

BOOK REVIEW

Sagnik Chakraborty, PhD Research Scholar, Department of History, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata 700050. Email Id- sagnik.chakraborty7@gmail.com

Rup Kumar Barman, *Paribarta Anusandhan: Rashtra, Nagarikatwa, Bastuchuti O Itihascharcha (Search for Alternative: State, Citizenship, Displacement and Historical Research)*, Kolkata, Gangchil, 2022, Page: 170, Price: 450 INR, Hardbound.

Historical writing on a region, nation or continent, even of ‘universal history’ gives immense pleasure to its readers by maintaining a perfect balance of literary flavour and historical reality. This type of perfect amalgamation can be noticed in a recently published work like *Paribarta Anusandhan: Rashtra, Nagarikatwa, Bastuchuti O Itihascharcha (Search for Alternative: State, Citizenship, Displacement and Historical Research)*, Kolkata, Gangchil, 2022.

Rup Kumar Barman, the author, connects the history of a region with national and international history in *Paribarta Anusandhan*. In the book, the author has connected his journey (from the Dooars region of the Indo-Bhutan border to an Indian metropolis through Darjeeling and Cooch Behar) with regional, national, and international events. In this process, he seeks to highlight the various genres of historiography from the 1970s to 2020. The author began the writing while narrating the scenic view of his native village, Chhoto Chowkir Bos, beside the *Raidak* River. While reminiscing about fifty years of his life experiences, the book presented an unwavering tale starting from Mahakalguri, Samuktala, Kamakshyaguri, Alipurduar, and Cooch Behar down to Kolkata. The book is not a monotonous recollection of memories, instead an excellent amalgamation of the author’s life sagas with the local histories and cultural and ethnographic illustrations of the places he visited. He linked local history with regional history and depicted how various international events affect personal lives and contemporary local and regional waves of life. His far-sighted eyes could draw a resemblance between the desolate village of Mahakalguri in the Dooars and the European village narrated by William Wordsworth (1770-1850) in *Solitary Reaper*. The rich literary enthusiasm and profound knowledge of history have adorned the memoir with the utmost uniqueness.

The author has divided *Paribarta Anusandhan* into four chapters. The first chapter is *Jatra Suru Hala* (the journey begins). In this part, the author gives a glimpse of the initial days of his life at the little village named ‘Chhoto Chowkir Bos’, enriched with natural scenic beauty, situated on the bank of *Raidak* river near the Indo-Bhutan border. He carefully crafted each memory of his childhood, largely imbibed with the region’s archaeological, historical, and cultural identity along with the

melody of Nepali and Assamese folk songs and provided detailed and picturesque descriptions of the diverse folk culture and festivals of the region. All these descriptions give the author's profound memories of Mahakalguri, Samuktala, Alipurduar and Kamakshyaguri, as well as the enriched local history and folklore of these places to the readers competently. Furthermore, the author presented the contemporary political situation of West Bengal, like the Communist political affairs of that time and its impact on regional politics. The author opined that the Assam Movement (1977–1985) and the Bangladesh Liberation War were crucial in changing the demography of his native place. Besides, the chapter reflects that a few regional movements in the 1980s and 1990s (such as the Bodoland Movement, the Kamtapuri Movement and the Gorkhaland Movement) profoundly impacted the region of North Bengal. The discussion also highlights several international issues, such as the Cold War (1948-91), the Liberation War of Bangladesh (1971), the GATT Treaty, the downfall of the Soviet Union (1991) and the extent of their effects on the people and society. Lastly, the chapter highlights that after moving on from the springs of college life, the author embarked upon a new journey in the 1990s with new prospects, faith, and experience.

The book's second chapter mainly revolves around Prof. Barman's life at the North Bengal University and Siliguri (in the Darjeeling district). In this chapter, the author has shown how harmony lies among the pupils of different language groups, castes, and creeds in the university campus. The unity in the campus, on the one hand, used to fascinate the author. On the other hand, the author encountered demeaning questions of casteism, which was a completely new and unexpected situation for him. During his university days, he came across the famous novel *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* by Adwaita Mallabarmān (1914-1951). This book left an everlasting influence on his mind. While describing life in university and his travelling experiences, the author highlighted the historical background of the Naxalbari movement. Simultaneously, Prof. Barman made the readers acquainted with various historiographical streams along with topics like the increase of labour migration in North Bengal, the agitated political circumstances in North Bengal in the late 90s, class and clan-based politics in university and sensitive issues such as the Kargil War (1991). The chapter ends with transcending the author's marvellous student life to set foot into professional life.

The third chapter begins with Professor Barman's journey as a permanent faculty member at ABN Seal College in Cooch Behar. In this chapter, he discusses the history and heritage of the former princely state, now an important district of West Bengal, Cooch Behar, from the early mediaeval period to the twenty-first century. Concurrent incidents around the world, such as the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre (2001), and the Durban Declaration (2001) got a special mention in the chapter. The author regretted that despite being a significant incident, the Durban Declaration failed to receive as much response from the masses and educated people as the first incident, although it was extremely important. The

Durban Conference blamed the colonial rule and its impact on generating racism and racial discrimination in the world. In this prospect, the author introduced Bengali society and colonial epistemology to the readers. In this process, Prof. Barman precisely reviewed the reaction of Indian intellectuals and the attitude of subaltern historians towards the lower caste. He opined that students from small towns and rural areas were subjected to innumerable problems and discrimination while adjusting to metropolitan areas. Repeatedly, they get rejected for being unknown and they fall victim to the intricacy of bureaucratic affairs. The author was no exception as well. Prof. Barman has written that in an interview, he faced an unexpected question that had gone “You are born and brought up in North Bengal, why do you want to join Jadavpur University?”, needless to say, he was quite astonished by the question. Despite all these hindrances, Professor Barman made his way to success with his knowledge. The chapter ends with a hopeful note by depicting Professor Barman’s journey to Kolkata to join the prestigious Jadavpur University.

To earn better opportunities and reach a better place, people often tend to leave their homeland, grow up years behind, and ship across the country, which is a common feature of ‘voluntary migration’. The fourth chapter highlights the idea of ‘voluntary migration’ and depicts how the author’s quest for better opportunities uprooted him from his homeland and embraced voluntary migration by settling in Kolkata to join Jadavpur University. In the first portion of this chapter, the author mentioned the distinct differences between rural areas and Kolkata’s city life, and the discriminatory behaviour of colleagues, but he did not hesitate to give prominence to the new horizon of research works Jadavpur University had presented before him. While dealing with various personal experiences, the chapter also provides the details of Prof. Barman’s dealing with various historiographical aspects, his two-decade-long research work by providing a deep insight into how he has always walked unconventional paths in quest of finding alternatives. While discussing all these issues, the chapter offers an insight into the heterogeneous issues like the partition of India, displacement of people, forced migration and anomalous topics such as environmental history, history of rivers and folk medicine, which were closely imbibed with the lives of Scheduled Caste refugees. According to Prof. Barman, one must derive information from archives and indigenous knowledge systems to write a history of the common people. To achieve this, the author advised the researchers to keep their foot on the ground to accumulate local beliefs and wisdom from the indigenous people. In this context, the author introduced the reader to Dalit Discourse and its various aspects. This chapter reflects the influence of historical awareness on Rup Kumar Barman’s life and personality.

In conclusion, it can be said that *Paribarta Anusandhan* is an exceptional memoir that relates the unique saga of an academic to contemporary society and events that span almost fifty years. The book provides a glance at the author’s views on the

different historiographies, the apparent effect of future administrative rules and regulations on lives and thrives to provide a guideline for future researchers to break the structure for acquiring necessary data. The memoir of Prof. Barman is not a mere collection of data or an anthology of contemporary historiography; it also tells the story of a man from a middle-class family in a remote area of North Bengal who fought and gained a significant place among the intellectuals in the cultural capital of the state.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

1. **Dr. Abhinandan Das**
Assistant Professor
Department of History
Raiganj Surendranath
Mahavidyalaya
Raiganj
2. **Anukta Gairola**
Guest Lecturer
Ambedkar University, Delhi
&
PhD Research Scholar
Department of History, Delhi
University, Delhi
3. **Chanchal Chowdhury**
Senior Joint Commissioner of
Revenue, West Bengal
4. **Dr. Ratna Paul**
Assistant Professor
Department of History
Birsa Munda College
5. **Sagnik Chakraborty**
PhD Research Scholar
Department of History
Rabindra Bharati University
Kolkata
6. **Sanchita Mahanta**
PhD Research Scholar
Department of History
University of North Bengal
7. **Santosh Kumar Sahani**
PhD Research Scholar
Department of History
University of North Bengal
8. **Subir Ghosh**
PhD Research
Scholar
Department of History
Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan
9. **Dr. Sudash Lama**
Associate Professor
Department of History
University of North Bengal
10. **Dr. Sufia Khatun**
Professor
Islamic History & Culture
Department
Jagannath University
Dhaka, Bangladesh
11. **Sweety Paul**
PhD Research Scholar
Department of History
University of North Bengal
12. **Topgyal Zimba,**
Assistant Professor
Department of History
Siliguri College

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