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Tiluttoma Baruah ed., *People of Contemporary North-East India*, 2011. Pratisruti Publication: Guwahati, 2011, 319 pp. ISBN 81-88s05-12-2. Hard Cover. Price: Rs.350.

The present edited volume brings a multitude of dimensions addressing the northeast India's cultural mosaic. The volume has 31 papers out of which ten discuss the biological, physical aspects of the human organism, fifteen papers are devoted to cultural perspectives of the human life and the last five focus on archaeological explanation to the human existence in North-East India. The volume attempts to bring together different yet integrated facets of man in one canopy. The papers on the biological dimensions of man range from discussions on Metabolic Syndrome emerging as a health problem, to understanding the correlation between the foot structure and body weight. Ranjan Deka while discussing the emerging health problem due to metabolic syndrome draws attention to the point that these health concerns have emerged due to civilization and modernity. In their study on the body mass index in the north east states, Suparna Shome et.al bring out that since North-East India was an area of neglect for a long time, the development schemes came in much late here and this is reflected in the BMI level in the people of the northeast states. Their findings show that while Assam and Tripura show prevalence of underweight. Sikkim and Manipur show more percentage of overweight or obese people. Specific communities have been empirically researched by some authors who present a very culture specific scenario of a health dimension. Bhaskar Das and Sarthak Sengupta assess the frequency of haemoglobin E variant present among the Khasi population of East khasi hills, Meghalaya and also study the fertility, morbidity and mortality pattern among them against various haemoglobin genotypes. Jyoti Ranjan Ghosh and Arup Ratan Bandopadhyay's study on Bengali females in the age group 20 – 26 years brings out the influence of overweight on foot structure. Chandana Sarmah and A.F. Gulenur Islam Barbhuiya discuss the nutritional status of the adult Dimasa Kacharis living in the rural areas of the Cachar district of Assam. The fertility and mortality differentials among the Khasi, Pnar, Garo and Mizo tribes, residing in Shillong have been researched by Dipak Kr Adak and Tiluttoma Baruah.

Annada C Bhagabati makes a very interesting anthropological overview of the socialstructure of Arunachal Pradesh. This paper, a perfect blend of

personal memoir and anthropological eye of Professor Bhagabati makes a very gripping and informative read. The theoretical construct of social structure and the dynamics involved therein is very well explained with reference to the different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The idea of 'sacred' against the backdrop of culture forms the topic of discussion in two different papers written by Indira Baruah and K. Jose SVD respectively. Indira Baruah analyses L.P.Vidarthi's concept of Sacred Complex on the Deori and Tiwa of Assam. The institution of marriage forms the area of discourse in two different papers written by Lanu Devi and Nazeem Anan respectively. Lanu Devi discusses the marriage among the Karbis and Anan brings forth the marriage system among the Thadous kukis. Kanta Chakravarty's paper on 'Tourism and Women Empowerment: An Experience of a Japanese Concept', attempts to throw light on the significant role which Mich-no-eki, a Japanese concept related to tourism can play in empowering women in the tourism sector in North-East India. The following paper also delves into the prospects of tourism in North-East India. This paper by Mrinmoyee Bhattacharyya and Manisha Bhattacharyya explores the potential of ecotourism in India's northeast in generating employment and in improving the economy of the region. The institution of marriage is the focus of two different papers, one on the marriage among the karbis by Lanu Devi, and the other dealing with marriage among the Thadous, written by Nazeem Anan. Both the papers lack in addressing the dynamics and changes which have been witnessed in the institution of marriage. Suparna Baruah's work, 'Indigenous Knowledge (IK): A Brief Note' and Jonali Devi's paper, 'Indigenous Knowledge Tradition in Agriculture: A Study on Few Practices in Nagaland' make very informative reads. A very exhaustive and excellent exploration on the *knowledge continuum* by Suparna Baruah in her paper enriches the theoretical constructs on Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Jonali Devi's paper on the indigenous knowledge tradition in agricultural practices of the Angami and Rengma of Dimapur and Kohima districts in Nagaland throws light on the blending of traditional and the modern technologies and practices used in shifting cultivation.

Section III of the volume is devoted to papers on prehistory. A.A.Ali's article 'On the Discovery of Prehistoric Site in North-East India' comes out as a very comprehensive and analytical piece of work. Dilip K Medhi's paper on the archaeological research in Karbi Anglong brings forth the current findings of tools and megaliths in North-East India, thus taking an important step forward in further establishing the interesting antiquity of 'man the tool maker'. Another paper devoted to the Karbis of Assam is by Kalpana Choudhury gives a

descriptive account of the megalithic assemblages in the area.

The edited work by Dr. Tiluttoma Baruah attempts to bring the researches on the integrated aspects of man – cultural, biological and archaeological, under a common canopy thus holistically addressing the quest about man and his being. There is no dearth of published work on this part of the country. Yet instead of passing as yet another volume on the oft beaten road, the present volume comes across as a fresh attempt to cater to the ‘contemporary’ look of the northeast. However certain areas needed more attention in editing the volume. In some articles, the references and citations are found incomplete. There is no mention of publishing house or place of publication in several articles. There is no uniformity in the styles in which the references have been mentioned after each article. The article by Kalpana Choudhury does not contain any list of references cited in the text. Care should have been taken to avoid such inexcusable errors.

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Arkotong Longkumer, *Reform, Identities and Narratives of Belonging: The Heraka Movement in Northeast India*, Continuum International Publishing Group: London and New York, 2010, xiv + 258 pp. ISBN: 9780826439703 (Hardback)., Price: \$120.00.

Reform, Identities and Narratives of Belonging: the Heraka Movement in Northeast India is an ethno-historical treatise on the Heraka reform movement among the Zeme, a Naga tribe living in the North Cachar Hills of Assam, and part of the more generic Zeliangrong community spread over Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. Little post-colonial ethnography has come out on the Zeme, and since Ursula Bower’s (later Ursula Betts) ‘Naga Path’ (1952) this is perhaps the most comprehensive work done among the Zeme. But this book is not only valuable for its original ethnography, but also equally for its wide theoretical engagement, situating, as it does, the Heraka reform movement in larger scholarly debates on reform and identity. In a complex, multi-layered, though lucidly expounded treatise, Longkumer traces the genesis and evolution of Heraka reform and identity, and its emergence into a contested

arena of competing ideologies of religion and ethnicity in India's northeast. This book is based on archival research and seven months of field-research in Hsongle village, from where the author also visited other villages. Hsongle is incidentally the same village as Bower conducted major parts of her fieldwork in the 1940s. The book consists of seven chapters, including the introduction and conclusion, and runs through 258 pages.

The Heraka movement found its genesis, the author argues, in failed colonial land, administrative and immigration policies, which caused land and food scarcity, and further swelled in reaction to proselytizing Christianity. In this context, the Heraka movement represented a 'new system of religious attitude in relation to economic realities' (p. 48). It provided practical remedies, like altering the agricultural cycle and minimizing expensive blood sacrifices, a cosmological rearrangement, from traditional pluralism to the adoption of one God, and a Millenarian promise in the form of *heguangram* (the free community) brought about by a *heguan* (he who brings that freedom). In the upshot, then, the Heraka movement provided new and evolving ideas of community, tradition, and self / identity among the Zeme, and the five main chapters of the book approaches this predicament from different angles.

In the introduction the author maps out his ethnographic and conceptual framework. In approaching the issue of identity, he sides with Stuart Halls' thesis, influenced by Derrida, that identity is primarily constructed through the articulation and negotiation of identity boundaries, through *différance*, which at once 'differs' and 'defers' (p.12). The author also importantly reflects on his positionality in the field, as a Naga scholar researching another Naga tribe, and introduces his research assistant and interpreter, a college-educated Heraka.

The second chapter, and the most ethnographically rich, narrates the author's participation in a pilgrimage to the Bhuban cave, the assumed starting point of the movement. It is the place where god Tingwang instructed the first reformers, Jadonang and Gaidinliu. Interestingly, the Bhuban Hill and its cave do not only hold religious significance to the Heraka, but represents a shared ritual space as it denotes ritual importance too to the Poupei Chapriak, who follow ancestral practices known as Paupaise and who maintain two separate temples in addition to their worshipping in the cave, and to Hindus who organise an annual yatra to the Shiva temple located a little up from the cave. These groups, the author argues, share both common grounds and contested spaces. As such, it reminds of Hertz classic study on the cult of St.

Besse (a roman legionary soldier who converted to Christianity and was then martyred and beatified), an engagement of which would perhaps have benefited the author's argument. Hertz showed how St. Besse became the saint protector of five hill villages who were jointly responsible for the upkeep of the cult, but disagreed about how, why, where and when rituals should be conducted. Their disparate versions, however, united in shared opposition to Church hagiography and the 'plainsman's interpretation of the past, which they commonly reject (see Parkin 1996). Similarly, different groups ascending the Bhuban Hill share the same ritual space, agree on some points, but maintain competing versions of rituals and traditions. Criticising Turner's (1978) seminal concept of *communitas*, the author concludes that these differences, or contests over authenticity as he frames it, in fact supersede feelings of *communitas* in the Bhuban Cave.

Chapter three reconstructs the genesis of the movement in the 1930s. The author argues that the Heraka reforms gained momentum for two prime reasons. First, British failure to understand shifting agriculture and subsequent failed land policies and, secondly, their invitation of Kuki immigrants to settle in land 'owned' by the Zeme. This led to land shortages and food scarcity, to which the Heraka reform movement provided practical solutions, and which, in turn, brought about significant socio-economic changes and renewal in villages. This chapter also introduces the lives and millenarian activities of Jadonang (1905-1931) and Gaidinliu (1915-1931), the two main reformers that shaped the Heraka movement. They both acted against British rule. On accusation of murdering two Manipuri traders, Jadonang was arrested and hanged by the British. The second prophet, and the most venerated today, Gaidinliu, a woman, was arrested in 1932 for instigating the population against the British and released 18 years later. She was then bestowed with the honorary title 'Ranee' (queen) by Jawaharlal Nehru, but instead of endorsing India's independence, Gaidinliu went underground, as the author dwells on in more detail in chapter five, and renewed her struggle for the rights of the newly formed, in the year 1947, Zeliangrong Community (a combination of Zeme Laingme and Rongmei). Gaidinliu was not against India, as she had been against the British, but she opined that the Zeliangrong were unduly marginalised and their identity threatened since India's Independence.

Chapter four zooms in on how the Heraka movement altered the Zeme cosmology by dismantling the pantheon and by adopting one single, macrocosmic entity, god Tingwang. For this to come about the Zeme had to modify their creation story, a process illustratively reconstructed by the author. This new

religious attitude also came together with the introduction of a Heraka scripture, the Hinge Book which laid down the new Heraka way of life.

Chapter five then focuses on processes of identity-formation among the Zeme Heraka through the position and recognition of *différance*. The author argues that the Zeme Heraka's predicament today is that they are at once non-Christian and Naga, a combination which makes them a difficult fit into the Naga national movement, whose professed unity lies, to a significant extent, in a shared Christianity. By configuring the Heraka as *vanvasi* (jungle dwellers), Hindu organisations like the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) working among them, attempt to appropriate the Heraka into the Hindu-fold. In this scenario, Heraka reform and identity, the author elucidates, is best understood as the outcome of the continuous mutual articulation of difference between the Heraka and external forces, and, as such, Heraka identity, like identities elsewhere, is always evolving.

In Chapter six the author discusses the construction of Heraka community. In doing so, it takes a cue from Cohen's (2003) formulation of community as 'aggregating device'. It discusses the Millenarian Heraka ideal of *heguangram* (free community), which embodies life, hope and freedom, and *heguang* (the agent of that freedom). Gaidinliu was long imagined as the *heguang*, and some still wait for her return to lead the Heraka into paradise. As an ideal and hope, *heguangram* persists, and currently a new self-proclaimed *heguang* has emerged who now stages his identity as the Heraka saviour. This longing, however, now symbolises the rural Heraka more than the urbanised Heraka, warning, for one, that the Heraka ought not to be seen monolithic entity, but may imply different things to different sections of the Zeme Heraka population.

In the conclusion the author winds the various strands together, and summarises his main arguments and insights. It emphasises the current difficult transition the Heraka movement is experiencing as it shifts from the local to the regional, and even the national. In conclusion, the author reflects on the relation between religious reform and ethnicity, or, ethnographically speaking, the position of the Heraka in the national Naga movement. The case of the Heraka, he argues, shows that the term 'Naga' should be seen as an evolving concept, that when pinned down on certain characteristics like Christianity, may alienate some at the margins, like the Zeme Heraka who refuse Christianity, but who nevertheless identify as Naga.

As most studies on the Naga are grounded in the now somewhat stale trinity of ethnicity, nationalism and Christianity, the author aims to introduce

a new vantage point, one which shows how this trinity is also contested at the margins (p.17). In this aim the author well succeeds, and his treatise provides new pathways in approaching questions of identity among the Naga, and in North-East India more generally. This book is also innovative in that it is researched and written by a Naga scholar on a Naga tribe different from his own, a practice which, perhaps a little unfortunately, remains rare.

References

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Hugh Sinclair, *Confessions of a Microfinance Heretic – How Microfinance lost its way and betrayed the poor*, Harper Collins Publishers India Ltd: Noida, 2012, pp. 268. ISBN: 9781609947668. Price: Rs. 350

Recent years witnessed a growing body of critical literature on mainstream ‘developmental’ thinking. The latest to emerge here is the book titled ‘*Confessions of a Microfinance Heretic: How Microfinance lost its way and betrayed the poor*’ by Hugh Sinclair. Sinclair was directly involved in MFIs, rating agencies, transparency initiatives and investor agencies and watched the developments in the sector closely. The book is written in a popular style and drawn from real experiences in the sector. It exposes how ‘microfinance turned out to be what it promised to be otherwise’.

The book argues that microfinance was one of the major ‘development strategy’ recommended by ‘Britten-wood institutions’ to developing countries. The grameen model initiated in Bagladesh has attracted the attention of the

World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), international aid agencies such as USAID, DFID, SDC etc., and multinational commercial banks like Citi Bank, Standard & Chartered etc., have also been part of this set up.

As brought out in the book, Microfinance suggests ‘commercial microfinance is a panacea’ to the problems of poverty. The sector propagates a myth that microcredit lifts people out of poverty through small investments in microenterprises. This myth attracts governments, developmental institutions and social investors. The book points out that a select success stories of MFIs are used to hide the reality of high interest rates involved in availing credit, diversion of credit for consumption purposes, inability of micro-business to generate sufficient returns to micro-entrepreneurs, prevalence of child labour, and oppressive practices adopted by MFIs.

Contrary to the propagated social claims, Sinclair reveals that ‘commercial interests’ dominates the reality in the sector. Citing his personal experiences, the author shows how MFIs deviate from its fundamental mission, adopt flawed practices in an un-regulated environment, how the ‘commercial’ interests get priorities over potential ‘social costs’.

The case of ‘Grameen Trust Chiapas’ an MFI based in Mexico which deviated from its fundamental mission of ‘serving the poor and women’ to include ‘people in need’; the case of Fondo de Credito Comunitario (FCC) an MFI based in Mozambique which under took ‘forced savings’ in the name of collateral and misused client savings enabled through an un-regulated environment; a range of microfinance players in development microfinance such as Triple jump, Oxfam Novib, Calvert foundation which never took action against an alleged Nigerian MFI named ‘Life above poverty organization’ (LAPO) despite its exorbitant interest rates and misbehavior with clients – each of these instances go on to show how the ‘commercial interests’ have overtaken the sector. MFIs like ‘Compartmantos’ an Mexican based MFI and ‘Swayam Krishi Sangh (SKS)’ an Indian based MFI, have reached such heights of commercialism that they have gone in for ‘initial public offer’ (IPO) and got enriched further.

Sinclair, however, indicates that cracks are appearing in the Microfinance model. The happenings in Nicaragua, India and Bangladesh point out the same. The civil unrest in Nicaragua by MFI clients expressing their protest against MFI practices, the suicides by MFI clients in Andhra

Pradesh in India as a result of growing indebtedness and oppressive recovery practices by MFIs resulting in regulation and mass default by MFI clients and continuation of poverty in Bangladesh despite over three decades with microfinance experiments – all of them indicate that microfinance experiments have failed. Drawing from the academic critics on the ‘economic theory behind microfinance’, Sinclair demystifies the assumptions that abundant opportunities are available to the poor to invest in productive enterprises, that the micro-enterprises of the poor are immune to laws of competition and that the micro-enterprises can be accommodated within market framework.

While attempting to expose the role played by micro-lending in betraying the poor, Sinclair however seems to carry optimism and speaks of ‘microfinance 2.0’ – a model that draws on lessons from earlier experiences and is more pro-poor. A micro-lending model aiming at modest profit, charging lower interest rates and adopting right behavior towards poor clients are seen as a solution. He also draws a list of Do’s and Don’ts for the investors, the microfinance funds, the management of MFIs, to the regulators, to the poor, for the microfinance whistle blowers in media etc., with piecemeal changes he seems to believe that a more pro-poor and humane microfinance is possible. Moreover, he seems to believe ‘informalisation’ of the economy to be a solution.

While rightfully bringing out an insider’s perspective on ‘microfinance’ with its flaws and shortages, he fails to situate it in the context of ‘politics of development’ as pushed by the international aid agencies. Microfinance has particularly grown in an historical context during which World Bank and IMF pushed the neo-liberalism and globalization project – with pressure on developing countries to reduce the role of state / public institutions for the welfare of the poor, reducing public expenditures / subsidies for poverty reduction, promoting commercial models for extending welfare and encouraging private players towards the same. The emergence of privately run MFIs with ‘cost recovery and for profit models’ towards providing public welfare services isn’t brought to the fore.

The book fails to appreciate the fact that ‘commercialization’ is not a result of ‘individual behavior of MFIs’ which wanted to get rich, but the result of ‘neo-liberal project’ which sees privatization and commercialization as a solution to poverty reduction.

Despite the shortages, this book is a must read for those who get carried away about the magic of microfinance. Microfinance still attracts

many. Md. Yunus, the father of MFIs, believed that in one generation with microfinance, poverty can only be seen in museums. The book under review convinces the readers that this is not so.

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Neelanshu Ranjan, *Swami Sahajanand Saraswati (Hindi)*, National Book Trust of India: New Delhi, 2012, pp.XX+100. ISBN: 978-81-237-6486-3. Price: Rs.60.

Biographical sketches are usually published on the occasion of birth or death anniversary/centenary of great historical figures with a view to commemorate their achievements. However, an intellectual inquisitiveness that looks into the past in order to remove the maladies of the present would certainly, without waiting for such an occasion, likes to focus on the life of the most befitting a historic figure of his choice. Such inquisitiveness led Neelanshu Ranjan to publish the biography of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, the legendary name in the history of peasant movement in modern India.

The life of Swami Sahajanand appears full of diversities and shifting priorities. If his adolescence manifests a missionary zeal of a person exhaustively unfolding the pages of ancient Sanskrit texts with a view to understand the ethos of religion, his adulthood presents him as a person deeply diving into Marxist literature with a view to grasp the essence of revolution. If his social activity begins as a committed caste leader, it ends as a dedicated class leader. In fact, his life appears like a spectrum of contrasting ideological shades. In introduction the author himself mentions that Swamiji at different points of time developed comradeship with persons of different ideological orientations simply in order to strengthen his struggle against social injustice and economic inequality. Moreover, Swamiji was not only a social activist, but also a prolific writer with a distinctive critical analytical insight into contemporary theoretical debates. To accommodate the various important aspects of the life of such a dynamic and diverse intellectual social leader within one hundred and thirty pages, not exceeding fifty thousand words is certainly a tough task which the author has done successfully and precisely.

The book is neatly divided into eight chapters, along with an analytical introduction. The author finds three important turning points in Swamiji's life,

first as a caste leader, second as a nationalist and third as a peasant leader. While the first two chapters trace his childhood, education, marriage and wanderings, the third and fourth chapters deal with the beginning of his active social life as a caste leader and then joining the national movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The fifth one throws much light on how Swamiji almost created, moulded, inspired and engineered the peasant movement during emotionally charged moments of anti-colonial struggle. Swamiji remained involved for more than thirty years, almost half of his life, in struggles to materialise the ideals of social justice and economic equality of peasants and workers. That is why the author rightly devotes maximum number of pages (more than thirty six pages) on Swamiji's relationship with the peasant movement that remained his primary concern till the last days of his life. The description of three events related to peasant sufferings that transformed Swamiji into a rebellious peasant leader reminds us of three episodes that led Lord Buddha to renounce the worldly attachments for achieving salvation. Next three chapters take into account respectively Swamiji's friendship with Rahul Sankrityaan, his interpretation of *Bhagvad Gita* and his contributions as editor and author. In brief, the book touches upon the crucial markers of Swamiji's life.

After going through the work the reader would feel himself well equipped to rationally counter the malicious design of power brokers who never hesitate in projecting Swamiji as a caste leader for parochial ends. In fact, Swamiji was an epitome of an endless struggle for social justice and economic equality. The author clearly states that Swamiji due to his own vision and insight could not remain an uncritical adherent to any kind of ideology and so shifted his priorities over social problems.

In professional historiography, it is generally accepted that sources of history, after being cross-checked and cross-referred, become more reliable. Keeping this in view, the author, while evaluating historical events, does not simply rely on Swamiji's autobiography, but also refers to other source materials written by Swamiji's contemporaries like Rajendra Prasad, Rahul Sankrityaan and others.

Had the author consulted archival records related to caste, national and peasant movements, it would have certainly substantiated and enriched the explanations. While dealing with Bhumihaar caste movement, it would have been better to refer to other parallel caste movements that may throw greater light on social history. The author also lacks maintaining a uniform pattern in preparing footnotes. An index, missing in the book, would certainly

have made its reading easier. An exclusive chapter on Swamiji as an author and editor is expected to publish a complete list of his works, partially missing in the book. On the whole, the work is praiseworthy, because it is easily comprehensible and so general readers would be well acquainted with a unique leader of mass movement in modern India.

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***Hachuk Kurio* Vol.I, Kokborak Bhasha-Sanskriti Samsad, Agartala, 1987. Price: Rs 25/-**

***Hachuk Kurio* Vol. II, Akshar Publication: Agartala, 1994. Price: Rs. 35/-**

***Hachuk Kurio*, Vol. III, Akshar Pubication: Agartala, 1999. Price: Rs. 35/-**

Hachuk Khurio by Sudhanna Debbarma is an epistolary regional novel depicting the life of tribal communities in the state of Tripura. It views the genesis of the problems of indigenous tribes in the break-down of traditional social order and absence of proper political alternative. Limitless consumerism along with aversion to work has looted the natural treasures of the indigenous people of the state converting them into economic refugees. A salvation is possible only by generating political consciousness and by reinvigorating indigenous life style of the past.

Naren – the hero of the novel is a farmer’s son who nourished an ambition in life. Naren’s father, a hardworking farmer sends his son to the town of Agartala for education. It is the time when, in the princely state of Tripura, Janashiksha Samity has started movement in the hills for the spread of education and removal of illiteracy. Many tribal youths have responded to this call. Naren stays in the Umakanta Boarding House and pursues his study in Agartala institutions. The winds of change are now blowing through the hills; educated tribals have started challenging many of the age-old

customs and beliefs, many of them have turned into the harbingers of Renaissance in the hills under the kings. At Agartala, Naren observes the way of life of the Bengali urban middle and lower middle class people. He achieves a better vision of life. Mita, a girl from a lower middle class Bengali family develops admiration for his simplicity and honesty. During the holidays, Naren returns home in the hills and becomes the original self. He works as a farmer in the field along with fellow tribals. He speaks his mother tongue Kok-Borok and becomes a part of his milieu. The author gives a pen-picture of this milieu which protects the community and, at the same time, subdues it. The inhabitants live in certain ways, engage in certain occupations and keep alive certain customs. *Hachuk Khurio* can be read as the first ever full-length regional novel in Kokborok language as it is set in a specific area with its indigenous specific way of life. Characters are all away from the metropolis. People in the novel are meant to be like any other place, the beings whose hearts and minds are apparently local but actually universal.

The Princely state of Tripura resisted the onslaught of the British Capitalism for a long time. The British did not think it profitable to arrange the merger of the state with the Union. Whatever may be the reason, Tripura remained under the Kings till the time India became free and the indigenous people of Tripura had to fight against the kings for their rights and privileges. Popular movements against the Kings gained momentum in the early part of the twentieth century. *Jana Shiksha Parishad* was one such movement which aimed at establishing schools in the interiors of the state. This type of social movement was responsible for the spread of education among the people. Sudhanya Debbarma was an active participant, or rather, one of the pioneers in this movement of social upliftment of the indigenous tribal communities of the state. After the Indian Independence, tribal population of Tripura experienced a turmoil vis-à-vis the influx of people of Bengali origin from East Pakistan. These people were mostly lower middle class persons, tradesmen and other skilled individuals. A tension was generated and confrontation between different classes of immigrants and tribals developed in different parts of the state. There was pressure on land and limited resources but this social tension only helped the advanced section of the tribals to embrace a more materially developed culture. Tribal youths, on the other hand, felt that they had been pushed towards an area of competition. This encourages a stagnant society living at an underdeveloped stage of production level, to move out of the stagnant stages. Sudhanya Debbarma's novel *Hachuk Khurio* caters to the taste of the middle class or lower middle class living in the urban centers of the state.

In *Hachuk Khurio* Sudhanya Debbarma portrays the rural landscape which nurtures and nourishes the tribal folk. They owe to Nature their simplicity and straight forward attitude towards life. Though Nature in Sudhanya Debbarma succumbs to change and social pressure there are sufficient warnings about the unhealthy alteration of Nature and the natural. Naren, the hero of the novel observes the palpable change all around. He has witnessed nothing except the false promises of the politicians being revered by the suffering community in the hills of Tripura as in the other parts of the country. Population explosion, thanks to the migration from East Pakistan, poses a challenge to the wild forests and hills. Wild animals like deer etc. have disappeared from the hills. Tiger's abode is replaced by refugee camps. Man encroaches the depths of the forests and hence chirping of birds like Maina, Dhanesh are no longer heard. Nature too is undergoing transformation along with the changes in the tribal society. Rivers do not remain navigable round the year. Rain water stagnates and floods occur. Many of the ills have a reference to the unscientific partition of the subcontinent which was forced upon the people to make room for the greed of the unscrupulous politicians. This cruel and inhuman act of partitioning the country on the basis of religion has been responsible in many ways for the unnatural migration and concomitant ills which till date are plaguing the life of the hills. Tribal economy and culture based on jhum cultivation undergoes transformation. Women folk have forgotten the use of handloom. Naren's neighbors do not use the indigenous cloth. Jhum is out dated. Thread is not available and the beautiful cloth the tribal women weaved called *Rignai Barak* exists in memory alone. Hence, tribals have become accustomed to the use of cloth produced by cotton mills. The wind of change sweeps over the countryside. The semi urban tribals have given up their simple food habits and are taking to the rich and delicious dishes which the Bengalis prefer. Even the marriage system of the tribals has become complex. Earlier the grooms had to give bride price in order to marry. However, now the bride's father gives dowry to the groom's family. It has become difficult for the poor fathers to give their daughters in marriage because they are too poor to arrange dowry for the bride-groom. Naren has a sister named Malina. He is unemployed and his father is a poor farmer. He is tormented with the thought of his sister's marriage. Naren observes a gradual drift from traditional values taking place among the tribal people. His inability to arrest the changes lead him to loneliness and frustration.

He visits his former beloved Sabita who is married to Bimal at his instance. Bimal's poultry farming is in bad shape. The domestic fowls are ill

but no veterinary surgeon is around. The government hospitals do not come to the rescue of the poor. Meaningful Government encouragement to private enterprise remains absent. Bimal cherishes a desire to sell his farm and to take up a Government job even if that is of a peon. Government service was and is the goal of the unemployed. This is a pointer to the death of all private initiative and eventual degradation of the country with respect to capital formation. The then Congress Government appears to make no worthwhile effort for the upliftment of the vulnerable section of the society in terms of initiating such welfare schemes as the protection of arable land from the erosion of rivers, management of fisheries and the like. It appears, that the Government's focus is on robbing the state treasury and proliferating corruption. Naren becomes sad and morose. He looks around and finds his friends and countrymen gone astray, given to gambling, card-playing and such other vices. Naren's ancestral house is situated in Mataidangar para. The villagers are drifters. His neighbours such as Bharat Chandra, Harajay, Katagdiari and others assemble around Naren for advice. Naren observes that the poor among them have become poorer. More and more people are coming down from the poverty line and swelling the ranks of the day labourers and of part time farmers. Bharat Chandra is the link between the town and the village. He accosts court officials as a broker and squeezes money from fellow tribals in the name of Jumia rehabilitation and passes the share to the town- babus like the Circle inspector, Amin Babu etc. Deceit and bribery, precisely urban vices make their place in the persona of Bharat Chandra. In the character of Bharat Chandra and urban babus, the tribal society meets its nemesis.

Naren is seized with the keen desire to lead the people to have an identity of their own. The tribals could take pride in their glorious past. They once defeated the designs of the Delhi emperors and until the other day, were a free people. Freedom of the tribals from various vices and superstitions became Naren's only motive. To materialize his dreams Naren joined the Communist Party. He found that the tribals, the sons of the soil are firm supporters of the ideology of the Left. However, the ruling Government is indifferent towards the upliftment of the poor tribals. There are some negative attitudes resorted to by the Government. Efforts are there to bribe some tribal leaders who, in turn, will cheat the fellow tribals and pauperize them. Naren finds that he is to take bigger responsibility but it is not possible on his part to go against the system so it appears that he is given to inaction like the prince of Denmark. He is unhappy of the surroundings and naturally, cannot

think of a faithful personal relationship at the moment. After a long wait he gets an offer of appointment as a physician under the Government but is in a dilemma whether to join the service or not. He finally decides to play a bigger role. He has a mission to lead his people towards the goal of self-sufficiency. The tribal leaders are going after ministerial positions in the Cabinet and wish to enjoy the loaves and fishes of the office. The plight of the downtrodden remains unchanged.

We see this change in the terrains of Tripura through the eyes of Naren. He is the central figure and other characters move around him. Naren comes across as a matured young man with a degree in medicine and yet is unemployed. Unemployment is a curse in the life of an educated young man and soon his dreams about life start fading. Memory of Mita, an urban girl does not make him happy anymore. In the rural surroundings Mita is a misfit. This episode in the opening chapter of volume II illustrates the complexity of life that haunts the educated sections of the lower middle class or poor tribals who have received exposure to the Western model of education. By training - Naren is a physician and he tries to gather first-hand experience of the quality of life of his people in the hills of Tripura. He could see the ills that have long plagued the lives of the tribes who are leading a life on the fringe, far away from the benefits of the so called 'mainstream' life. The novel thus caters to a sound understanding of the various dimensions related to race, class and gender. Gradually, Naren realizes that the tribals, as a racial group should embrace an appropriate political ideology. He meets many friends from among the tribals who are political activists. It dawns upon him that a substantial change in the lives of his people can only be achieved through collective participation and action. Individual can never think of his fulfillment in isolation from the community.

Left political parties have remained active in the hills and have pioneered popular movements for amelioration of the quality of life of the tribal folk. There are four major characters in the text, which propagates Marxist ideology among the people. They are Radhamohan, Surya, Harinath and Sumanta. Naren's residence at Kamalpur becomes the hub of political discussions and debates. The topics of discussion included the issues emanating from the partition of the country into India and Pakistan and also the question of the uplift of the tribals of Tripura. Change of habit and habitat usually becomes a dominant discourse. The act of merger of the princely state of Tripura with the Indian Union is of enormous significance to the tribal people of the state of Tripura which has border with East Pakistan (now Bangladesh)

on three sides and, hence immediately after the partition this small state experiences large scale migration of mostly Bengali Hindus from East Pakistan. The people who migrated to Tripura are farmers, artisans, barbers, traders and other professionally skilled workers. As a result of migration, the tribal society which is otherwise static undergoes turmoil. There is much tension and apprehension in the minds of the tribals regarding the fate of the indigenous people of Tripura. Discussions across the table veer round this burning topic of the day, namely the influx of the refugees. Issues are debated as to whether the people who have migrated from East Pakistan into Tripura after 1949 should leave the state. The activists are divided on the basis of religion and, hence religious and sectarian views surrounding the influx of the refugees constitute the major argument of the day.

Leftists are also not untouched by the storm and hence topics like clan sanctity and group interests, play riot in their minds. The struggle for existence is what defines the thought process of both the migrants as well as the indigenous people. Everyone is seriously engaged in this struggle but little attempts are there to translate all such struggle into a collective proletarian one cutting across race, linguistic or other affinities. Kalicharan, thus, opines that political promises regarding the enshrined clauses of the Constitution for uplifting the indigenous people as lectured by the political parties before the election, including the Leftists, should be preserved in ink and the 'tribals should build up right kind of agitation to realize their rights and privileges' (*Hachuk Khurio* : 16-170). There is much energy among the leaders who are self-less and dedicated to the cause of the uplift of their own people. Political discussions occasionally become heated. Socialism and other ways are discussed in details and sometimes these political ideologies are found to be wanting.

'Buidey sini raajni tatal bujoganu samaajtantra Marxism bujoganu
obtui kok bai tauma ongnai' (*Hachuk Khurio* : 76).

Main argument of the novel proceeds through a process of thesis , anti-thesis and synthesis. Radhamohan is another activist who supports the role of Ganamukti Parishad in the hills. He is of the opinion that but for the activities of the Ganamukti Parishad and Jana Shiksha Samity, the tribals of Tripura would have remained ignorant and superstitious as they had been before. That these organizations are instrumental in the spread of education and political consciousness among the tribals is universally recognized. Naren himself and many other young persons are beneficiaries of the popular

movement pioneered by these organizations. Naren's exposure to better vision of life makes him a complex character. He has intimacy with Bengalis, he loves a Bengali girl. But he is aware of his own culture and heritage. He does not favour the deliberate attempts of neo-elite tribals to ape or mimic the Bengali way in matter of food or dress. The value he cherishes comes to control even inter-familial relationships. Much of the action is carried on by letters. Naren and Mita, Malina, Naren's sister and Naren develop epistolary friendship. The letters give a view of the inner workings of the minds of the characters, male and female. Female characters in *Hachuk Khurio* may be read as a testament to the author's belief in feminism. Malina, a girl of the hills is deprived of formal education but she is allowed to possess cultural accomplishment. She is also allowed to choose her marriage partner. Naren arranges birthday party for his sister which gives Malina a chance to meet the would-be groom before the marriage. Malina can sing, read novels, write letters. She fits in the label of a cultured lady. The author prescribes education for the women of hills because education alone can pave the way for liberation. Similarly Mita, Naren's lady-love, personifies the literary variety of the feminist heroine which became fashionable in English fiction after Ibsen under the caption of *new woman*. Mita, a shy Bengali girl of feudal parents of Agartala desires personal freedom which is denied to the women of the class because of traditions and the laws of patriarchy. Her love for Naren matures into selfless love. It transcends narrow domestic walls. She embraces the role of a nurse and involves herself in the activities of the larger world, becoming a part of the social milieu. In the process she shares the agony of Naren and his commitment and her love for him goes beyond the flames of mere passion. An emancipated woman as she is, she plays in a bigger role. She becomes successful both in the private and public sphere.

Madhabi, a girl of the same hills, engages herself in the popular movement for gaining a solid identity for the tribal women. Madhabi's relationship with Promode, a tribal youth who leads a life of luxury, is found to be dictated by an urgency which is at odds with the existing order of patriarchy. She is deprived of the benefits of higher education. Yet she is endowed with social and political consciousness. Unfortunately, she falls prey to the clever tricks of a Bengali urban boy. Yet she does not succumb to this relationship of deceit and she overcomes her heart break by turning to her indigenous roots and searching for a meaningful life. The author places her in her milieu and Madhabi takes the role of a new woman. She becomes an activist in the hills championing the cause of the illiterate tribal women,

fighting for their identity in the society. In this process Madhabi finds her freedom. She joins political activists like Promode, Kalicharan and others in their goal towards self assertion and development. Malina and Madhabi represent those women of the hills in the early part of the twentieth century who oppose the customs and prejudices of the tribal society which retarded their progress.

It is observed from the discussion that the narrative begins with a note on the identity crisis faced by the tribal people of the hills of Tripura and this is attributed mainly to the influx of refugees from East Pakistan. The large scale migration in the scarcely populated region as well as in the forest land of the state shakes and disturbs the natural habit and habitat of the tribals of Tripura. The skilled tradesmen livelihood of the local tribals is also threatened. Jhum and other traditional customs are becoming extinct. The drive to earn money leads to an indiscriminate exploitation of the natural resources like bamboo and other flora and fauna in the forest. Under the pressure of a neo bourgeois tribal community the ordinary mortals of the tribe become further marginalized. So the main journey of the novel is the cherished journey of political consciousness among the indigenous tribal community of the state and Naren plays role of a savior in the days of darkness to usher in a better life for the indigenous tribal community of the state.

Hachuk Khurio is claimed to be the first novel in Kokborak language (tribal language of Tripura). The novel received appreciation for realistic characters, socially relevant themes and sub-themes. All the characters in the book reflect the ideals, dilemmas and aspirations of the community. The language is lucid and straight forward and supports an effortless reading. The novel is translated into Bengali language also. The book helps to understand the socio-political changes taking place among the tribal people in Tripura and seek solution for tribal problems in the progressive movements of the tribal people.

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