

## **Book Review: Maharaja Prithu - The Unsung Warrior King Who Annihilated Bakhtiyar Khalji.**

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This review is based on Patar, R. (2021). *Maharaja Prithu - The Unsung Warrior King Who Annihilated Bakhtiyar Khalji*. To write on the history of Northeast India and to highlight its unique shared cultural heritage with India is a herculean task, given the decades of neglect and marginalization which the history of the region has received from its mainstream historians; if today someone asks about Northeast India, the general perception in the minds of people (both scholarly and educated) about the region is that it is associated with insurgency and is a politically disturbed area. In this background, Dr. Raktim Patar's book makes a timely intervention to highlight the rich cultural linkages this region has shared with the rest of India. Patar teaches history at Garhgaon College and Dibrugarh University and has several publications to his credit.

One lacuna in the writings of Indian history has been the exclusion of the diverse, rich historical traditions of India's various regions. Seeing the region as separated and isolated began during the Colonial period. The Colonial authorities introduced terms like 'Mainstream' and 'Fringe,' divided the people into plain people and hill people, and legal regulations were enacted to separate areas of the region into 'Excluded Areas' and 'Partially Excluded Areas,' The publications of various Tribal Monographs, Census Reports laid the foundations for politically and psychologically dividing the people into diverse but opposing religious, ethnic and linguistic groups, in order to justify their rule the Colonial authorities harped on the theme of regions isolation from rest of the country and presented their rule as paternal and benevolent and protector of the tribal communities.

The process of marginalization of the history of Northeast didn't end after Independence, the late historian of Assam Surya Kumar Bhuyan tried to bring the attention of intellectuals in the field of historical research, at various forums like the Indian History Congress (Orissa Session, 1953) and Gauhati Session, 1959), he appealed to Indian historians to make Assam's

history as a part of mainstream history, unfortunately the history of Assam and Northeast remained neglected, even after the New Education Policy of 1986, in subsequent history text books issued by NCERT as well as books written by mainstream historians Northeast India was mentioned only during the Pre-historic period, giving an impression of the region to its readers as an Anthropological paradise, during the Medieval period, mainstream historians solely focussed historical research centred on the powers who occupied Delhi, the subsequent process of cultural syncretisation of Islamic and Hindu cultures and lastly the economic foundations and structures of the Medieval economy, This however doesn't present a complete picture of the political narrative of Medieval India, resistance offered by the native rulers against the Arab Invaders are mainly passed without reference or omitted in the writings of history. In Schools and University textbooks, reference is given to Bakhtiyar Khalji, who destroyed Nalanda University. However, little or nothing is known about Raja Prithu, the King of Assam, who defeated Khalji.

The present book entitled *Maharaja Prithu- The Unsung Warrior King Who Annihilated Bakhtiyar Khalji* by Dr. Raktim Patar tries to fill the gaps in the history of resistance against foreign invaders. The book is divided into eight chapters, which not only tell the historical event of the defeat of Bakhtiyar Khalji but introduce the readers to the shared cultural and political legacy between Assam and the rest of India (Chapter 1 *Northeast India: Cradle of Indian Civilization*), relying on the works done earlier by distinguished scholars like Dr. S.K. Chatterjee and other forgotten historians like Dr. P.C. Choudhury, he critiques the existing historical narratives of class conflict and cultural domination crafted by the Leftist historians and the narrative of Isolation introduced by Colonial Administrators only to be picked up by later Modern Assamese Historians like late H.K. Barpujari who stated that Assam maintained a 'Splendid Isolation,' from the rest of the country.

The Second Chapter, entitled '*Brief History of Kamarupa*,' is written to introduce the history of Assam, particularly to readers outside the region. The Third and fourth Chapter, '*Maharaja Prithu*' and '*Administration of Kamarupa during the time of Maharaja Prithu*,' introduce the readers to the main character of the event, Maharaja Prithu, and his administration, citing views of historians and scholars like R.M. Nath, K.L. Barua, S.K. Chatterjee and archaeological sources like the rock inscriptions of *Kanai Basasi* where mention of the defeat of Khalji's forces are recorded, the author presents well-detailed facts. In subsequent chapters five, six, and seven, the author introduces the characters of Bakhtiyar

Khalji and Ghiyasuddin Iwaz Khalji, on how they conquered Bihar and Bengal before setting out for a military expedition to Tibet which led them to come to Kamarupa and where the Arab invaders for the first time not only faced a humiliating defeat.

The last Chapter, entitled ‘ Kamarupa after Maharaja Prithu,’ describes the Political condition of Assam, where several kingdoms emerged like the Bara-Bhuyans, The Kacharis, The Chutiyas and finally, the foundation of the Ahom kingdom by Sukapha. Dr. Patar’s book is a well-researched book he has tried to bring back from historical obscurity. Maharaja Prithu relies on rich archival materials consisting of Archaeological and literary sources and secondary sources; the book is written exhaustively, presenting history from an Indic perspective, which will appeal to Scholars, students, and lay people in knowing history.