to few people outside the circle of his family, friends and contemporaries. It was his eldest son Pranavi (Rupoh) who continued the family tradition of making music a part of life. Entrusted with the task of composing music for his father's lyrical poems and songs from an early age, he lived up to the great burden his father had left him with. He never received any training in classical music, but lived and breathed music. Every evening at Sonali Puh he used to play on the harmonium and

sing his father's songs, accompanied by his friends Ghyasuddin Ahmed and Khagen.

In 1971, under the banner of Parvati Soaroni Samstha, Pranavi produced the first record of the Geetikavi's songs. He roped in his mentor Bhupen Hazarika to lend his voice to the now famous song 'Pujan Aha'. A young Malabika Bora (Baruah) sang 'Saradhi Sandhiyar Jonaki Mel' while Pranavi himself sang 'Nobolo Tok Sonar Asam'. His friend Ghyas sang in chorus along with them in 'Ahiye Aji Nabajbonor Dhal'.

But, except for Bhupen Hazarika, Pranavi and his friends were yet to make a name for themselves, and this first production was not a commercial success. Pranavi realised that to popularise his father's legacy a popular singer was needed, a voice the people of Assam were familiar with. The obvious choice was Bhupen Hazarika. In 1982 the first long-playing record of eight of the poet's compositions was released by EMI with the active financial backing of the poet's cousin brother, tea planter Hemendra Prasad Baruah. Hazarika's golden voice ensured the immense popularity of this record titled *Parvati Prasad Barua Geet Aru Kabita*. The songs in this album were 'Aji Phagunar Pua Belate', 'Aahin Mahiya Sewali Sorile', 'Heyro Boliya Nayan Bhari Bhari Sa', 'Maaj Nisha Mor Endhar Aghor', 'Been Boragi' (a recitation), 'Kihor Ragid Jola Kola Hol', 'Bojale Aahine Banhi Ne Been' and 'Jai Brata Sankalpa Bhagi'.

In 1984 the third record 'Tomar



iti' was released. In 1985, 15 new songs. Soon the songs of the Geetikavi were on everyone's lips. He had at long last received his due recognition in the cultural life of Assam. In 1971 the Sahitya Sabha published a volume of his collected works called *Parvati Prasad Barua Rasanawali*. This book familiarised the academic world with the poet's works. His poem 'Tor Nai Je Bondhwa Bat' was included in the syllabus of the Assamese literature paper of SEBA's HSLC Examination. *Sukula Dawor Oi Kohua Phul*, a collection of poems was included in the Master's degree syllabus of the Gauhati University.

The Jonaki Mel is also a unique constituent of the poet's legacy. In 1929, while at Sarusarai TE situated near Jorhat in upper Assam, Parvati Prasad held the first Jonaki Mel (a moonlight musical soiree) at the tea garden bungalow. It was a gathering of like-minded souls which he called *saradi sandhiyar jonaki mel*. Its first and foremost rule was that there were no rules. Whoever came to the Jonaki Mel could come on to the stage and perform. These moonlight soirees were later held at his home in Sonari Sonali Puh, at Shillong and Guwahati, and found a place in the annals of Assam's cultural history.

(This article, commemorating the Geetikavi's 50th death anniversary, has been excerpted from Dr Paromita Das's book *Geetikavi*, The Poetry of Parvati Prasad Barua.)

Parvati Prasad, at the age of ten, for the first time, played the part of 'Joymoti', in a play staged by the local theater group. In 1921, he started a hand written monthly magazine called 'Thupitora'. At the same time he, along with his elder brother and friends, founded a literary organization called 'Bimalalaya' that held literary discussions regularly. Later the group started another hand written magazine called 'Ghar Jeuti'

He composed two dance dramas, 'Lakhimi' and 'Sonar Soleng'.

Parvati Prasad wrote two book of poems in his lifetime called 'Bhonga Tukarir Sur' and 'Khel Bhonga Khel'. 'The Assam Sahitya Sabha' later compiled all his work in a book called Parvati Prasad Barua Rasanawali. It includes two of his previously unpublished books called 'Mayapi' and 'Mou Tukari'. During his lifetime, Parvati Prasad published three books of his songs. They are 'Gungunani', 'Luiti' and 'Sukula Dawor Oi Kohua Phul'.

Parvati Prasad was the first person to introduce the famous 'Jonaki Mel'; which was a gathering of like-minded people where one could come on to the stage with an entertainment item like a song, a dance item, a poem, a joke or a talk. Today, in Assam, the jonaki mel epitomizes Parvati Prasad's creative spirit.

Amid global outrage, BJP acts against leaders for hate remarks

The party suspends Nupur Sharma, Naveen Kumar for communal comments

NISTULA HEBBAR
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NEW DELHI

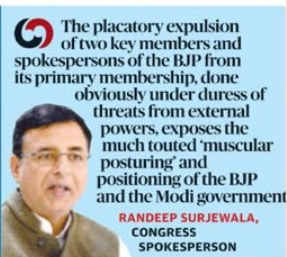
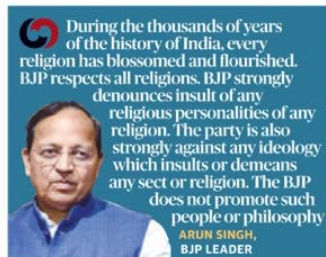
The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday suspended its spokesperson Nupur Sharma and the media cell head of its Delhi unit, Naveen Kumar, from the primary membership of the party following objectionable and communal statements made by them on Prophet Muhammad and Islam.

The disciplinary action comes amid a diplomatic outrage, especially in West Asian nations. Qatar's foreign office summoned Indian envoy Deepak Mittal, while Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu is on an official visit there. Social media was flooded with protests, with a call to boycott Indian products in the Gulf countries.

On Friday, violence broke out in Kanpur over the remarks made by the BJP leaders.

An official statement by the External Affairs Ministry said that Mr. Mittal "conveyed [to Qatari authorities] that the tweets do not, in any manner, reflect the views of the Government of India. These are the views of fringe elements... strong action has already been taken against them."

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West Asian nations demand public apology from India



SUHASINI HAIDAR
KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

The government on Sunday faced a growing diplomatic storm over comments made by two suspended BJP leaders, as countries in the Gulf region summoned Ambassadors and conveyed their concern about growing "extremism and hatred" the comments signified.

Qatar and Kuwait summoned India's Ambassadors in Doha and Kuwait City, respectively, and demanded a "public apology" from New Delhi for the comments that were considered "Islamophobic," as did Iran. A num-

ber of other Arab nations are understood to have informally conveyed their concerns over the comments to India. The controversy erupted even as Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu began his visit to Doha, part of a three-nation tour. The Iranian protest came three days before the Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian is due to make his first visit to Delhi.

Meanwhile, the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation also issued a "strong condemnation" of what it called "abuses by an official of the ruling party of India (BJP)" linking the

comments to previous decisions to ban the hijab at educational institutions in certain Indian States, violence against minorities, and demolitions of their property.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called the comments "hurtful", and accused the Modi government of "trampling [on] religious freedoms and persecuting Muslims".

The Indian Embassy in Doha and Kuwait subsequently issued statements clarifying that the comments "did not reflect the views of the Government of India".

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What is Hate Speech?

- There is **no international legal definition** of hate speech, and the characterization of what is 'hateful' is controversial and disputed.
- The term hate speech is understood as any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or **uses pejorative or discriminatory language** with reference to a person or a group based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.

T.K. Viswanathan Committee:

- It submitted a report recommending **stricter laws to curb online hate speech** and use of cyberspace to spread hatred and incitement.

Bezbaruah committee: "

- It was constituted by the Centre in 2014 in the wake of a series of **racial attacks** on persons belonging to the northeast.

Provisions regarding Hate Speech

- Section 153A IPC penalises 'promotion of enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony'.
- Section 153B IPC penalises 'imputations, assertions prejudicial to national-integration'.
- Section 295A IPC penalises 'deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs'.
- Section 298 IPC penalises 'uttering, words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person'.
- Section 505 IPC penalises publication or circulation of any statement, rumour or report causing public mischief and enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes.
- Part VII of the Representation of People Act, 1951 classifies hate speech as an offence committed during elections into two categories: corrupt practices and electoral offences. The relevant provisions regarding hate speech in the RPA are Sections 8, 8A, 123(3), 123(3A) and 125.
- In the realm of the hate speech debate, the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) assumes significance as Item 1 (General Conduct) of the MCC prohibits parties and candidates from making any appeals to caste or communal feelings for securing votes.

Daily MCQ for APSC CCE

Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is an initiative of which of the following countries?

- A. India
- B. USA
- C. Japan
- D. China

Correct Answer is B. USA:

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is an independent U.S. foreign assistance agency that is helping lead the fight against global poverty. As of September 2017, MCC has formed partnership in 46 countries around the world including Nepal. Nepal is the only country in South Asia that MCC provided fund.

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