

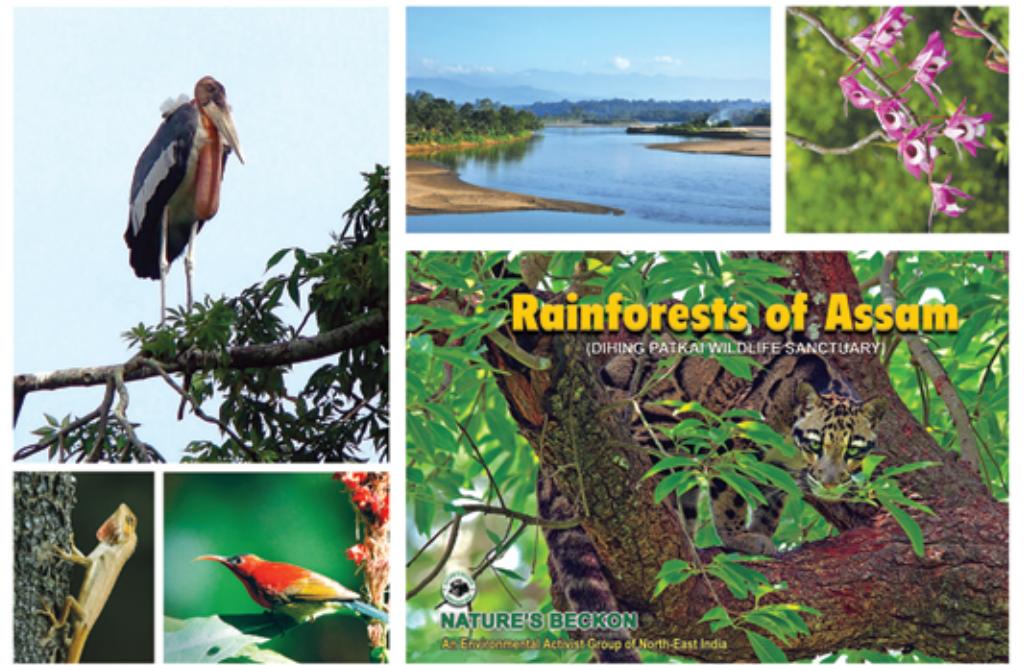
BOOK QUEST



Special issue published on the occasion of New Delhi World Book Fair 2014 ₹ 5/-



Forests have their own brand of beauty and the real magic of nature is awakened when we are on a safari in the depths of a rainforest. With its four different layers of vegetation and characterized by high rainfall, a rainforest can be home to 40% to 75% of biotic species. It is well said that rainforests are earth's oldest living ecosystem. Maybe this is the reason why forests have always fascinated mankind. Trekking in a rainforest had been a dream for me and my heart leaped when I got the chance to roam through the jewel of Northeast India—Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary, the biggest living patch of rainforest of Northeast India.



Situated on the south bank of the mighty Brahmaputra, the Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary has been a source of endless enchanted natural beauties, which the districts of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh of Assam may proudly announce as their own. Being one of the 17 wildlife sanctuaries of Assam, this jewel of Northeast India is a treasure trove of amazing species of flora and fauna including a number of endangered species of fauna, avifauna, and flora, a major portion of which is still yet unexplored.

The Dehing Patkai rainforest is a portion of the total 800 sq. kms area of three combined rainforests namely Joypur, Upper Dehing and Dirak. There is no other forest bigger than this. On 13th June, 2004, 111.19 sq. kms of this area had been declared as a protected area – the Dehing Patkai Wildlife Sanctuary. It was a mighty dream envisioned by the environmental activist group of Northeast India "Nature's Beckon" led by eminent environmentalist cum Ashoka fellow Soumyadeep Datta. In the late 90's this part of Northeast India was brought into the global limelight by Nature's Beckon. An important cause rose at that time due to the heavy deforestation which occurred due to the setting up of industries, cultivation by the ever increasing population and as well as smuggling of endangered species.



This book describes in lucid and simple language, the fascinating traditional practices and unique social systems of the major ethnic tribes of the Patkai range, particularly of the Tangsa, the Singpho, the Nocte and the Wancho— some of whom once-upon-a-time indulged in human sacrifice and, till recently, were head hunters. It begins with a historical prelude and goes on to give detailed accounts of the geography of the region and the cultural characteristics and social behaviour, political administration and impact of the Second World War on the communities living in the Patkai range. This edition is a revised and edited version of the first edition, with a rearrangement of the chapters. It also contains some supplementary articles and some additional maps. The photographs not only comprise those taken half a century ago by the author, but also some more recent ones of these communities. It is hoped that administrators, researchers, historians, educationists, social scientists and general readers from both within these communities and from elsewhere will find this book useful, informative and enjoyable.

Assam occupies an important position on the global biodiversity map. Nestled in the Indo-Burma and Himalayan biodiversity hot spots, the state has more than 800 species or nearly three-fourth of all the bird diversity in India. Assam also has the second highest number of mammals and is known for its high reptilian diversity. Besides, the state has a wide variety of habitats ranging from tropical wet evergreen rain forest and wet savanna grassland of the Brahmaputra Valley to the subtropical forests of the Barails. The state is also home to a globally distinctive population of wild elephant, tiger, great Indian one-horned rhinoceros, and wild water buffalo, swamp deer, pigmy hog, golden langur, hoolock gibbon as well as white-winged woodduck, Bengal florican and black-breasted parrotbill. Over the years, mainly due to the increase in human population, the wildlife habitat has shrunk and also got fragmented. The book is an attempt to throw light objectively on all the challenges facing nature and wildlife.

The book will cater to the needs of a broad section of readers, including tourists who could have a better appreciation of Assam's rich wildlife.

This unique book goes beyond the fundamentals of traditional textiles to remind the modern society that indigenous textiles of different ethnic groups in Assam are not merely a commodity, but a reflector of socio-cultural life of the people of this region. It provides a systematic account of rich textile tradition covering its past, present and historical perspective, including the distinctive design elements and their symbolic meanings. The minute details in the book are expected to be of great help to the handloom lovers of the world.



Dhuliyari Bharir Saach: A Golden Trail of Dust

Rabindra Sarkar is the winner of the Sahitya Akademi award in Assamese for 2013. An Assamese poet of Bengali descent, he has remarkably enriched Assamese poetry over a prolong journey through dust and grime.



Hirendra Nath Dutta

Dhuliyari Bharir Saach (Traces of Dusty Feet) by Rabindra Sarkar (b.1941) has justifiably won the Sahitya Akademi award in Assamese for the year 2013. Its title implies that the ageing poet has covered a long distance and he is presently getting confined within a big and inhuman metropolis. Yet he has firmly asserted that his emotional attachment with the folk—presumably the toiling farmers of Assam with their dusty feet is not lost. Metaphorically speaking, in the centre of his heart the traces of their dusty feet are deeply and permanently imprinted. So, this avowal by Rabindra Sarkar is the shining evidence of his kinship with the common people. In addition to this, the book under consideration covers a wide range of topics. The evils of capitalist hegemony and its concomitant cruelty are forcefully denounced. His intense anxiety about the days to come has been expressed thus: “Life now is a yell from a forsaken garden”. Despite this forceful note of protest, the poet’s faith in humanity has not blurred. He ardently aspires to capture Walt Whitman’s irrepressible faith in a blade of grass. We are also being assured that the healing power of mother Nature is not entirely lost. All these beliefs are expressed through startling imagery and most daring poetic diction. Subtle sensory impressions are vividly communicated all through this remarkable anthology of verse. Together with this, Rabindra Sarkar’s creative gift has attained a new height through his mastery of the Assamese language.



Dhuliyari Bharir Saach, Rabindra Sarkar, Students’ Stores, Rs-50/-

An Assamese poet of Bengali descent, Rabindra Sarkar has remarkably enriched Assamese poetry in a sustained manner. Born and brought up in Assam, his interesting childhood upbringing inculcated in him a wholehearted attachment to the Assamese culture in its entirety. These autobiographical information are attractively recorded in prose in his book *Dinbor Mor Sonor Sajat*. Emulating Hemanga Biswas and Amalendu Guha, two of his distinguished forerunners Rabindra Sarkar minutely observed the vital aspects of Assamese folklore and the unique quality of Assamese ethos issuing out of its ethnic diversity. His effort to unravel the mystique of the Assamese mindset is wonderful.

Through this attainment he has set a high poetic ideal.

As a poet, Sarkar belongs to the group upholding the progressive trend in Assamese poetry. Faith in Marxism is inherent in his poetry. As his poetic self widened its ken and thereby attained a greater depth, the revolutionary zeal came to be strengthened by a humanist world-view. The voice of indignation aspired to attain a depth characteristically noticeable in the best exponents of revolutionary poetry. The suggestive power of Rabindra Sarkar’s poetry acquired a multiple dimension thereby. This is evident in the book under discussion. ●

Bhabani Books, an offshoot of Bhabani Offset Pvt. Ltd., Guwahati, has emerged as a major publishing house in Northeast India. Bhabani Books aims at not just commissioning new titles and promote new talents, but also reprints old classic. It seeks to bring out a series of value-added reprints of books with an archival importance and bring out translation of well-known Assamese works into English.

A WINDOW TO BHABANI BOOKS

Started in 2009 with an illustrated version of ‘Burhi Aair Xadhu’ (Assamese, reprint) by Roxoraj Lakshminath Bezbaroa, the doyen of Assamese literature, it has over 200 titles on its publication list comprising both English and Assamese.

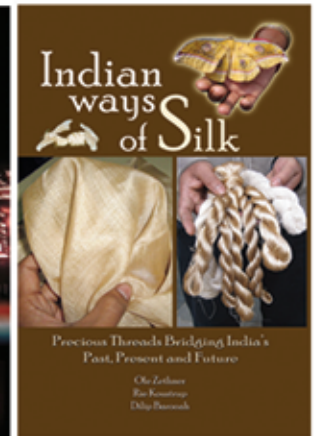
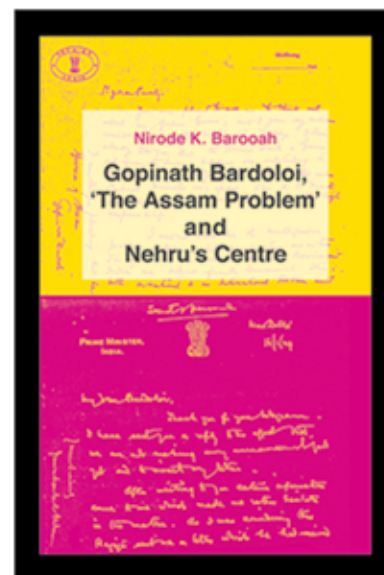
Bhabani Books is known for its quality production on a range of subjects from art and culture, literature, history, cinema to sociology, language study etc. Over the period of five years since its inception, it has developed a prestigious author-base covering wide spectrum of subjects. Aiming at creating a wide range of readership it is committed to offer high quality publications at affordable prices.



Bhabani Books is aware that in a multilingual society in India, today, translation is one of the major tools to promote peace, harmony and understanding by way of popularising better quality writings available in each language group. Our forthcoming publications will provide varied titles translated from the regional languages to English.

Book Quest is our quarterly newsletter and this is the inaugural number. We propose to introduce our current and forthcoming titles, our authors, events in book world through this newsletter. Also we would like to build a proactive platform to new genre of creative authors whose primary focus is on quality literature.

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Genesis of Books

When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?

Synonymous to this saying, tracing the history of a particular thing is a hard nut to crack. However, books, research materials, archives and many other sources help us to accomplish this task. But when we are talking about the history of something, that is books, which is itself an instrument of keeping records, then the job becomes all the more difficult.

Let us move back in time by putting a reverse gear and make a flight to the origin of books, printing and written literature.

Getting a copy of your favourite book, keeping track of the latest, waiting eagerly to read a quick review of a book which you want to buy is just a click away, with all the modern implements at hand. But things were not the same in earlier times.

The inscriptions made on caves, monuments, pillars, medals, coins and so on, date back to the ancient civilization, when people communicated through signs and hieroglyphs. The evidences and records of writing of those times have perished for the materials used by people could not be preserved as the objects were mostly metal foils, barks of trees, leaves of papyrus which were fragile in nature. When initially people began to write texts they were unaware of grammatical rules such punctuations, thereby, the text which was to be read had no order. It was late in the 7th century that a system of arrangement was introduced by Irish monks. The origin of printing dates back to the 2nd century in China as they are considered to have devised the basic elements like paper, ink and engraving methods.

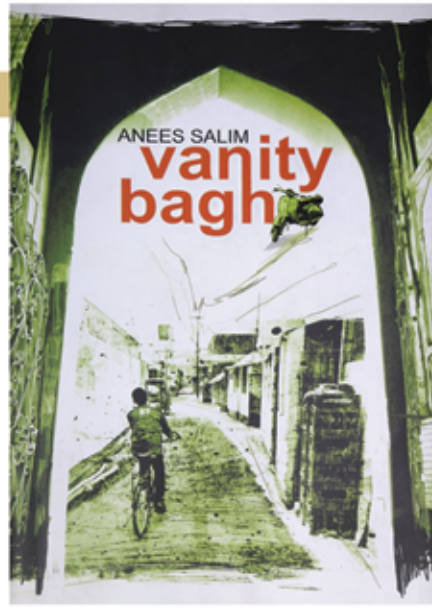
Books in printed form became a part of people at large, after the invention of printing press by Johannes Gutenberg of Germany in the 15th century. Thus, gradually books became a source of knowledge and information to the religious preachers, saints and the sophisticated elite mass of the society who could read and write. Eventually, monasteries and religious establishments with an aim to make people God-fearing started preaching the ideals of religious scriptures, promoting the culture of book reading. This transitional phase was the dawn of a new era with an outlook which helped people to make a shift from darkness to light and illuminate their mind’s eye.

Cicero rightly quotes, “A room without books is like a body without a soul”. This is true indeed. Can we imagine our lives today in the present times, without mobile phones, television, internet etc? Well, these are technological gadgets which have become an integral part of our daily life. The thought of doing away with these things may sometimes send a shudder to our generation and make our spines numb! Similarly, having a world without books or no books would be a dream far dreamt of. It has often been discussed and debated that due to the advancements in current technological trends, the importance and significance of the printed documents and books would be lost. If the World Wide Web is capable of storing millions and tons of information, what would be the relevance of books and what would be its future 30 to 40 years down the line? Such threats I believe, would hardly make a difference to readers and book lovers. If a copy of a century old book, say a hundred year old history is relevant and exciting in the present times, then I must say books will continue to give solace and comfort to people even when they will be on a journey to the moon on a spaceship.

Sneha Verma

Anees Salim is the winner of The Hindu Prize for Best Fiction 2013 for his novel *Vanity Bagh*. Apart from being a master storyteller Salim's oxymoronic style of narration laced with subdued humour and his amazing objectivity lend his craft a uniqueness rarely found in the contemporary crop of Indians writing in English.

Anil Kumar Baruah



Vanity Bagh, Anees Salim, Picador India, Rs : 499/-

The location of Anees Salim's story was one such little Pakistan named *Vanity Bagh* sharing a common boundary with Mehendi- a Hindu neighbourhood in the large city of Mangobagh. Like all other entities of its kind the predictable demography of *Vanity Bagh* is eccentuated by its share of oddities and inanities, fads and foibles, poverty and petulance, virtues and vices, as also romantic adventurers, petty criminals, smalltime thugs, optimists, cynics, gluttons, gourmets, poets, pendants, and threading through them all was a spirit of survival. Despite the bleak realities of life in a ghetto the people had their hopes and aspirations and "dreamed the dream of the poor to be rich, and circumstance per-



While the embittered partition of India on the eve of its independence nearly seven decades back, saw the birth of a new sovereign State-Pakistan—for the Muslims of the subcontinent, there were still millions of them who had decided to stay behind where their roots were firmly entrenched. This had led to the spawning of a series of mini Pakistans in ghettoised holes within various Indian cities.

Vanity Bagh Storytelling at its best

mitting famous" too. At times the lure of the dream and the anxiety to realize it too soon proved so irresistible that the gullible dreamer tended to lose all his sense of discernment before falling prey to his own desperation. This was exactly what happened to Imran, the protagonist of *Vanity Bagh* and paid dearly for his act of indiscretion.

Apart from being a master storyteller Salim's oxymoronic style of narration laced with subdued humour and his amazing objectivity lend his craft a uniqueness rarely found in the contemporary crop of Indians writing in English. He does not seem to have particular target readership in mind for his *Vanity Bagh*. He simply has transferred his close familiarity and deep insight into the characters onto the text in an inimitable style with stamp of originality all over-shun cliché, melodrama and pontification. What is most striking about his craft of narration is that the real story of *Vanity Bagh* is contained not in the lines but between them. Because every sentence in the novel has a long tale to tell about the unwary victims of history, destined to suffer a life of ignominy and at the same time they also cannot resist themselves from being sucked in to the vortex of circumstances. Salim's deceptively genial humour subtly blended with uncanny sarcasm, permeates through every line of the text to make one sit up and ask oneself a few uncomfortable questions. Cleverly concealed under the cloak of humour is an undertone of intense pathos that is open to interpretation. It also mocks at the pretence and derelictions of a secular democracy, without ever being remotely judgemental. •

These conjected ghettos were predominantly occupied by Muslim population with occasional presence of a few Christians here and there. The scourge of partition continued to lash against these Muslim dominated ghettos but they somewhat survived like destitute homes left to the mercy of scheming care takers with little sense of responsibility and still less accountability. The Hindu majority neighbourhoods always suspected the spectral presence of Pakistan in these ghettos and an air of mutual distrust never ceased to play tug of war between the two which had often enough, worsened into open riots.

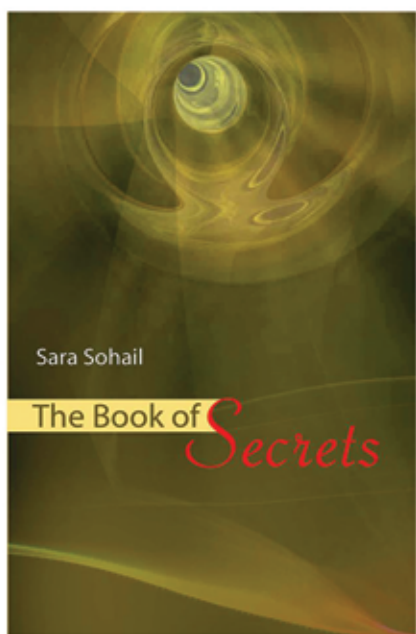
The Book of Secrets A Story of Mystery, Magic and Adventure

Madan Sarma



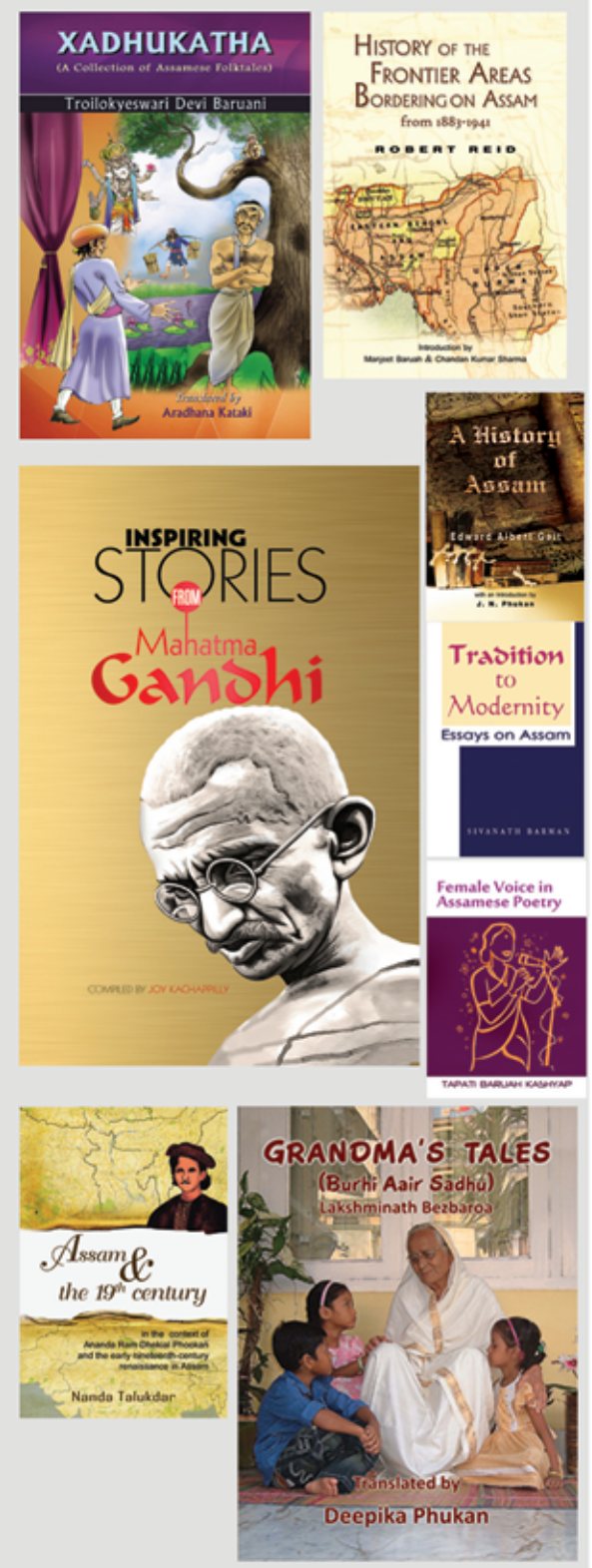
Sara Sohail (b. 1999)'s first book of adventure *The Book of Secrets* holds considerable promise as the teenaged writer successfully weaves an interesting tale of fun, mystery, magic and adventure with surprisingly good command over English, her second language. What is more important is that she has flights of imagination and more than adequate narrative skill that have enabled her to sustain the reader's interest for over four hundred pages.

The story has a rather quiet but mysterious beginning that has a hint of suspense. Then we are introduced to the delightful pranks and naughty and playful 'activities' of the four children studying in a school in New Delhi. As their aged grandmother finds the Delhi winter a little too harsh and longs for home at Tezpur in Assam, the Hazarika family comes back to Tezpur for a few months. And that is when the real story of mystery, magic and adventure begins.



The Book of Secrets, Sara Sohail, Aalibaat, Rs: 200/-

The children are chosen by a group of magicians for receiving special training in the art of magic that would empower them to harness their latent magical power and enable them to retrieve the 'Book of Secrets' for neutralizing the curse contained in it. The purpose is to help the The Magic Society to save magic from misuse, distortion and extinction. The unsuspecting children are mysteriously transported into the magical village of Baikong. A series of interesting events, intrigues and adventures take place in the magical village leading to an unexpected ending. The book is sure to attract children, teenagers, even adults. One hopes Sara Sohail continues her writing, giving free rein to her imagination and fulfilling the promise that she has shown in her very first book. •





Kalam, Kolkata Literary Meet

Ranjita Biswas

Literature in its diverse forms- different genres, styles and the ways of imagination transformed into the written word, were presented in a smorgasbord of events at the recent Kolkata Literary Meet on its third edition (25 -30 January, 2014). Set against the majestic backdrop of the Victoria Memorial, the Meet offered an intimate look at how the author thinks or reacts to events, often ending up as books.

Feminist icon and writer Gloria Steinem inaugurated the Meet. As she said, telling stories “around the campfire” that later developed into literature, resonates in intimate meets like this too. “After all, literature is story telling.” While Vikram Seth (“Go East Young Reader”) reminisced about his journey (From Heaven Lake) through China to reach India, he also said that he had never gone back to China after the Tiananmen Square crackdown; translating great Chinese poetry of the 720s - Wang Wei, Du Fu and Li Bai (Three Chinese Poets) showing him that there could be sanity and beauty at a time of conflict too as happened during the Tang Dynasty period when these poets lived. He also talked about the intricacy of Chinese calligraphy, an art he has been trained. That a paint brush was used to write Chinese alphabets showed how highly the written word was held in this culture, he said. The session “Writing from North-East” had writers from the region but living in different

locales, Jahnvi Barua and Parthajeet Sarma of Assam, Tayen jam Bijoykumar Singh of Manipur and Chetan Raj Shrestha of Sikkim discussing how cultural nuances of the Northeast percolate into the text ‘even if it’s written in English.’

‘Why do you write in English?’ Barua is often asked. Her answer is “because I am comfortable with the language, and many of our generation who have been educated in English medium schools are.” Besides, “English is as much an Indian language as others today,” she believes.

An interesting session (“Coolie Woman to Google Boy”) saw writers of Indian origin living abroad going back to their roots. Gaiutra Bahadur’s great grandmother was a ‘Coolie woman’ of Bihar transported by the British colonists to work in sugar plantation in Guyana; curiosity about her roots made her dig deep into that past and write the book *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*. Saroo Brierly, while growing up in Tasmania with his adoptive

Australian parents always knew he was a little ‘different’ and he wanted to find out why. He surfed Google map in order to connect that vague memory of a railway station where he had lost his way in childhood; he at last found it in Burhanpur, Madhya Pradesh! His extraordinary journey *A Long Way Home* is now to be made into a movie.

From across the seas of Indonesia came writer Ayu Utami, whose feminist writing and bold statement on sexuality and the place of woman in the society (Saman) have made her a controversial figure. In fact, in one of her writings she projects Sita not as beautiful but unattractive overturning set ideas about women and their image. Utami’s writings also underscore protest against oppressive rule as she herself grew up under the dictatorship of Suharto. The celluloid world would have seemed a little out of place in this world of words. But when Soumitra Chatterjee and Sharmila Tagore reminisced about Satyajit Ray (Manik-da to them) they were the maestro’s regulars, in the session ‘Manik Ratan’, it was a whole new world of discovery: how Ray guided the actors, his interpretation of the stories, his love of world cinema, et al.

Stories around the campfire never lose their warmth, after all. ●



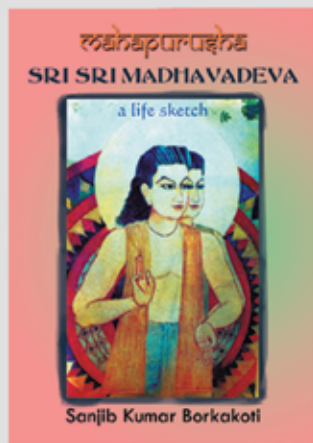
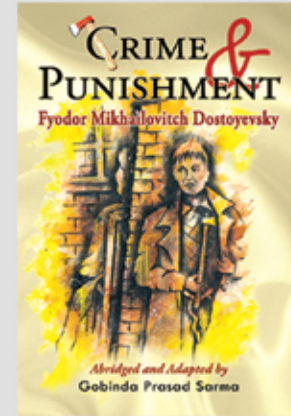
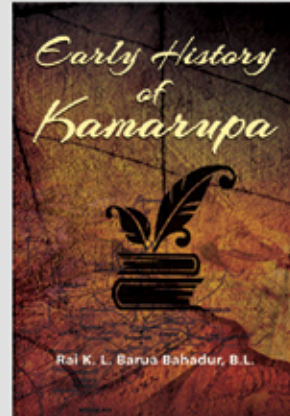
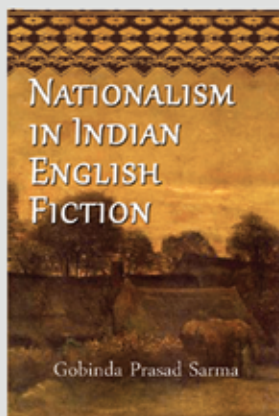
1. Vice-President of India, Hamid Ansari and others while releasing the book *The Ardent Patriot* at his residence, at New Delhi
2. Launching of *Tribes of Indo-Burma Border* by State’s power minister, Pradyut Bordoloi at Margherita, Assam
3. While releasing *Grandma’s Tales* by eminent personalities of Northeast.

Our other publications

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2. *Situating Assamese Middle Class The Colonial Period* Dr. Ramesh Chandra Kalita Price : ₹ 250
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