

Book Reviews

Sankar Sen Gupta: *A Survey of Folklore Study in Bengal*.
Indian Publications, Calcutta, India, 1967, pp. 149, Rs.
20.00.

The purpose of this book was to assist the students of folklore, social and cultural anthropology, literature, history and other related subjects. It suggests certain trends and views of research and provides a mass of material ready at hand, contributions of folklorists, anthropologists, etc.

This book provides a brief outline of folklorology and folklorists of Bengal. Almost all of the knowledgeable accounts, persons and organizations were mentioned. Certain activities, movements, value conflicts, and a socio-cultural matrix of Bengal within the framework of oral traditional culture and literature has been pointed out. Faults arising from unscientific, unacademic, unrealistic attitudes and views were pointed out. The book also deals with divisiveness, with conflicts within organizations and disciplines of study. But, it should be pointed out that this is only a preliminary survey report where some essential information is recorded and some minor inconsistencies may also be noticed.

Bengal is one of the most important states of India. Before 1947, Bengal was divided. Bengal was the whole of Eastern India that stretched from the Chota Nagpur plateau of the present Bihar on the West to the river Karatoya on the East and the Himalayas on the North to the Southern waters beyond the Sundarbans on the South.

In 1947, Bengal was divided again into West Bengal and East Pakistan.

In the introduction the author gives some background geographical information on Bengal and the caste system.

In the second chapter, the author gives definitions and types of folklore and folkloristics. Folklore is the accumulated knowledge of homogeneous people, tied together not only by common physical bonds, but also by emotional ones, giving unity and individual distinction. Folklorology came into style in Bengal not in response to meet academic research or needs, but to serve administration and to satisfy enthusiasts. Folklore may be of the action type which includes drama, music; the science type that covers beliefs and superstitions; and the linguistic type that constitutes the study of speeches.

There are five basic literary forms of folklore such as biography, fiction, poetry, drama and essay.

Different types of folklore are being studied by different schools of folklore study, such as the India School and the Anthropological School.

The field of folkloristics is vast in Bengal. Here the intellectual class stays close to their folk inheritance and hence the gulf between industrialized and traditional cultures has not yet ruined their societies. The Bengali intellect has been stimulated through the contact with the dynamic forces of the western world. This is also the case with Bengali literature. The Bengali ideas and literature first made contact with the Europeans through translations. The first book rendered into English verse was *Arabian Nights Entertainment*.

Bengal folklore consists of rules of conduct of do's and don'ts which although extending to all walks of life have an essentially religious character. The history of the folk literature of Bengal may be characterized by a continuous process of lifting out considerable bodies of folklore from the stream of oral tradition and freezing them in writing.

It is difficult to determine the date of the oldest Bengali writers, but probably few of their books are more than four hundred years old.

In the study of "Mangal" poetry, "Panchali" and other genres a number of scholars have been distinguished. Among them are Sakumar Sen, Archarya Jogeshchandra Roy Vidyandhi.

The popular topics for the folk poets were the Krishna legends. Modern writers of Bengal, poets, novelists, etc., use folklore in this way or that way in their writing. Of course, there are many others.

In archaeology the first brief essay on the chronology of pre-historic remains was published in R. B. Foote's *Catalogue of the Prehistoric Antiquities*. This was followed by many important and useful essays.

Important studies of descriptive analytical nature along with the works of hobbyists were significant in folklore study in Bengal. Most of the earlier scholars have treated castes, tribes, religion and festivals.

The author also lists some of the western scholars and their works on Bengali folklore such as G. H. Damant's *Bengali Folklore from Dinagepore*.

Lal Behari Day is perhaps the first successful Bengali in his field. His *Folktales of Bengal* won him world reputation. *A Collection of Agricultural Sayings in Lower Bengal* appeared in 1893. Another well known book is Jnanendrenath Gupta's *Upakatha*, a book on Bengali folktales.

Nineteenth century Bengal was a marvellously creative age. Folkloristic activities in Bengal have its roots in caste, community and village economics. T. C. Das Gupta and Gaurhairi Mitra prepared a more fully developed view of Bengal folklore.

In conclusion, the study of folk literature of Bengal is blundering into existence. The quality is inferior at the present although there is a lot of quantity. If we look to the contemporary folklore publications in Bengal we will find that the Bengali mind is anything but unproductive.

Eastern Pakistan, which is also briefly discussed in this book is very rich in folklore. Collections of works are progressing very fast. Some of the works published are *Sahutyika* and *Bengal Academi Patrika*.

I would recommend this book to any student who is interested in Indian folklore. It could serve as a good reference book for materials written about Indian folklore.

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