

INDIGENOUS WRITERS OF INDIA

Introduction and Contributions

Volume I : North-East India

Editor
Ramnika Gupta



Published for
Ramnika Foundation

This series, running into four volumes, presents biographies of indigenous writers of India, covering all genres of literature. It offers not only personal data and list of publications of individual writers, but also a window into their culture and the various ways that each of them has used literature to preserve and promote their own languages and community identities.

Volume one puts together biographies of 105 tribal writers of all the eight states of North-East India—Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram and Sikkim. They represent more than 15 tribal languages such as Adi, Apatani, Boro, Garo, Karbi, Rabha, Santali, Tiwa, Paite, Tangkhul, Khasi, Mizo, Tenydie, Kokborok, Lepcha and Nepali.

The other three volumes, covering Eastern India (West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand and Bihar), South India (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu), and Western and Central India (Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Goa, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh) are also in the pipeline.

Ramnika Gupta, former member of Bihar Vidhan Sabha, is presently President of Ramnika Foundation. Also, she is editor of a Hindi quarterly journal *Yudha Rat Aam Aadmi*, and Joint Secretary of Democratic Writers Association (Bihar-Jharkhand Chapter) as well as Member of National Council of Democratic Writers Association. She is a well-known Hindi poetess and novelist and has to her credit many collections of poems, short stories, novels and essays. She has bagged several awards for her literary achievements and social service.

Introduction

This is a book about Invisible India. With this publication, we have tried to peel back the dark curtains around the people and lands of the North-East and offered our readers a glimpse of the multi-hued cultural panorama of this diverse collection of states and communities.

This bibliography, published side-by-side in Hindi and English, marks for the first time that the Tribal writers of the North-Eastern states of India have been recognized and brought together in a single volume. This is a landmark achievement, that will help the various writers of the North-East for their impressive work and which will also contribute greatly to the enrichment of Indian language and literature.

The writers included in this volume represent the seven states and more than fifteen languages which comprise the land and tribal communities of North-East India. It is a land of cultural diversities and rich linguistic and social history, but a land whose people are too often neglected by the “mainstream” Indian national culture, so much so that we have come to think of the North-East itself as a kind of “invisible India.” Many Indian citizens in the North-East face looks of incomprehension when they travel to other parts of the country and are even sometimes asked, “Are you Indian?” The purpose of this volume is to bring the richness of this area’s history and present it to light. In bringing these writers and their achievements together in a single volume, we hope to begin a much-needed dialogue between the creative communities of the North-East and the rest of the country, which for too long has remained ignorant of the literary, linguistic, and cultural achievements of various tribal communities in the North-East. And we hope to bring to the people of the North-East, a kind of exposure and national recognition that they have been denied until now.

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as oral languages until the arrival of Christian missionaries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed the Lepcha language of Sikkim is believed to be even older than Sanskrit, but a written script was not created until Reverend William Start started a school for Lepcha language and culture in 1841. One interesting folk tale tells the story of how the spirits presented a script to the Mizo people on a piece of leather in ancient times, but due to negligence, it was eaten up by a dog. Thus the Mizos had to wait until 1894, when Reverends F.W. Savage and J.H. Lawrence created a script based to represent the vowel sounds of the language of communication between hunters, known as the Huntarian system in Mizoram. A great scholar Ram Das Boro is of opinion that Boro language was so rich that several of its aspects are considered to be the source of the Indian languages. It is a proven fact that the Boros came to India before the Aryans.

Madhu Ram Boro says that during the regime of the Boro kings, Devdhai script was in vogue. This script is engraved on the remnants of the Royal Gate at Deemapur.

Hence Bodos had a written script (which was subsequently lost) when they were rulers of this area during the Ahom Dynasty, it too was not recipient again of a written alphabet until 1895 when Reverend J.D. Anderson created the first script and grammar. Khasi emerged as a written language under the direction of a Welshman named Thomas Jones between 1810 and 1849 in Meghalaya, and was later improved upon and codified by Khasi intellectuals Jeebon Roy and Radhon Singh Berry. The achievements of all of these languages in creating a rich body of literature in only the last 100-150 years are therefore extremely impressive. One tribal writer refers to the development of a canon of Boro literature in the space of only fifty years like a "galloping horse". While it should be said that the development of all the languages of the North-East has been certainly uneven, that some languages have achieved greater success than others in the world of literature. For example with six Padmashree awards given to Mizo writers including two women, and several writers in Assam including Boro, Karbi and other tribal writers. It is also important to point out that tribal writers of all the languages and cultures and they are working hard towards that goal.

The tribal writers of the North-East do not simply write. They are linguistic, dealing with social and cultural activists and fighting for the life of their own native tongues. The writers in these pages have not only written creative literature, but have also codified grammars of their native languages. They have also produced histories of their communities stretching beyond recorded nationalist histories that examine prehistoric period, so that they may know the roots of their culture, community, and language. They have also written educational books for children and adult students, and translated important national and international works of literature and history into their local languages. In particular, the Boros, without any government assistance, have translated so many of the world's "classics," such as Shakespeare, Tagore, and the Hindu epics, into the Boro language. That they have succeeded in making Boro a language fit to be the principal medium of education in primary and secondary schools in some parts of Assam. Even a quick look at the entries included in this bibliography will impress the reader with the incredible literary and linguistic achievements of these tribal writers in just the last sixty years since Independence and creation of the North-East states.

Each individual entry of the more than ninety writers included in this volume offers more than just personal data and a list of publications. Every entry is also a window into the writers' culture, and the various ways that each of them has used literature to preserve and promote their own Languages and community Identities.

Though we have made our best efforts, we cannot claim that this volume represents all of the tribal writers of the North-East. We faced many hurdles due to lack of communication, the geographical distance and spread of these writers, as well as due to their sheer number. A second, and even more complete, volume is already being planned. But we hope that this book will serve only as a starting point for interested readers and students of Indian literature and culture to explore the rich collection of authors in the North-East. Any survey of Indian literature and culture would be incomplete without them.

Three years ago when I made up my mind to prepare and publish this bibliography of the North-Eastern tribal writers, the enormity of labour involved in it stood in the way. One of the major challenges

was to collect information about the writers. Dr. L.T. Liana Khiangte and Darchhawna from Mizoram, Bijoya Sawian from Meghalaya and Mangal Sing Hazowary from Assam came to our rescue and arranged both addresses of the writers and materials in their respect. I owe a debt of gratitude to each of them. Dr. Khiangte, Darchhawna (Mizo) and Bijoya Sawian (Khasi), Mangal Sing Hazowary (Bodo) and Theso Cropy (Karbi) took pains for us to transcribe the names of the writers accurately in Hindi.

It was Shri Prakash of kritika, Ranchi, who made it possible to contact writers by E-mail, telephone or by visiting places personally where necessary to get the Biodata required, for the book. I must thank him for this.

Once the requisite information and materials began to pour in, the real problem was to incorporate them in presentable write-ups. I wish to acknowledge my very great obligations to Aquil Quais who helped me on this front right from the beginning. Most of the write-ups of this bibliography have been prepared by him. It is no exaggeration to say that without his help, this book could not have been possible. Later on Ms. Ginger from U.S. joined the project and made necessary corrections. When she left India, Ms. Laura Brueck from U.S. (who is doing Ph.D. on Hindi Dalit writers) joined the team. She made significant contribution in making the prose of the book (English version) more acceptable to the readers at large. I express my hearty appreciation to each of them for their kind and helpful association.

I am also indebted to Mr. Dinesh, Mr. Rakesh, Mr. Ram Kuresh and others who helped in composing the matter of the bibliography patiently for months together. I must mention with special reference to Mr. Hare Prakash Upadhyaya who saw the proofs with special care and helped significantly in editing the stuff of the book in the final stage.

This volume of the bibliography is the first of a series of publications that we intend to bring out in course of time. While we intend to publish an enlarged edition of this first volume, many more volumes focusing on tribal writers from other parts of the country will be brought out. The next volume will be focused on eastern states viz., Orissa, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Bihar, southern states

comprising Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and western states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa and Rajasthan, central states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh and the remaining states viz. Uttaranchal, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab and Delhi. Though tribals inhabiting all parts of the country have suffered and neglected, the north-eastern tribals are the worst sufferers. For this very reason, this first volume of the bibliography is focused on them. It is regretted that we could not include the writers of Sikkim for lack of communication. Lepcha writers living in West Bengal have found a place in it.

I take great pleasure to commend this book to the readers and scholars. Suggestions to improve this volume and the other ones to come in the series are welcome.

Ramnika A-1/K

Ramnika Gupta

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Arunachal Pradesh

Adi/Apatani



BANI DANGGEN

Personal

Bani Danggen was born in Palling village in the Upper Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh. In his childhood he became an A. L. C. load carrier, but he was so young that he could barely manage to carry anything, so he was assigned to cook the A.L.C. Babu's food. After a year he was appointed as a Dak Kunner.

In 1963, he began his political career as a student when he became secretary of Adi Branch Student Union. In 1964, he won first prize in an extemporaneous speech competition at the All North-Eastern Students Meet in Guwahati. In 1976, he began his political career and became a member of the District Congress Committee. Then, in the 1977 elections, he joined hands with the Shri Bakin Partin Peoples' Party of Arunachal (P.P.A.) and in the same year he was elected as District Vice President. He became the Vice President of the state unit of the Janata Dal in 1993, and in the same year he also became the Chairman of the Teachers' Cell. In 1995, he joined the Arunachal Development Council as a member.

Education

Bani Danggen first studied in the Karko Inter-village School. In 1957, he joined Pani Khowa Baptist Mission School. Within one and a half years he was promoted to class five. He joined Dumduma High School in 1959. In 1960, he was back at Along High School (West Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh). He achieved second position in his Matric final in NEFA (Now Arunachal Pradesh), and for this he was awarded an Advisers prize. After higher secondary school, he went on to study in J.N. College at Pasighat and St. Stephen's College of Delhi University. He also obtained orange nursing training in Japan. In 1965, Danggen won all nine literary prizes in the college week of J.N. College, Pasighat, East Siang District (A.P.).

Contributions

Bani Daggan is a well-known expert in the system of tribal affairs. A widely travelled person, he has engaged primarily in writing and social work. His two books include **Kebang** and **The Book of Conversation**. **Kebang** is a study of three aspects regarding a unique indigenous political institution of Adi society. In this book he looks at the historical and mythological background of the **Kebang** system, its contemporary practice and the **Bogun-Bokang**, the highest political institution of the **Adis** society.

Selected Published Works

Kebang—2003, The Book of Conversation—2003.

Contact Information

Bani Daggan
Gegi Shopping Complex
Tinali Itanagar
Pin : 110024
Telephone : 0360-2291910



MAMANG DAI

Personal

Mamang Dai was born on February 23, 1957 at Pasighat, East Siang District, in Arunachal Pradesh. Her father's name is (retd.) Chief Secretary Matin Dai and her mother's name is Odi Dai. She was Selected to the IAS/IFS, 1979. Subsequently she left the service to pursue a career in journalism. She was appointed to the post of Programme Officer with World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Itanagar Office, during the first year of its establishment in the State. She worked in this capacity with the Bio-diversity Hotspots Conservation programme in the field of research, survey and protection of the Flora and Fauna of the eastern Himalayas. She was appointed adviser (Culture & Publicity) for the Donyi-Polo Mission, a voluntary organisation, and was involved with numerous programmes in the school for the Hearing Impaired, Itanagar.

Education

Mamang Dai did her schooling at Boarding school in Pine Mount School, Shillong, Meghalaya. She did her B.A. in English Literature from Guahati University Assam.

Contribution

Mamang is a Poetess, Story writer and a Journalist. She has written two books of poetry and one book in prose about Arunachal Pradesh. According to her, as far as I can remember I was always writing stories, poems, essays, in school and at home. I also read every book I could find especially during the school holidays when my father was posted in remote outposts. Even now I keep notebooks and journals.

She is Accredited journalist to the government of Arunachal Pradesh. Reporter for the Sentinel and Telegraph newspapers since 1992; and currently writing for Open Forum in the Statesman,

Kolkata, and for Guest column in The Telegraph, Guwahati. She is also affiliated to All India Radio and Door Darshan (DDK), Itanagar, covering news programmes and interviews since DDK was inaugurated in the state in 1996.

Currently she is the President, Arunachal Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ) and former Secretary, Itanagar Press Club. She is Vice-President of the North East Writers' Forum (NEWF), an organisation of writers/poets/essayists representing all the States of the North-East, including Sikkim, dedicated to the cause of promoting the literature of North East India.

She received the State's first Annual Verrier Elwin prize in the field of publication and print media. on her book Arunachal Pradesh The Hidden Land.

Selected Published Works

Arunachal Pradesh The Hidden Land, River Poems, Mountain Harvest The Food of Arunachal Pradesh.

Contact Information

Mamang Dai

Gute-Gamroh, C- Sector, Itanagar : 791111,

Itanagar (Arunachal Pradesh)

Telephone : 91- 0360-2212694.

E-mail : mamangdai@hotmail.com



N.N. OSIK

Personal

N. N. Osik was born on April 28, 1961 in Padu village in the upper Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh. He is a member of the Abor tribe. After his post graduation he worked as a school teacher 1983-84. He then became a District Research Officer. In 1985 Osik joined the Arunachal Pradesh Civil Services as an Extra Assistant Commissioner. He presently works as the Director of Civil Supplies for the Government of Arunachal Pradesh.

Education

Osik received his primary education at his village school in Pedu. He passed his matriculation from Government Higher Secondary School, Meob, in 1977. He joined St. Edmunds College, Shillong, for graduation and was awarded History Honours in 1981. He received his post-graduation from North East Hill University, Shillong, in 1983. While serving in different capacities in Arunachal Government he obtained a Doctorate in Philosophy in 1991 from Dibrugarh University.

Contribution

Osik started writing at a very early age. His first poem *Bidai Prarthana* was published in the Assamese journal *Deepak*. He has written articles and short stories for different magazines. *Myths Legends And Folktales Of Arunachal Pradesh* (2002) is a commendable contribution. He has written a *History of Arunachal Pradesh* and a book on the songs, dances, and holy places of his state.

Selected Published Works

Song and Dances of Arunachal Pradesh (Directorate of Art and Culture, Naharlagun)—2002. *Myths, Legends and Folk Tales of Arunachal Pradesh* (Directorate of Art and Culture, Naharlagun)—

2002, **Nibo–Robo** (A Myth of Abo Tani group of Arunachal Pradesh) Directorate of Art and Culture, Naharlagun—2002, **Holy Places of Arunachal Pradesh**, (Directorate of Art and Culture, Naharlagun)—2002, **Modern History of Arunachal Pradesh** (Himalayan Publishers, New Delhi, Itanagar)—2000, **A Brief History of Arunachal Pradesh** (Omsons Publications, New Delhi)—1993, **British Relations with Adis** (Omsons Publications, New Delhi)—1991.