

Appendix:

Interviews with two of the Authors:

Interview with Dhruva Hazarika

The Questions and Answers:

1. You were a bureaucrat when you wrote the novel *Sons of Brahma*. Did your experience as a bureaucrat impel you to write the novel?

Answer—Yes, to a very good extent my experiences as a bureaucrat did impel me to write *Sons of Brahma*. But equally strong were my general feelings as an inhabitant of a remarkable, tumultuous region of our country. For too long had I seen violence that had taken too many lives, and the wide-spread fear that this violence had generated, seen a whole generation of youth floundering in helplessness. However, as a part of the bureaucracy I was allowed a glimpse into the working of the state machinery through individual acts of bravery and cowardice, of corruption as well as honesty.

2. In the novel *Sons of Brahma* you criticised both the insurgents and the leaders of the counter-insurgency operations. Being a part of the state machinery, was it not difficult for you to be a critic of the system of which you were also a part? .

Answer—I think the hallmark of our democratic set-up is such that it allows you to be critical of things that do not augur well for society as a whole. There are many issues within the bureaucracy that stand serious scrutiny. A writer's, especially a fiction writer's, subconsciousness often dictates the theme. At the same time, he is more bothered about scribbling a well- written story than expounding a cause, social or otherwise. He needs a base, a locale, a plausible platform. Once having found this, he proceeds with the sequences.

If in the process of this narration it is construed as being critical of the system of which the writer is a part, it is for the reader to decide although there is no denying the fact that there have been writers who have made it their specific goals to espouse social causes, issues. For others, as it is with me, it is not necessarily a deliberate attempt.

3. When you wrote *Sons of Brahma* Assam was primarily afflicted by the insurgent activities of ULFA and the Bodo militant groups; but the present affairs of the state is influenced by certain external elements. In this context what is your opinion about the present disconcerting situation in the state?

Answer—When I started the novel, it is true Assam was in a violent flux. But by the time the book came out in print things were not as grim. Assam, and the North- East, has always been in the eye of the storm of external forces as well as events, from the assistance rendered by foreign powers to the insurgents in the region to the unmitigated influx over the past several decades by illegal migrants. An illegality is an illegality. We cannot turn a conveniently blind eye to this. Especially when the social implications are massive. I do not think we can easily wash aside this threat. It will continue as long as we do not take up in right earnest a love of labour, a work culture that is not so senselessly dependent on white collar jobs only. Our land laws need redefining. Then again, we are riven by social stratification; there are far too many divisions among us in terms of ethnicity, race, language, geography. This does not augur well. Yet, given the tremendous motivation through which our present day youth continue to render the best possible service to our country, I have no doubt we can overcome the very obstacles created by our acts of omission and commission. For all this to happen, we, of course, need a very strong, decisive, perceptive and honest leadership, a leadership that faithfully swears by our Constitution. In thoughts, words and in deeds.

Interview with Srutimala Duara

1. How did you select the title of the novel?

Ans. As the protagonist of my novel is constantly on the move I thought of the word “travelling”. Though now at times I think chasing would have been better. And as the youths wanted to pursue some dream that made them join the militant organisation I wanted to have the word “dream” in the title. However, the youths had different reasons for joining the militant organisation, and this I got to know by talking to some of them during the heyday of the outfit. So I made the dream plural.... Not dream but dreams.

2. How do you select the names of your characters?

Ans. The central character is Jibon and I thought well this is life...perhaps that's why I gave him the name Jibon. As for Unmona, I simply found it to be an attractive name and very Assamese. I wanted to give Assamese names to the characters as the region in which my novel is set in Assam.

3. What was your hardest scene to write?

Ans. Every scene needs a lot of thoughtful planning. I had done a lot of research work on the outfit at that time. To make the scenes come alive was the challenge I had to face.

4. On whose image did you craft the character of Jibon?

Ans. No one in particular. The boys who joined the militant outfit and the news that kept on flashing in the dailies, the talks I got to hear about the boys at that time who joined but wanted to come out, yet caught in the web...all contributed to my character.

5. What do you think about Insurgency and what made you write on this topic?

Ans. Youths having to take up arms is a sad thing. But they had seen and felt something that made them choose the path of violence. Though violence cannot be justified many people supported their welfare activities. Their building broken bridges, helping the villagers, and other social works had the sympathy of the people at one point of time.

It was the burning issue at the time I wrote this novel. It affected us all. And I thought it would interest readers from the rest of India too just as it had caught my imagination. Our boys are not hard hearted. At core they are soft, but the neglect of this part of the country, the ignorance of the people about the region, all added to my wanting to write, narrating through fiction about our region as the state of affairs was at that time.