



PRATIMA BARUA PANDEY

Fostering the Folk Tradition

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Who says that folk tradition has lost its earlier sheen in the techno savvy modern world? Pratima Barua Pandey's resonant voice rendering the Goalparia Lokageet in her impassioned and unique style would definitely take one back to the good old days with all its glow and glamour, passion and purity.

Folk singer par excellence, known all over the country, indeed the world for her rustic ballads is Pratima Pandey. Born with royal lineage on the Mahalaya Day on October 3, 1935 in Kolkata, Pratima went on to become one of the best loved singers in the country. She came from the royal family of Gauripur in Assam's Dhubri district, her father being Prakitesh Chandra Barua (Lalji).

Her early schooling was done in Kolkata's Gokhale Memorial School but later on she came to Assam and continued her studies at the Girls' High School, Gauripur. The quiet and scenic Gauripur with the serene Gadadhar river flowing alongside captivated her. Flitting between the bustling Kolkata with all its din and the

tranquil small town Gauripur, she absorbed the sights and sounds and serenity of both the places. When she was in school, she learnt Rabindrasangeet but never underwent any formal training as such. Her father was her constant source of encouragement and support, who saw nothing strange that a royal chose to sing the songs of the boatmen.

The turning point in her life came when Dr Bhupen Hazarika visited Gauripur in 1955. He attended a jalsa and heard the young Pratima sing. Though shy, her lokageet in Goalparia dialect sung in her husky voice impressed Dr Hazarika. The sounds of the dhol, ditora, dhuluki and bansi seemed to reverberate in the air in complete harmony with her geet. The great balladeer himself, Dr Hazarika went on to predict that her voice would be the one to take this form of lokageet to great heights. He was proved true. In fact, he became a friend, philosopher and guide in helping her to fight the battle to launch Goalparia Lokageet at par with mainstream Assamese sangeet.

She received due recognition for her efforts in popularizing this genre of music when she went on to win the Padmashree Award and Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for her pioneering efforts in this field. Well known film maker Prabin Hazarika went on to make a film on her called 'Hastir Kanya' which won National award for the best biographical film in 1997 and created waves at the South Asia Film Festival in 1998.

She was married to Gauri Shankar Pandey, a retired Principal of Gauripur P.B.College. People in Gauripur still shed silent tears when they remember her immortal song...

*'O mor hai hastir kanyare
Khaniko doya nai mahutok lagiya
Hastir kanya, hastir kanya, bamuner nari
Mathai niya tam kalsi o
Omi hate sonar jhari omi o
O mor hai hastir kanyare' □□*