



SHEELA BARTHAKUR

An Epitome of Versatility

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From literary pursuits to singing and dancing, from active involvement in political matters to disseminating knowledge and skill, Dr. Sheela Borthakur has proved her worth not only in diverse field of activities, but also in being the beacon light for the underprivileged section living at the margin of the society

Padmashree awardee Dr. Sheela Borthakur is a woman of versatile qualities. She is not only a writer of repute, she is also a dancer, singer and above all a dedicated educationist devoted to the uplift of female education in Assam.

Dr. Sheela Barthakur was born in Jorhat on 30th March, 1934. She completed her post graduation in Philosophy and then joined Darrang College. She obtained her PhD degree in the year 1993 while she was the Head of the department. The topic of her doctoral thesis was “Social Change in Assam since independence : Role of women with special reference to Sonitpur District”. She retired as the Head of the department in 1994.

In 1979 she founded Tezpur Girls' College and served as the founder Principal of the college for many years before returning to Darrang College. Later the college was renamed as Gopinath Bordoloi Girls' College.

Dr Barthakur was one of the founders of Lekhika Samaroh Samiti in the year 1974 which has been giving a platform to the Assamese female writers and has been contributing to the growth of women writing in Assam. The organization has now spread across the state and now it has about 350 branches including a few branches outside Assam called "Integration Centres". This literary organization has been playing a pivotal role in bringing to light the hidden sparks of creativity in women living in the nook and corner of the state.

One of the important contributions of Dr Barthakur was her book *Lekhikar Jivani*. This was published in two volumes. In this book she compiled the biographies of women writers of Assam between 1600 AD and 2000 AD ensuring that the women writers of Assam who contributed to the literary arena of Assam are not forgotten with the passage of time. Dr Barthakur wrote many books. Some of them are *Ananya*, *Antara*, *Drishti aru Drishtanta*, *Sanskritir Sandhanat*, *Lekhakar Shristit Nari*, *Era Botola*, *Sarashwat and Atlanta*. Some of the books edited by Dr. Barthakur are *Lekhikar Jivani* (1st and 2nd part), *Nalinibala Devir Rachana Sambhar*, *Dharmeswari Devi Baruani Rasana Sambhar*, *Mahashweta*, *Lekhikar Grantha Panji*, *Drishdyoti*, *Ruptirtha*, *Argha* etc. Dr Barthakur was awarded "Basanti Devi Bordoloi Literary Award" by Axom Sahitya Sabha in 2005 for her anthology *Sanskritir Sandhanat*.

Dr Barthakur was an acclaimed singer for All India Radio, Guwahati between 1949 and 1955 in Assamese modern and devotional songs. She was a recipient of a competitive scholarship of the State Govt. to study Rabindra Sangeet in Santiniketan, West Bengal in 1956 and also obtained the B.Music from Bhatkhande Sangeet Mahabidyapith, Lucknow in Sitar recital in 1961. In 1999, she recorded a musical album, a collection of 8 songs, by the name of "Phagune Ulati Sai".

She promoted a vocational institute named "Mahila Silpanushthan" in Tezpur in the year 1972 for providing vocational training to the women.

Dr Barthakur was not only a versatile singer, but also an actor and a dancer. She performed in many places including Jorhat, Barpeta etc. during her academic years. She was a regular artist at Jorhat Sahitya Sabha and Bani Sanmilan. She participated in Guwahati Sanmilan and secured prizes in songs categories like Borgeet, Bongeeet, Lokageet, Modern Songs etc. She conducted classes at Jyoti Kala Kendra, Tezpur and at Balya Bhawan, Jorhat for many years.

Dr Barthakur was also involved in politics. She was an active Congress volunteer during her academic life. She was the convenor of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee in 1971. During this period she was instrumental in the development of Mahila Congress in Sonitpur.

Besides being active in social, political, cultural and literary spheres, Dr Barthakur is a good weaver and proficient housekeeper as well.

Dr Barthakur has received many accolades for her contribution to the uplift of the womenfolk of the state. She was given the title “Karmaprana” in the year 2004 by a women conference in Jorhat and another title “Tejashwini” by the women of Tezpur.

In the year 2008 Dr Barthakur was conferred ‘Padmashree’ award by the Govt. of India in recognition of her contribution to various fields of the society. □□