

The NEHU Journal

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Vol II No 2
July 2004

The NEHU Journal

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The NEHU Journal is published bi-annually (January-July) by the North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Shillong. The focus of the journal is on India's Northeast and countries bordering it. Articles on other areas are also welcome. Contributors are advised to consult notes at the back.

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All correspondence related to the journal may be addressed to the Editor, NEHU Publications, Bijni Complex, Shillong-793003 or at tbsubba@sancharnet.in.

Production Assistants : Surajit Dutta & Binod Rynjah

Layout and Design : Shongdor Diengdoh

Editorial

I begin this editorial with an apology for the delay in getting the present issue off. Actually it was not planned to be a literature issue, as it has turned out to be, courtesy the hard work put behind it by the Associate Editor. It was meant to be a social science issue that somehow could not happen, though not the least for lack of submissions. There were enough submissions, but they were

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I note this with some surprise that most of our contributors are, fortunately or unfortunately, not subjected to peer review, and when they are asked to revise/rewrite as per the referee's comments they are shocked and their egos are hurt. They decide not to revise/rewrite and send their articles to some 'better' journal. This is not only true of senior colleagues who have some reason to rebel against the referees' comments but even the younger ones do not seem to have the necessary courage and culture to be rectified. They live in a world of their own creation, as most of us often do, but they must look out of their window and see how much the world has changed outside.

Literature is quite a different cup of tea. It is about creativity, and any piece of creativity is an object of art. Hence at least worth having a critical look at it, if not appreciate it, particularly if the creator is not a celebrated figure. But one must move on with the belief that some of the best creations can come out of the fingers of the most ignoble, the most uncelebrated, the most unknown, and the most unexpected...

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This issue is dedicated to such a possibility.

T B Subba
Editor

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Editor**

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Subversion of Conventional Morality in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*: A Post Modern Perspective

T. J. JOSEPH

Of all the novels of Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* is noticeably most informed by his multiple and contrasting perspectives on the problematic nature of human existence. And consequently, it involves the post modern debate on the question of finality of meaning and universal truth. More than any of his preceding novels *Jude the Obscure* explores the relationship between man and the universe, man and society, and between man and woman in their conjugal life. Ian Gregor's understanding of the novel is worth our attention:

It seems, almost ostentatiously, to be "about" so many things – a malevolent universe, an outworn system of education, the rigidity of the marriage laws.....¹

It is this simultaneous preoccupation with divergent and contrasting issues which undermines any critical attempt to attribute a finality of vision to the novel's central meaning. The conventional ending of the novel is not in harmony with the tone and mood of this superb work. Judging from the structural design of the novel as well as its internal tensions, *Jude the Obscure* is Hardy's rejection of any totalizing attitude. It is a plea for cultural as well as ethical pluralism.

Hardy's ultimate imaginative vision may rightly be compared

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with that of Dostoevsky:

Dostoevsky inaugurated a new "polyphonic" type of fiction in which a variety of discourses expressing different ideological positions are set in play without being ultimately placed and judged by a totalizing authorial discourse.²

However, in spite of the skilfully preserved symmetry of the novel, it received vitriolic criticism from the reviewers as well as the reading public. The Bishop of Wakefield announced in a letter to the papers that 'he had thrown Hardy's novel into fire.'³ A critic of the *New York Word* said '...when I finished the story I opened the windows and let in the fresh air...'⁴ There has been no dearth of disparaging criticism of this superbly executed novel which was considered by Hardy himself as the most moral of all his works.

The only point in the novel on which I feel sure is that it makes for morality... that the ethical feelings of the novel, even if somewhat crudely put, was as high as that of any of the bishop's sermon's...⁵

Even today there is no critical consensus about the ultimate vision embodied in the novel. The inherent ambivalence of the novel continues to paralyse any attempt to arrive at a closure. Besides, Hardy's refusal to accept any totalizing principles as true is suggestive of the post modern tendencies. Postmodernism condemns 'universalising meta-narratives ... which ruthlessly expunge particular or local ... in its drive towards universal rationalisation.'⁶ *Jude the Obscure* marks an important stage in the development of ethical awareness, and an increasing recognition of the irreducible diversity of voices and interests which are true in their own right and context. Hardy himself acknowledged the contrasting elements in the novel: 'Of course the book is all contrasts – or was meant to be in its original conception.'⁷ It is through the interplay of opposites that Hardy gives expression to his "series of

seemings” or “impressions.” Consequently, the novel displays a sense of the irresolution of issues. What the novel ultimately leaves behind is a ‘dualistic impression.’⁸ This is because ‘we do feel a genuine disparateness of theme, a constant oscillation of interests.’⁹ The characters are seen in ‘constantly shifting emphasis and depth.’¹⁰ The dialectics in Hardy’s imagination can be best comprehended if we examine the three basic issues in the novel – relationship between man and the universe, man and his society, and the question of marriage laws.

In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy’s long standing love-hate relationship with nature receives a thorough probing. His critical estimate of nature is best expressed by Phillotson’s remark to Arabella:

Cruelty is the law pervading all nature and society; and we can’t get out of it if we would (p.389).

Phillotson’s observation is an echo of Sue when she cries out “O why should nature’s law be mutual butchery!” (p.378) Hardy seems to go back on himself by ‘making nature shares with society the responsibility of man’s unhappiness.’¹¹ Among other things the novel reveals Hardy’s enhanced awareness of the plight of man in his cosmic setting. There is an intensification of his consistent belief that the universe is malign, hostile and always thwarts man’s efforts to achieve success and happiness in life. The novel evokes a sense of ‘cosmic tragedy,’¹² a sustained air of ‘cosmic gloom.’¹³ Like Alexander Pope, Hardy complains of a snag in the cosmic structure. The universal order is marked by complexity, contradictions and incompatible elements. There are various episodes in the novel which illustrate that man and animals alike are victims of nature’s cruelty. Orphaned by the premature death of his parents, Jude feels himself unwanted by everyone, even by his own aunt, Drusilla. The inherent cruelty of nature is discovered by Jude even as a tender boy of eleven years of age. It is first evident when Jude is physically punished by Farmer Troutham for letting the rooks eat the farmer’s corns. Young Jude is surprised at the scheme of things:

That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony (p.57).

The same perplexity is encountered later by Phillotson when he lets Sue go free from her marriage contract with him. He is dismissed by the School Management for his liberal attitude towards Sue. And yet he "did not see how an act of natural charity would injure morals" (p.312).

In *Jude the Obscure*, the term 'nature' is taken both as an impersonal, external force and as the 'inner voice' of the individual. Since as an external force nature remains callous and indifferent to man's aspirations, it is the inner voice, the dictates of the inner self that Hardy seems to rely upon as the true basis of actions. At the same time Hardy seems to suggest that 'the personal fate of the individual is largely at the mercy of impersonal forces over which he has little control.'¹⁴ Then the question that the novel raises is the extent to which man's inner voice is free from the influence of nature as an external force. According to Peter J. Casagrande, 'Hardy believed that human life is unavoidably out of harmony with the orders that encompass its movements.'¹⁵ Within such cosmic design man is doomed to failure, no matter how authentic and resourceful he is. Jude's life is a robust statement of the impossibility of achieving centrality in the mysterious cosmic scheme. Nor is there any comfort producing meaning of life. Aunt Drusilla's belief that there is a natural curse on Jude's family further demonstrates the cruelty of nature as Hardy saw it. Little Father Time's murderous act is a response to his reflections on the law of nature after his conversation with Sue. Soon after this tragedy we find Jude trying to console Sue by saying "It was in his nature to do it" (p. 410). It is this deep sense of determinism which informs *Jude the Obscure* and excludes even the possibility of living according to one's inner voice, for the supposed source of the inner voice itself is antagonistic to man. In the face of such cosmic hostility, Hardy raises doubt about the propriety of leading what is called 'natural' life, and the

novel testifies to this dilemma in Hardy.

Apart from nature, society is also partly responsible for the existential plight of man. Claiming itself as an enunciator of natural laws, society creates its own structure which further aggravates the existential traumas of man. Jude's fate proves how difficult it is for man to fight against circumstances and surroundings. Circumstances, bad chances, poverty, society and his own natural inclinations combine to make his life a battle ground. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy shows how both nature and society contrive to frustrate the genuine aspirations of man. In a letter addressed to one of his friends Hardy wrote:

The "grimy" features of the story go to show the contrast between the ideal life a man wished to lead, and the squalid real life he was fated to lead... It is in fact, to be discovered in everybody's life though it lies less on the surface perhaps than it does in my poor puppet's...¹⁶

Hardy seems to re-examine seriously his earlier belief that social conventions are the concrete articulation of natural laws. Both the laws are intransigently inimical to man. In this connection, William R. Goetz's observation is worth quoting:

In *Jude the Obscure* the natural law initially seems to be prior to the social law, which must be interpreted either as an "enunciation" or a deformation of it. By the end of the novel, these two laws are threatening to collapse into one; or rather they become two versions of a system of determinism that governs human fate.¹⁷

Both nature and society are seen as partners in wreaking havoc on the human individual. Man is ultimately ravaged by these two inescapable external forces. First Jude is trapped by his own natural sexual instincts towards Arabella, thereby shattering his academic hopes through a duped marriage. Then his renewed hopes

are further defeated by his magnetic, natural affinity he feels for Sue. In spite of the individual differences of their unique personalities, they would have remained happy had it not been for the unyielding attitude of their society. What seems to be emphasised by Hardy is that

the cruelty resulting from the laws of nature resembles the cruelty brought about by laws of man: both kinds of laws have a relentless universality, an indifference to the fate of the individual... In their monolithic universal quality, the laws of nature become arbitrary, cruel and machine-like.¹⁸

Hardy's tragic hero and heroine are caught between these two forces.

The question that naturally arises is that in such uncertain cosmic structure what kind of morality should one adhere to? – Individual or social? *Jude the Obscure* can be studied as a critique of both types of morality, their virtues as well as drawbacks. This is why the novel defies any critical attempt to elicit a singularity of vision. The reverse movements of the chief protagonists – Jude and Sue – are balanced in such a way as to make any finality of vision impossible. Jude proceeds from a state of conventionality to that of unconventionality whereas Sue moves from blatant unconventionality to perverse conventionality. When Jude gradually severs himself from the oppressive creeds and dogmas of society and creates a new self for him, he remains committed to it. It is a commitment born of conviction. It cannot be affected by even the most grotesque of adversities. Before his acquaintance with Sue, Jude was more or less a conformist. If he accepted a situation, he had done it with utmost truthfulness to his own self at a given moment of time. What distinguishes Jude from Sue is the authenticity of his personality. For instance, when Arabella feigns pregnancy in order to drag Jude into an early marriage with her, he makes no effort to eschew responsibility. His own instinctive sense of morality is best

expressed when he tells Arabella:

I have next to no wages as yet, you know; or perhaps I should have thought of this before..... But, of course, if that's the case, we must marry! what other thing do you think I could dream of doing (p. 101).

These are the morally assuring words of a man who owns up to the responsibility of his carnal desires. Even though a marriage at this juncture would smash all his hopes, he is ready to forfeit them in order to remain true to the morality of his inner self. In spite of his conviction that Arabella is not an epitome of real womanhood, he accepts the consequences of his action.

Yet, such being the custom of the rural districts among honourable young men who had drifted so far into intimacy with a woman as he unfortunately had done, he was ready to abide by what he had said, and take the consequences (p.102).

Jude remains loyal to his own natural sense of right and wrong. Simplicity is the distinctive trait of Jude's personality. Ann, a friend of Arabella speaks of Jude as "simple as a child" (p.85).

In contrast, Arabella is inauthentic, insincere and cunning. Her words are lies, her hair is false and her motive of marrying Jude is not informed by any sincere love for him. She is an embodiment of carnal physical desires and despicable practicality. She is a symbol of the hypocrisies and selfish interests of the emerging utilitarian society. Hers is not a 'spontaneous animality,' but 'calculated coquetry.'¹⁹ Nothing more vividly illustrates her practicality of life than the scene where she tries to seduce Vilbert while Jude is lying in his death bed. 'The Pig symbolism used for Arabella successfully brings out her essential sickness.'²⁰ She is an antithesis to Jude's intrinsic sense of morality and altruism. In a way she reveals the hypocrisy of the emerging modern milieu.

Though Jude began his career as a conformist, yet his total personality was always in disharmony with the natural and social world around him. His was a life surrounded by the inauthenticity of society and people. From the very outset of the novel, Jude is confronted with a world that is out of tune with his authentic temperament and attitude. The remaining tale of Jude is a painful self-discovery that his sense of natural harmony and sincerity of intention will always be a rarity in the world. As a young boy he is deceived by Physician Vilbert who promises to give him Greek and Latin grammars. Then his dream of entering Christminster, the centre of learning is obstructed by the deceitful Arabella. And the final blow comes in the guise of Sue who deserts him after converting him to her own radical beliefs and ideologies. Sue's final desertion of Jude points to two things – first, the doubtful integrity of her former conviction; secondly, the implacable influence of society on the individual. Jude has always been a victim of social conventions. Apart from his early marriage with Arabella the stratified Victorian society has been responsible for Jude's failure to get admitted into the university. Hardy himself declared that the novel is a pathetic tale of a socially and economically disadvantaged youth's frustrated attempts to receive university education. Hardy is highly critical of the discriminative attitude of the Victorian society in particular and every other similar society in general. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy has more or less truthfully followed the general tendencies of narrative literature which shows 'the fortunes of characters as they define themselves and are defined by various combinations of their past, the choices they make and the social forces that act upon them.'²¹ The much awaited letter from a Master in one of the colleges clearly states the conservative attitude of the society of Hardy's time. It was a society that catered to the affluent, the influential and socially privileged classes. *Jude* has affinity with *The Poor Man and the Lady* in its stringent and direct attack on class prejudice and the economic squashing of aspirants of humble station. Jude's intellectual abilities and brilliance cannot find fertile soil for fulfilment in such a snobbish social world. And Hardy is

eschew responsibility. His own instinctive sense of morality is best

vocal in his resentment of the social apartheid practised by the so called enlightened, intellectual community of his time. What Jude embodies in his thoughts and feelings is

the deepest aspirations of his class, and generation – for education, for an enlarged professional skill, for a more scientific philosophy, and above all for personal and sexual relationship based on a new level of candour and equality.²²

But Jude's hope of rising above his cramped social condition is frustrated by the rigidities of society. The frustrated Jude then reconciles himself to his inescapable fate and retorts:

And I don't regret the collapse of my university hopes one jot. I wouldn't begin again if I were sure to succeed. I don't care for social success any more at all (p. 177).

He is disappointed with society, with its fixed laws and notions, bias and social exclusion of the poor. The observation of Sue about Christminster is, to a great extent, Hardy's own views:

It is an ignorant place, except as to the towns' people, artisans drunkards, and paupers... They see life as it is, of course; but few of the people in the colleges do. You prove it in your own person. You are one of the very men Christminster was intended for when the colleges were founded; a man with a passion for learning, but no money, or opportunities, or friends. But you were elbowed off the pavement by the millionaires' sons (p.205).

Any social arrangement based on economic or class divisions is unethical, for it excludes the marginalised 'other.' An individual's potential for growth can be throttled by such socio-economic structures. Hence, it is immoral. Society's egoistic arrangements are perceived by Hardy as an attempt of the affluent to retain

social, economic and political power centres. These are historical and opportunistic cultural constructs. They are not, by their very nature, informed by any natural truth.

Social conventions and ethical principles receive rigorous critical scrutiny in *Jude the Obscure* when Hardy dwells upon the question of marriage laws. Though he declared that the central concern in the novel is not with marriage laws, yet this issue seems to occupy a major portion of the narrative. The technique employed in the narrative is to place genuine and authentic individuals, like Jude and Sue, in dialectical opposition to society's established moral paradigms. In the process of exploring the unsettled debate about the validity of individual and social morality, Hardy provides a critique of both without betraying any authorial predilection. Yet the novel clearly illustrates one thing that Hardy's ethical impulses have not conformed themselves intellectually to social morality although emotionally he remains a conventionalist. This division in Hardy can be felt throughout the novel. By portraying the tumultuous lives of Jude and Sue with their unconventional ideas and attitudes, Hardy takes the narrative to the subtle question of marriage laws. Jude may be said to represent all that is natural which comes into conflict with the artificial, whereas early Sue embodies the intellectual rebellion against all that is irrational in society. Together they form a revolutionary voice against society's stubborn resistance to comprehend the very basis and meaning of marriage. Jude's is a very natural, instinctive kind of personality. It was his impulsive nature which drew him to Arabella once, and it is the same force which later draws him to Sue. Jude's life and character vividly express Hardy's deep insight into human nature:

He knew there was an element in human nature, not subject to mathematical or the water, tight theories of dogma, and this intransigent, measureless force, divided against itself, is in conflict alike with its own system of laws and the unknown laws of the universe, was the real theme

of Hardy's novels.²³

Jude the Obscure questions by implication the primacy of thought over feeling, reason over instinct. The novel demonstrates the predicament and tragic consequence of the individual's craving for natural existence in a society constructed by the rational consciousness of man. Though crushed by both nature and society, Jude does not flee from his half-natural, half-created self unlike Sue. What gives an irresistible morality to Jude's personality is his tenacious truthfulness to his natural self. There is neither pretension nor hypocrisy in his dealing with both women who enter his life. Both are treated with equal magnanimity and with an inexorable commitment to his sense of right and wrong. Jude does not desert either Arabella or Sue, but he is deserted by both. In his relationship with both the women Jude displays an incontestable sense of moral integrity. His unimpeachable sense of right and wrong is best expressed when he struggles to resist his natural impulses towards Sue, his own cousin. It is an incontrovertible evidence of Jude's primary urge to honour the 'letter' of his marriage with Arabella.

The epigraph of the whole novel chosen by Hardy is "The Letter Killeth". Here "letter" stands for the laws, conventions and customs of society which remain insensible to the quintessence of a unique individual. The epigraph is taken from St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (Chapter 3:6). Interestingly, the second half of this quotation, "the spirit (that) giveth life" is omitted by Hardy. This apparently deliberate omission adds to the subtlety of meaning and puzzles the critics in their attempt to arrive at a consensus about the finality of Hardy's moral vision. The "letter" of the law becomes the emblem of what is wrong with the institutionalized society.²⁴ If Hardy had taken the whole quotation of St. Paul then it would mean the "spirit" is more redemptive than the "letter". But the dramatic ending of the novel holds back the readers from dashing into such easy conclusion, and this is what Hardy wanted to accomplish in his last novel. Hardy refuses to take sides, and

presents issues before the readers for their own personal judgement. Judging Hardy as a conventionalist from the formal ending of the novel is a critical error. The epigraph is too obvious to prove otherwise. As it is, the epigraph reveals the opposition between 'the state of civil society and the state of nature'²⁵ the "letter" kills something or somebody. What or who does it kill? From the narrative structure of the novel we can easily answer these questions: the "letter" kills "otherness", difference and authenticity. And yet, Hardy seems to ask himself whether these are worth defending. The answer is, they are. The tragedy is that they can't find a place in a social structure that is too intolerant to accommodate differences. By quoting only the first part of St. Paul's letter, Hardy attempts to show the pernicious tendency of man made laws which thwart all that is elemental in man. And by avoiding the second part of the quotation he refuses to be labelled as a moral preacher, for his works are only a 'series of seemings or impressions.' It is after a long struggle between the claims of the "letter" and of the "spirit" that Jude denounces the former for the latter. But the "spirit" does not give him life, rather takes away his life literally and Sue's psychologically.

Jude's initial respect for established social conventions cannot hold on for long against his natural impulses in his relationship with Sue. The natural ultimately triumphs over the unnatural. In his struggle "the human was more powerful in him than the Divine" (p.267). It is, however, after long meditation and inner struggle that Jude surrenders to his instinctive self:

Some men would have rushed incontinently to her, snatched the pleasure of easy friendship which she could hardly refuse, and have left the rest to chance. Not so Jude – at first (p.146).

But once he recognizes the intensity of his affinity with Sue and his love for her, he remains true and loyal to the end. Never does he disown the consequences of his action. Jude's attraction

for Sue has a qualitative difference from his earlier attraction for Arabella. The latter was of a physical and carnal nature. But the Jude-Sue relationship is characterized by its spiritual, ethereal quality. The ineffable, mysterious affinity that exists between Jude and Sue is acknowledged by even the aggrieved Phillotson. A reflection attributed to him confirms that fact: "They seem to be one person split in two" (p. 293). From the orthodox point of view Jude's fascination for Sue may be regarded as immoral, for he "was licensed by the laws of his country to love Arabella and no other unto his life's end..." (p. 146). But here Hardy is engaged in a critical scrutiny of the very basis of a durable, meaningful marriage. After Jude's matrimonial debacle with Arabella, he realizes the inherent error of their union:

Their lives were ruined, he thought; ruined by the fundamental error of their matrimonial union: that of having based a permanent contract on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connection with affinities that alone render a life-long comradeship tolerable (p.115).

Viewed from outside the purview of conventional ethical standards, their marriage lacks the support of any natural ties that alone are capable of sustaining a life-long relationship. Though in his heart Jude is convinced of its invalidity, especially after the discovery of Arabella's feigned pregnancy, yet he remains committed to the social norms:

There was perhaps something fortunate in the fact that the immediate reason of his marriage had proved to be non-existent. But the marriage remained (p.107).

It reveals Jude's conscious attempt to conform. Nothing is more moving than his sincere efforts to pray against his new weakness for Sue. But ultimately the natural in him proves too forceful for the life denying social morality. It is too tangibly evident when he tells Sue:

I'll never care about my doctrines or my religion any more! Let them go! Let me help you, even if I do love you and even if you... (p. 276).

According to William R. Goetz, *Jude the Obscure* 'seeks to call into question the institution of marriage on the grounds of natural morality.'²⁶ What compels Phillotson to allow Sue to go to Jude is his intuitive sense of the immorality of holding her back forcibly. He makes no secret of it when he discusses the issue with his friend, Gillingham:

I know I may be wrong – I know I can't logically or religiously, defend my concession to such a wish of hers; or harmonize it with the doctrines I was brought up in. Only I know one thing: something within me tells me I am doing wrong in refusing her (p. 293).

What prompts Phillotson to make such concession is his awareness of a natural morality as opposed to the social.

Both Jude and Phillotson have an intuitive awareness of what is right and what is wrong. They respect the 'otherness' of the other, something unthinkable in the pre-modern world, but celebrated in the post-modern world. Social and moral laws in any society are formulated on the basis of a belief in the 'metaphysics of presence' – a notion that there is a transcendental signified, a God-Word that underlies all philosophical talk and guarantees its meaning.²⁷ Hardy never believed in the transcendental presence of a purposeful, conscious being from whom emanates everything in the phenomenal world, or who attributes meaning to life. He never believed in the possibility of an ultimate Truth or Being. In this Hardy seems to have anticipated the postmodernist scepticism on the possibility of truth. Jim Powell's view of Derrida is worth quoting because Hardy seems to share the spirit of Derrida:

According to Derrida, all Western thought is based on the idea of a centre – an Origin, a Truth, an Ideal

Form, a Fixed Point, an Immovable Mover, an Essence, a God, a Presence, which is usually capitalised, and guarantees all meaning. The Problem with centres, for Derrida, is that they attempt to exclude. In doing so they ignore, repress or marginalize others (which become the other).²⁸

The logical outcome of such structures of thought is a tendency towards fixity, institutionalization and totalitarianism. Within such social atmosphere, the unique and the authentic will be oppressed by the social machinery. It is society's refusal to accept plurality of thinking which causes the tragedy of Jude and Sue. According to William K. Frankena 'Morality must ... recognize various sorts of excuses and extenuating circumstances.'²⁹ This is exactly what is not happening in *Tess of the d'Urvilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. Hardy regrets the societal attempt to freeze the free play of differences in the individual. It is a blatant refusal to recognise the pluralistic nature of man. The issues raised in Hardy's last two novels transcend the barriers of conventionality, pointing to a world of multiplicities.

Jude Fawley's transition from a state of conventionality to that of unconventionality unveils his increasing awareness of the absurdity of universalism. His is a gradual evolution from an uncritical acceptance of conventions through doubt and questioning, to an intellectual comprehension of the invalidity of man made laws. The tenacity of his conviction, earned through experience and meditation, is too powerful to sever him from their influence even in the midst of intolerable adversities. Whereas Sue makes a backward journey intellectually with the change of her circumstances, Jude remains intransigent. His 'identity is based on personal qualities that are revealed during the tribulations of life.'³⁰ In his stoicism Jude has an affinity with Crabriel Oak of *Far From the Madding Crowd*. The essential self of Jude comes into being in his encounters with the world. Essentially Jude has been authentic and Sue inauthentic. Her inauthenticity is exhibited through trying circumstances. In this connection the observation of Jonathan Culler is worth our attention:

Western novels reinforce the notion of an essential self by suggesting that the self which emerges from trying encounters with the world was in some sense there all along, as the basis for actions which, from the perspective of readers, bring this self into being. The fundamental identity of characters emerges as the result of actions, of struggles with the world, but then this identity is posited as the basis, even the cause of those actions.³¹

There is an indisputable harmony between Jude's natural self and his actions. During his initial inclinations towards Sue, Jude engages into an inner battle against the temptations as a married man. It is not Arabella's personality or his love for her which inspires him to be moral, but his spontaneous respect for a religious marriage contract. Falsity is alien to Jude's natural make up. For instance, when Phillotson comes to seek a clarification about the scandalous relationship between Sue and Jude, he would have easily sent him off in agony and defeat. But Jude is a genuine, authentic person, and "his action did not respond for a moment to his animal instinct" (p. 219). The most redeeming trait of Jude's personality is his acutely felt concern for others. At his surprise encounter with Arabella in a bar at Christminster after so many years of absence, Jude "pitied while he condemned her" (p. 244). While feeling a keen sense of revulsion for her decline into despicable dissoluteness, as a legal husband he felt pity for her. "She seems much the same as ever—an erring, careless, unreflecting fellow-creature." (p.331) When Arabella comes to the lodging of Jude and Sue, pleading for help, his natural sympathy is aroused. To Sue's argument that Arabella is no longer his wife, he retorts: "What those legal fellows have been playing at in London makes no difference in my relation to her" (p.331). What is striking about Jude's personality is that in him is combined the spirituality of Sue and the animality of Arabella.

The only occasion when Jude seems to lapse into inauthenticity is when he diverts his attention from his frustrated

intellectual ambition to altruistic ecclesiastical adventures. It is not the consequence of any ethical enthusiasm although it was there in him before he met Sue. This voluntary transition of Jude from authenticity to inauthenticity is short-lived. However, it reveals how social circumstances can lead people into a life of inauthentic existence:

He feared that his whole scheme had degenerated to, even though it might not have originated in, a social unrest which had no foundation in the nobler instincts; which was purely an artificial product of civilization. There were thousands of young men on the same self – seeking tract at the present moment (p.181).

It is an anticipatory echo of what he will discover painfully later about the Wessex music composer. Finer instincts in a man are strangled by the rapidly changing social world which is more materialistic and artificial than spiritual and natural.

In the last two parts of the novel Hardy's chief focus is on the question of marriage laws. Marriage as a legal institution is placed under scathing critical scrutiny, especially through the radical views of Sue. She is apprehensive about the capacity of a marriage contract to sustain permanent love between the partners. She tells Jude:

I have just the same dread last an iron contract should extinguish your tenderness for me, and mine for you, as it did between our unfortunate parents (p. 323).

Marriage as a misguided convention receives a penetrating treatment in the novel. Sue finds a relationship without any legal backing likely to be more enduring and passionate than the one brought about by legal contract. Hardy is exploring the viability of a union based on mutual understanding and natural affinities, rather than one created through a legal contract which undermines the real meaning of marriage. According to William R. Goetz *Jude the*

Obscure 'would demonstrate the perversion of a marriage that strays from the laws of nature into cruelty and yet cannot be corrected through divorce.'³³ A legal contract, argues Sue, is potentially destined to drain away all the natural passion for each other. People generally react against external compulsions. A permanent contract must be based on good will, not on any binding law. Sue is aggressively outspoken about her hatred of marriage institution:

What Arabella has been saying to me has made me feel more than ever how hopelessly vulgar an institution legal marriage is – a sort of trap to catch a man – I can't bear to think of it (p. 337).

Sue sees a conventional marriage contract irrevocably binding. If the initial passions of a union dither away and living together becomes intolerable, there is no scope for separation in the conventional scheme of marriage contract.

What Sue resents most is the 'spiritual bankruptcy and cruelty'³⁴ of a civil contract. Throughout the novel Sue and Jude live in a constant state of tension between civil laws and the laws of nature. A legal marriage contract is fundamentally based on the utterance of a pledge. In other words, it is the "letter" and not the "spirit" which determines the union. In this connection Goetz observes:

In so far as marriage furnishes the "machinery" for Jude the Obscure, the novel becomes an exploration of the marriage contract considered both as "letter" and speech act.³⁵

If we deny the 'metaphysics of presence', then a marriage contract which is fundamentally based on mere utterance of a pledge cannot claim to have any sanctioning authority. It is particularly this absurdity of the contract which constitutes the basis for Hardy's critique of marriage as an institution. In conventional contract, marriage is simply a speech act, an oath. And the convention of the

marriage oath is intrinsically incongruous because of the nature of promises and the nature of human diversity. A momentary feeling, an oath, binds one for life as it happens between Jude and Arabella. Most legal marriage contracts are based on physical attraction, not on spiritual affinity. Besides, the conventional, legal contracts do not attempt to find out whether such contracts are based on mere sexual attraction or spiritual affinity. According to Sue, legal marriage is not only a verbal convention, but also an occasion for the sexual act.³⁶ She contends that 'if the "spirit" of marriage seems to be contained in its verbal contract, its "letter" is found in the sexual act.'³⁷ And it is the letter that almost "killeth" Sue. She sees legal marriage as a licensed occasion for sexual acts. However, what Sue fails to recognize is the truth that sex is a natural, procreative act. Yet, her natural repulsion towards sex is only a minor snag in an otherwise natural response to the question of marriage.

The fundamental objections raised by Sue to a legal marriage contract call for a critical evaluation of this natural phenomenon. Even Mr. Phillotson's approach to Sue's request for a mutual separation is informed by his deep insight into the problematic issue of marriage contract. His eventual decision to grant Sue freedom reveals his acute awareness of natural morality as against the superficial, oppressive morality of society or the church. When caught between the opinions of society and his own personal convictions about the serious nature of his relation with Sue, Mr. Phillotson listens only to his conscience. He places the individual above the social laws and religious conservatism, and let Sue go her own way. In the eyes of society his position may be indefensible, but not in the eyes of natural law. Their marriage has not been one of mutual love and understanding. And she has no hesitation in undoing such a loveless union which would be only a misery to both:

I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one has done so ignorantly! I dare say it happens to lots of women; only they submit, and I kick...

when people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times we have the unhappiness to live in, what will they say! (p. 276).

Sue's radical views about the conventional rules of marriage may be provocative to the moral sensibility of a traditional society. But Hardy's purpose is to turn the attention of the readers to the rigidity of moral laws that are callous to unique cases. Not only Sue, but even Phillotson feels the same with regard to their separation:

... I am more and more convinced everyday that in the sight of Heaven and by all Natural, straight forward humanity, I have acted rightly (p. 312).

The rightness of his decision lies in his conviction that a marriage without love is dead and dry. It is as good as no marriage at all. It mocks the very meaning of marriage. Seeing through the eyes of nature, the marriage of Phillotson and Sue is adulterous. This is what Sue feels about it:

For a man and woman to live on intimate terms when one feels as I do is adultery, in any circumstances, however legal (p. 285).

Sue's calling her own marriage adulterous amounts to a radical attack on the institution of marriage. It implies that adultery can happen not just outside of marriage but inside as well. Sue's essential argument is that the 'marriage law necessarily generalises something that is in essence particular, and makes contractual a feeling that should be voluntary.'³⁸ Jude is not as radical as Sue although he advocates the need for toleration and circumstantial judgement of a particular case:

Well, I don't know. The intention of the contract is good and right for many, no doubt; but in our case it may defeat its own ends because we are the

queer sort of people we are – folk in whom domestic ties of a forced kind snuff out cordiality and spontaneousness (p. 354).

Hardy does not reject the institution of marriage altogether. What he suggests is the need for flexibility in applying general rules to different individuals, for men, are pluralistic in nature. He pleads for the dissolution of the universal perspective. Hardy seems to have anticipated the post modern thought that the pattern or the centre is only a wishful thinking, an imposition. When social laws tend to be rigid, Hardy parts company with conventions. That is why T.S. Eliot speaks of Hardy as ‘a powerful personality uncurbed by any institutional attachment or by submission to any objective beliefs.’³⁹

What makes life hard for Jude and Sue is not any intrinsic flaw in their unconventional union, but the intransigent attitude of society. When the neighbours in Spring Street, where Jude and Sue stay with Little Father Time, begin to suspect the basis of their intimate relationship, they begin to ostracize them. The spiritual affinities that constitute their relationship are of no significance to the rabble. They want conformity to laws and rules. Society refuses to understand and recognize the nature of their spiritual union that any marriage should ideally represent. Sue’s bitter reaction to social attitude is worth recalling:

I can’t bear that they, and everybody, should think people wicked because they may have chosen to live their own way! It is really these opinions that make the best intentioned people reckless and actually become immoral (p.372).

What Hardy is protesting against is the utter lack of ‘sensitivity to differences’ and the inability ‘to tolerate the incommensurable’ – something that the postmodern world has begun to understand and tolerate.⁴⁰ Any unorthodox leaps out of existing paradigms or governing structures of thought were morally as well as socially

offensive in Hardy's time. If Hardy had been writing today his ideas would have found many takers in the postmodern society, for it 'yields the vision of cultural "heterotopia" (pluralism) which has neither edges, hierarchies or center.'⁴¹ And Hardy himself knew that his ideas were a little too in advance of his time. Contemplating over the failure of their unique union Jude tells Sue that their ideas were fifty years in advance of their time to be of any use or success. Though true to themselves, they cannot escape the conventional judgement of society. They are out of tune with the times.

Hardy himself declared that '... A marriage should be dissolvable as soon it becomes a cruelty to either of the parties.'⁴² In *Jude the Obscure* the divorcés do not, however, bring a lasting solution to the problems of the protagonists. Rather, both the protagonists are ultimately united with their first partners. In Jude's case his remarriage with Arabella is a callous, meaningless exercise from his point of view. But Sue's reunion with Phillotson is a voluntary, conscious act. Many critics like to cite this dramatic ending of the novel as a reaffirmation of Hardy's inalienable belief in social conventions. On the other hand, many are disappointed with Hardy for leaving the problem where he found it. He pointed to a way without showing the possibility of success. This is, in fact, a conscious, deliberate structural design of the novel which is meant to be of 'turbulent contradictory views',⁴³ without providing any kind of finality of vision. The novel is full of contrasting views and opinions expressed by different characters. They are suggestive of Hardy's own internal conflict. Dale Kramer makes a pertinent observation about the final impression of the novel:

The relative validity of the several viewpoints of the characters and the narrator is supported by the lack of absolutes in the story.⁴⁴

In Hardy's conscious refusal to endorse any particular viewpoint as universally true, he shares the postmodern scepticism about truth. In *Jude the Obscure* singularity of perception is replaced by multiple perspectives; universalism is replaced by

particularity. The emphasis on the 'intensity and sanctity of individual perception in *Tess* and *Jude* makes them among the most intimate and compelling narratives of the last century.'⁴⁵ And it is this quality of these novels which makes them appealing and relevant to contemporary readers.

In Part VI – the final section of the novel – Hardy's technique is to draw Jude and Sue apart from each other in totally opposite directions. It is part of his artistic design to maintain equilibrium of his moral vision. Sue's self torturing journey back to Phillotson's arms, to the lap of conventions, vividly illustrates the horrendous hold of conventions on the individual. After the tragic death of Little Father Time and her own children, Sue is no longer the old, intellectually emancipated, unorthodox woman. She is shattered by the tragic events. Here Hardy is not supporting conventions; rather he seems to suggest that

... to do and live according to one's personal ideals in defiance of earth's opposition and the thunders of Heaven... is only for vast Promethean natures; perhaps, only for male natures; certainly not for fine and fragile natures as Sue's.⁴⁶

After the terrible death of her children, Sue leaves an impression of mental derangement. Her self sacrificing surrender to all that she once despised evokes in the readers both sympathy and a sense of her perversion. She turns superstitious to the extent of becoming a worshipper of her own nemesis:

We must conform. All the ancient wrath of power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God! (p. 417).

While Jude gradually frees himself from the shackles of dogmas partly under Sue's influence, and partly through his own reflections, she succumbs to conventions which she once loathed. While analyzing Sue's character Ian Gregor observes:

With her we find displayed the consciousness of self, the innate uncertainties, and the psychic disturbances with which the fiction of our day is to make us so familiar.⁴⁷

Sue is inextricably imprisoned within her own extremities. She has never known the moderate path. In her immoderation, Sue shares an affinity with farmer Boldwood. Sue's tragedy springs basically from two factors – her inauthenticity and the inability to maintain equilibrium. But then, throughout the novel Sue is portrayed as a highly particularized individual. She is mysterious, enigmatic and distinguished by the peculiarity of her nature. Her whole life bears witness to “her colossal inconsistency” (p.231). She is of “double nature” (p.269) and there is “no order or regularity” in her life (p.283). The impression Sue leaves on the readers is that “things which were right in theory were wrong in practice” (p. 280). What she ultimately suggests is the inherent disharmony in her personality between what she claims to believe and what she actually practises. Jude seems to have perceived this discrepancy in her character when he tells her:

I have sometimes thought, since your marrying Phillotson because of a stupid scandal, that under the affectation of independent views you are enslaved to the social code as any woman I know (p. 305).

This is an evidence of Sue's inauthentic nature. Sue's love for Jude was initially brought about by feminine capriciousness and jealousy. She herself acknowledges it later:

At first I did not love you, Jude; that I own. When I first knew you I merely wanted you to love me. I did not exactly flirt with you; but that inborn craving which undermines some women's moral almost more than unbridled passion – the craving to attract and captivate, regardless of the injury it

may do the man – was in me; and when I found I had caught you, I was frightened. And then – I don't know how it was – I couldn't bear to let you go – possibly to Arabella again – and so I got to love you, Jude. But you see, however fondly it ended, it began in the selfish and cruel wish to make your heart ache for me without letting mine ache for you (p.429).

What is undoubtedly clear is that Sue's love for Jude, and her final surrender to his physical desires were partly stimulated by her jealousy of Arabella – "Mine was not the reciprocal wish till envy stimulated me to oust Arabella" (p.428).

The dramatic change in Sue's intellectual opinions about convention and marriage laws is linked to her inherent "colossal inconsistency." Her abrupt reversal perplexes Jude:

Sue and himself had mentally travelled in opposite direction since the tragedy: event which had enlarged his own views of life, laws, customs and dogma, had not operated in the same manner on Sue's. She was no longer the same as in the independent days, when her intellect played like lambent lightning over conventions and formalities which he at that time respected though he did not know (p.419).

Sue's eventual return to Phillotson may appear to be a compelling evidence of Hardy's conventionality. But this is not what the spirit and mood of the novel indicates. Though Hardy believed in the saner, humanly ennobling aspects of social conventions, in *Jude* man is shown as defeated and ruined by 'the obduracy of the world about him...' ⁴⁸ The individual will and social forces are in constant interplay in the novel. The final vision that emerges from the dynamics of this interplay is the need 'to reject the necessity of a conflict...' ⁴⁹ and the cultivation of a symmetrical attitude towards

life. Both Jude and Sue have adopted extreme courses alternately, and suffered accordingly. If Sue had abandoned her eccentric attitude towards legal marriage and opted for a legal contract with Jude after getting their respective former marriages dissolved, they should have found at least a modicum of happiness. But her extremity of views denies even that last possibility. What she does not realize is that it is not a contract that determines the course of love; rather it is love that leads to a contract and preserves it. Marriage with Phillotson was not the result of love, but a social compulsion following her relationship with Jude. And her final reunion with Phillotson is a repetition of the first blunder she committed. When she enters Phillotson's bed "clenching her teeth" she betrays herself as well as Phillotson (p. 479). Her eventual sexual submission to Phillotson is evocative of Tess's surrender to Alec to save her destitute family. In both the cases the spirit remains severed from the body. This forced union of Sue with Phillotson may be seen as Hardy's ironic mockery of a conventional, loveless marriage. Yet he was compelled by his age and his own sense of the form of the novel to wrench a formal conclusion from a work that does not offer one. As Ian Gregor has rightly perceived in *Jude* Hardy tried to venture into new territories which his imagination had no access to.⁵⁰ With regard to the conventional ending Ian Gregor's observation is worth quoting:

In *Jude* Hardy was still committed to a fiction which pressed for a conclusion even though it was to be a conclusion shaken to the core by the pressure of contraries. Looking back, it is difficult to see how that last hard-won ending could have been anything other than the ending to his whole fictional journey.⁵¹

Hardy seems to have realized in course of the evolution of his story what Jude was slow to realize:

Perhaps the world is not illuminated enough for such experiments as ours! Who were we, to think

we could act as pioneers! (p. 428).

Though Jude and Sue could not become successful pioneers, yet they and their creator have shown a way for later day pioneers. John Bayley makes a very pertinent observation about Hardy's works:

The most Victorian thing about his (Hardy's) novels is their plot: the least, their sense of time, place and event.⁵²

With the conventional ending of the novel, Hardy has not achieved any moral resolution to the problems raised in the novel. The reunion of Sue with Phillotson, and Jude with Arabella is not a moral resolution at all. It may be 'a formal resolution, but a moral dissolution.'⁵³ Society, Phillotson and undiscerning critics may be comforted by this illogical resolution but not Jude and Sue. Jude dies with a curse on his lips. His is the tragic end of an honest, authentic individual. And Sue is left behind to continue her inauthentic existence with Phillotson. Sue's wretched state is vividly captured by Arabella. To Widow Edlin's opinion that Sue has found forgiveness and peace in her return to Phillotson, Arabella replies:

She may swear that on her knees to the holy cross upon her necklace till she's hoarse, but it won't be true!.... She's never found peace since she left his arms, and never will again till she's as he is now (p. 491).

Society may triumph, but the individual is crushed. Ultimately Jude and Sue are victims of nature, society and their own authentic selves. In *Jude* Hardy has fictionalized a world where authentic existence will be possible only at the cost of one's own happiness and even life itself. The best summing up of this brief discussion is that of John Rabbets:

Jude takes its bitter flavour and its shape from this merciless quality of separation – separation of man from his accustomed

environment, of talent from opportunity, of compassion from convention, of love from marriage.⁵⁴

END NOTE :

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That God is both unmanifest (avyakt) and manifest (vyakt), and that He is accessible to us through love constitutes a major thematic concern of Anne Brontë's verses, which read and sound like hymns dedicated to God.²

The world Anne Brontë creates in her poetry is her world 'within' — something internal and intimate to her heart and soul — the region of her poetry — wherein she enshrines the object of her worship and loving devotion, God.³ She knows her eternal deity as the God of love and grace her heart and soul need and seek. Hers is the One who inspires love and trust, service and devotion, reverence and loyal self-surrender. As a devoted lover, she is very much within her rights to have a personal God. She expresses her conviction thus:

Eternal Power, of earth and air!

Unseen, yet seen in all around,

Remote, but dwelling everywhere;

Though silent, but heard in every sound⁴ [of the devotee]

Book Review

Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Robin S. Ngangom (ed.),
Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the North-east.
NEHU Publications, Shillong, 2003, pp.264, Rs.230.

For a long time now, the North-east has been the troubled zone, “a seething cauldron” torn by the ethnic crisis, economic failures, terrorist violence and mounting claims of regional autonomy and separatism. Lost in the haze and blur of contemporary history very often, it is usually conceived not so much as a landscape inhabited by real people but only as a fictional metaphor of a world gone awry. No wonder it lurks rather uncertainly at the edge of an average Indian’s consciousness.

On reading this artistically packaged anthology, one is certainly disabused of a number of preconceived notions about the North-east and its rich cultural heritage. A world of eerie contradictions leaps out of these pages as tradition rubs shoulders with modernity, folk rhythms jostle uneasily with the western pop, virgin forests stand a mute testimony to the debauchery of urban life, and recalcitrant nativism co-exists with the ‘otherness’ of the outsiders. This anthology certainly does rip the mask off the multi-layered and complex history/culture of the region, revealing the face of the people and the landscape that is anything but just salubrious and enthralling.

This anthology also has a definite purpose beyond its immediate poetic appeal. If on the one hand it brings the ‘gunshots’ and ‘the bloodstained faces’ of the North-east within earshot distance, on the other it takes us right into the hearts of the people, their dreams and desires, myths and memories, and long struggles through history. By thus bringing us into direct contact with the cultural history of the people, it opens up the possibility of a dialogue

we may have thought never existed. If in our troubled times poetry can synergize this dialogue, it could be said to have achieved much more than it ordinarily does. For such a possibility alone can redress one of the understandable complaints of the editors that, for all the political rhetoric, this remains a “little known and largely misunderstood” region of India.

In all, this anthology showcases some forty-five contemporary poets of the region, reflecting not only myriad styles and trends but also diversity of concerns within “the Seven Sisters,” which, in itself, is no mean achievement. However, the representation of each state is somewhat erratic. Meghalaya, the home-state of the editors, leading the way with as many as fourteen poets; Manipur a close second with eight; Arunachal and Mizoram struggling hard to catch up with barely two poets each. Tripura and Assam have seven poets each whereas Nagaland has only five. If space is a marker of identity, then this kind of unequal distribution does raise questions of internal hegemony of languages/cultures. Especially so, because the editors have chosen not to address this issue.

Interestingly, all the poets selected from Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland have one thing in common: they all write originally in English. While celebrating the “fading voices/of deaf (tribal) women,” Mamang Dai, a journalist who belongs to the Adi community of Arunachal, does not forget to mourn the endless wait of “the silent hillmen” for “the long promised letters/and the meaning of words”(pp. 4-5). Her retreat into personal memories is only a way of reclaiming historical consciousness, and it is on the interstices of both that the political content of her poetry becomes manifest. Yumlam Tana, a teacher from the Nyishi tribe who is almost apologetic about writing in English, is acutely self-conscious about losing his tribal identity inscribed in *Porno* and *Jupung* to *kurta* and *pyjama*. It is another matter that he manages to counterbalance his loss through his universal claim “to the Bible/The Quran, the Gita/ And all human endeavours/In Science, Art and Commerce” (p.13).

Occasionally, he also dips into the archives of Nyishi myths, bringing out poetic pearls of astounding beauty.

Though the personal note dominates the poems of H. Ramdhintari, a poet from Mizoram who now lives in Maryland, U.S.A., she is conscious that "We're at the far end of the earth/ where the touch of the sun ceases to have meanings" (p.197). However, her contemporary Mona Zote, who lives in Aizawl, is more explicitly political as she ominously waits for the "bomb" to fall "on those of us, unaware under/The catastrophe of houses against trees," and is even eager to "leave words too and be/a gunrunner" (p.203). Though both T. Ao and Nini Lungalang from Nagaland are among the better-known and older voices, each bears an unmistakable individualistic stamp. While T. Ao's poems such as *The Epitaph* and *Rumour* pulsate with a definite fable-like quality, Nini Lungalang returns "to where I began," a world throbbing with social and political tensions, often caught through "neighbour's quarrel/over a strip of land" or the personal pain of "I too have a brother slain." Among the younger lot, Monalisa Changkija, a Dimapur based journalist, and Easterine Iralu, a lecturer at Nagaland University, impress by virtue of their uncanny ability to resurrect the social conscience. If Monalisa raises her voice in support *Of a People Unanswered*, Easterine Iralu regrets that "One day, my son/when you come to ask me/what colour was the sky/before it turned grey/I will no longer have the answers" (p.222).

Assamese and Manipuri poets distinguish themselves by their unswerving commitment to their respective languages, though it hardly ever takes the form of linguistic chauvinism. Most of the Assamese poets are fairly young, the only exception being Nilmani Phookan, a much older and well-respected Sahitya Akademi Award winning veteran. In his all-too-familiar romantic world, "the plantain leaf (still) trembles," "distant dreams of trees/move past," and "the afternoon sun melts/into the shoreless waters." Only very rarely does he surprise with an unexpected turn of a phrase or an image, and even when he does as in "In the frost-silent Japanese silk-night/if I could die" (p.57), the burden of existence is not much

lightened. Among the younger generation of Assamese poets, Jiban Narah and Prem Narayan Nath are apparently the only inheritors of Nilmani's romantic sensibility. Jiban discovers his own voice in intensely personal poems such as *Mother* and *Night's Portal*, and despite its long-winded invocations and veiled references to the ethos of the Mishing tribe, his poem *The Buddha* fails to make its mark. However, Prem Narayan has a deeper and richer resonance as he captures "the hum of *raga gandhara*/in darkness" with as much elan as he shows while recording the "rumblings from the earth's womb" that throw up "scores of dead bodies suddenly" (p.50). Nilim Kumar, Anubhav Tulasi and Sameer Tanti combine a certain earthy rawness of passion with more contemporary staccato speech rhythms. If Nilim Kumar questions "where are you bound, brother/with all those dead birds/on your shoulder," Anubhav Tulasi shares his anxiety over a dog "barking long since/Fretting in my blood." But it is left to Sameer Tanti, who has also crafted *The Ballad of Bones*, to state: "How do I hold hunger guilty/Hunger is my mother's first miscarriage/the third world of my agony" (p.67). Although she is the lone woman poet from Assam, Anupama Basumatary is easily the most powerful of all voices in her language. In comparison to other women poets from Nagaland and Mizoram who write in English, it is she whose concerns are overtly and explicitly feminist. Not only is she interested in historicising the silence of women through the image of "the stone-body," but she also speaks of woman's essential exclusion and loneliness in her poetic ramblings *An Evening On the Banks of the Ganges*. Often she manages to transcend the politics of exclusion, thus revealing a strong universal strain in her poetry, which is self-evident when she says, "In the hope of achieving something/Every man is only losing himself" (p.22). A poetic sensibility that sees "a childhood dawn" "in the cluster of mushrooms" is certainly no ordinary talent.

Of the Manipuri poets, again only two are women, and the rest all men. Kunjarani Longjam Chanu and Atambam Ongbi

Memchoubi are both teachers by profession and have published more than two collections each. Kunjarani's "hunters" that "stand in front of you/Carrying poison arrows" and "black maidens" that fall "inside the deep ravines" "along with the white slabs of snow" fester in our memory as much as Memchoubi's *The Goddess of Lightning* and *My Beloved Mother* do. A popular children's writer and a much published poet, R K Bhubonsana, in his rather longish musings *Should Lights Be Put Out Or Minds Kept In The Dark*, exposes in a playfully sardonic manner the designs of the government in perpetuating the people's subjugation by not promoting literacy among them. Yumlebam Ibomcha's *For the Next Birth* and Raghu Leishangthem's *Politician and White Dove* are also poems in a similar vein, though Ibomcha's *Story of a Dream* and Raghu's *The Old Woman's Pitcher* leave a much stronger impression because of their depth of feeling and sensitive portrayal of character/situation. Thangjam Ibopishak, who along with Ibomcha is a Sahitya Akademi Award winning poet, creates unfailing images of the land and its people. While gushing over his land in a manner least bashful, "Manipur, I love your hills, marshes, rivers/Greenfields, meadows, blue sky" (p.88), he does not allow himself to be blinded by the fact that it is also "the land of the half - humans" where "for six months just head without body, six months just body without head" (p.93). The mythology of the land interests him as much as does its poetry or its history. If Saratchand Thiyam, an engineer by profession, stands out by virtue of being able to sing of both *Shillong* and *Africa* with equal ease, Ilabanta Yumnam, a teacher, marks himself out through the tardy, prosaic rhythms of his poetic outpourings.

Of the seven sisters, the only two that betray a baffling sense of linguistic diversity are Meghalaya and Tripura. In Meghalaya, one comes across poets in languages as varied as Hindi, English, Khasi and Bengalee, whereas in Tripura, Bengalee and Manipuri happily co-exist with Chakma and Kokborok. Tarun Bhartiya, who is from Meghalaya and writes in Hindi, appears to have internalised

the ethics of postmodernism, and so celebrates the fragmentation of thought and being with a rare irreverence and panache. Just as he has no qualms about saying that "Cow Mother's thighs should be rubbed with pepper," he's equally blase about sniffing "reality of gunpowder in the breath of reporters" (p.114). Piyush Dhar, who writes in Bengalee, brings a razor-edged sharpness of a typical Bengali sensibility to bear upon his reflections on the mindless nuclear arms race in *Five Pokhran Poems*. There could not have been a more forthright indictment of Pokhran than this: "Infanticide ditches crisscross/your dreamy chest, too, Pokhran;/today your silent sands bury in their voice/an epitaph of vice" (p.121). Of several poets writing in English in Meghalaya none is so cosmopolitan as Ananya S Guha, who is very much at home, be it *In Calcutta*, *Mymensing* or his *Poem for Punjab*. If Anjum Hasan impresses with her deft use of the Japanese form in *November Haikus*, Robin S Ngangom sweeps us along by the sheer force of his haunting images in the searing evocation of the *Native Land*. But this, indeed, appears somewhat pale in comparison with the range, depth and intensity displayed by Khasi poets such as Paul Lyngdoh, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih and Bevan L Swer. As their effort is to explore the archeology of Khasi legends, folk-tales and customs, their poems often sizzle with a peculiar pungency of a purely local variety.

This variety of localism is also available in the poems of Niranjana Chakma, Sefali Debbarma and Chandra Kanta Murasingh, all from Tripura, though they practise their craft in Chakma and Kokborok languages respectively. While Sefali Debbarma celebrates the local sounds and smells in her intensely personal poems; Chandra Kanta's crisp, compact lyrical meditations slowly bring her into contact with "our beloved soil." In the poems of Niranjana Chakma one senses a definite rage born out of irrevocable 'silence' that most of the tribal communities have come to accept as their *fait accompli* over the centuries. In an intensely moving poem, Kalyanbrata Chakraborti captures the plight of Manirung Reang, "a girl from the hills" who falls prey to "the gun-toting belligerents,"

with only “the birds and the wind” grieving for her. A similar portrait of a “woman suffering this society’s grievous hurt” bristles out of a poem by Gambhini Sorokkhaibam, who originally writes in Manipuri. However, the crowning glory of this collection are two poems by Krittibas Chakraborty, both of which could be regarded as the final tribute to the awesome linguistic plurality of the North-east in particular and our country in general. Originally written in Bengalee, for inclusion in this collection, these poems have been translated not directly from the language in which they were written but instead from Tripuri into English. More significantly, these two poems bring into sharp focus for us, once again, the complex issues of hybridised identity, belonging and homelessness. While wondering with the poet “How long you will burn, Northeast horizon!” (p.247), we feel as though we have come back full circle, once again. With apprehensions about the future of the North-east buzzing in our ears, we return from this mythopoeic journey, sadder and somewhat wiser as well.

Despite the fact that poetry often does not lend itself to an easy linguistic transfer, most of the translations in this collection have been competently handled. Often while reading these poems, one gets the impression as though all of them including the ones not originally written in English have been so written. The use of words or expressions from a variety of host languages, however, doesn’t set up any jarring rhythms. On the contrary, it ties up rather well with the politics of translation that, in any case, should have informed the very spirit of such a collection. By preferring the “foreignising” mode of translation to the “domesticating” one, the editors have not only demonstrated their respect for the notion of linguistic plurality, but also made a significant statement of their ideology and intent. Of course, they deserve a full round of applause for their success in accommodating a vast “polyphony of voices,” reflecting an equally bewildering range of thematic concerns and formal preferences. These are the voices that ought to be heard with passionate concern, even compassion and urgency. More than the ordinary lovers of

poetry across the country, this collection should strike a chord among those who wish to understand the cultural labyrinths of the North-east, and respond to the multiple challenges such an understanding often poses.

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The review article is published by arrangement with KAVYA
BHARATI, Madurai.

Sujata Miri, *The Broken Circle*, London, New Delhi: Minerva Press, 2003, Price Rs 250).

The *Prologue* starts with the cries of a child. Then screams and protestations, of a mother thrown out and a baby's incessant crying. The beginning of the circle...

The child in Chapter One has grown up into a young woman:

"She had just turned fourteen and there were already two boys who claimed to love her, each proposing marriage..." This is Asha, nubile and full bodied, vivacious and full of beans. It is a delightful accentuation by the novelist as she opens the narrative with the trepidation relating to Asha's awakening sexuality. It is amazingly candid and acerbic at the same time. Every page in the novel is pulsating with warm figures, bristling with a rugged earthiness and racy sensuality.

As you read the novel, you are momentarily surprised by its clinical bluntness. This is solely Asha's story, a tale bold and brash. The setting is Lalchand Basti, the colony that is "home" to the

Nepali community of Shillong. The scene shifts to other localities, Lumphing, to "somewhere less Nepali & more cosmopolitan-Pokseh", then Umpling.

Asha is a wonderfully drawn character, very sensual and irresistible. She can twist men around her little finger, a truth she learns early in life. She is surrounded by her ridiculous Laban *Phuphu* and aunts. Crude, coarse and artless. She elopes, is brow bitten and bundled back home. Consequently a "respectable" marriage is arranged, with Golu Bahadur, a clerk, and Asha is ecstatic "She was one rare bride who thoroughly enjoyed her own wedding. The festivities, financed by her guilty father, were lavish and the meals rich with Nepali, Bengali and Khasi specialities...." Then follows some petty clashes with her in laws and another victim falls to her charms, her brother-in law Deepu. She is aware of her physical allure, and makes full use of it. Her desires are flimsy, but her needs are immediate. Money matters a lot to her, but her obsessive passion for a two timing, scheming older man, the highly exhibitionist Nirmal Chhetri leads her to plumb the depths of despair. She flings herself against him in secret rendezvous which carries her to bliss and destruction. Then follows more intrigues and shady deals of a surreptitious degree racket, where her husband Golu is involved. Then a murder, and the resultant trappings of the uncouth police probings and the emergence of an unsuspecting social worker. The circle widens. She is caught in a web spun by other men in her life and she cannot break free of debauchery and greed as she flaunts and lives as she pleases unabashedly. In her frantic search for physical fulfillment, she ruins her defenseless youngest daughter Lakshmi's vulnerable world too.

It is Sujata Miri at her best. She does not mince words in the dissection of sexual violence and the circularity of the dissolution of a woman's life based on greed and lust. Asha is no Emma Bovary, because she has no saving self-delusion. The familiar locales, Police Bazaar, Laban, Malki, Dreamland Cinema Hall and Guwahati add to the topicality of the issues involved. The reader would tend to

judge everything and everyone in this novel by a relentless straightforward uncovering of actions of a broad sample of men in relation to a woman — an interesting method. This is a world where time is measured with *Chitrahara* programmes on the TV, as well as revealing some attempt to people with objects, and the need for consumption as an outlet for anxiety: “We are not basti wallahs. You must dress the children well.... Now you have a TV, a tape recorder, a sewing machine, besides the new bed and almirahs. Does anybody else in our family have this?”

The story is tragic to the point of pathos and the indirect narration adds to the callous indifference of the events. Sujata Miri retains a distance that evokes objectivity but also seems disdainful. Asha remains a sad figure and an object of pity.

Neither can we call it a cultural study of an interpretative kind, so any notion of a *final* meaning is always endlessly put off. Probably a little amount of sociological inquiry is inevitably caught up in this ‘circle of meaning’. Definitely the novel betrays very strong tenets of popular pulp fiction, but probably the title bespeaks of the irony where the unity, wholeness, and the feminine spirit or force denoting “the circle” is broken off.

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Selma K. Sonntag, *The Local Politics of Global English*, Lexington Books, New York, 2003, pp152.

This is a book that opens up one’s understanding of the linguistic dimensions of globalization which, in the explanatory words of the author herself, “pushes forward global English hegemony.” In doing so, however, it creates its own antithesis as it “politicizes

the language issue and hence “potentializes” a reaction. The burden is to ensure that the potential of this reaction is linguistically democratic.” Immense scholarship has gone into mapping out the contradictions that are inbuilt in such a situation, dynamic and unique enough to this century, to initiate the kind of academic interest that would garner rich dividends at the political and the personal level.

Sonntag begins by drawing upon the linguist Braj Kachru’s typology of concentric circles as a starting point, for differentiating the cases covered in the book according to the degree of global English usage. She then familiarizes the reader with certain key concepts of globalization, such as hegemony, resistance, elites, subalterns, and liberalization and democratization before launching into a discussion of the complexities of global English as it manifests itself in various countries.

The United States representing an English-speaking core corresponding to Kachru’s inner circle sees language as a neutral tool for communication and not as an identity marker. Language rights have not been established under American law and there are, according to the author, several contending views among Americans on language politics. The overall picture that one has of the American scene is that it exudes both hegemony and democracy in economic as well as linguistic globalization.

Her next case study presents an interesting analysis of the politics of language in France. Whilst attempting to stamp out the Breton language, the French state puts forward the “same arguments and logic for its battle against global English that the Breton nationalists use against French linguistic hegemony”. This transference between what she calls “local and global of oppressor and oppressed” is characteristic of the local politics of global English in France. Language politics in France remains a confrontation between regional languages and French linguistic hegemony. This has, however, been compromised, not only in global terms as English becomes the sole working language in Francophone countries, but

also internally in France. Sonntag views the local politics of global English in France as being post-modern by virtue of the shifting roles of hegemon and register .

Chapter Four looks at the subaltern language politics in India which has influenced the dynamics of English language usage in the country. Sonntag follows what she calls the “messy local politics of Indian democracy” from its colonial resistance in the 1920s when Gandhi convinced the Congress to organize along regional language lines, to the kind of vernacular language politics dominating the states of Bihar and UP in recent years. Perceptively so, she arrives at the conclusion that, in India the politics of the English language is essentially local. Although English was introduced by a global power, it has become part of the local, political and linguistic landscape of the country. The global face of English in India is Indian English. It has become synonymous with the elite class but it has also been appropriated by subalterns. And as a final comment she remarks that the subalterns can become the new local elite in India. However, the only valid conclusion that she can really come to is that, amidst reigning discordance there are truly multiple voices in India worth listening to, and she observes that some of these voices are subaltern ones.

In the penultimate chapter of the book, Sonntag compares the language politics of South Africa and Nepal, countries that are in democratic transitions. South Africa is part of Kachru’s outer circle, an “official English” country, whereas Nepal is a “marginal English” country. In South Africa, English has been the language of liberation and democracy, hegemonic and liberatory, elitist and democratic. During apartheid, South African Blacks used English as the language of protest and resistance despite the different language policy preferences of various segments of the liberation movement. Multilingualism in the post apartheid years is valued by Black South Africans in the informal and private sphere. But in the public arena, the majority of Black South Africans would opt for English. However, the political debate on linguistic democratization

and globalization in South Africa is not yet over since the new South Africa reflects the tension between the ideal of pursuing a truly transformative South African political project and the reality of seeking improvement in a majority of South Africans.

There are several points of similarities between South Africa and Nepal but the important difference lies in the fact that English has never played the role that it did or currently does in South Africa. As in South Africa the democratic transition ushered in a new multilingual policy where the Nepalese were assuredly tolerant of global English. In South Africa multilingualism advocates actively resist global English. There is an emerging position of global English in Nepalese society which hints at a class based struggle as the more likely future for Nepal.

Sonntag concludes with a salient observation that global English represents the possibility of globalization from above as well as from below, especially in terms of a democratic subaltern resistance to linguistic hegemony.

Each case study presents the human face of a political conundrum, where the choices to be made are sometimes dictated by the linguistic policies of a larger community or as in the case of South Africa, chosen by the people themselves. Needless to say, it is a book to be read not only by language scholars but by all and sundry as it brings into focus the linguistic complexities of globalization. Sonntag has succeeded in employing the tools of culture, language and history to conceptualize a situation that is necessarily global.

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Robbins Burling, *The Language of the Modupur Mandi (Garo), Vol.I: Grammar*, NJ,: Bibliophile South Asia in association with Promilla & Co. Publishers, New Delhi, 2004. Pp. xiii + 406 (hardback); Price: Rs. 750.00.

This is the first descriptive study of the grammar of the “Mandi” dialect of Garo spoken in Bangladesh. The book under review is divided into fourteen chapters: (1) The language and the people, (2) Segmental phonology, (3) Juncture and prosody, (4) Morphophonemics and variation, (5) Core grammar: an overview, (6) Verbs, (7) Optional verb affixes, (8) Nouns, (9) Nominals, (10) Numerals, (11) Minor parts of speech, (12) Complex noun phrases, (13) Subordination, and (14) Restructuring. Besides these fourteen chapters, the book also contains three appendices: (A) Texts, (B) Questions for study, and (C) Glossary of linguistic terminology; references, and two indices: index of affixes and index of topics.

In the introductory chapter of the book, Robbins Burling (henceforth RB) outlines the goals/scope of the grammar of the Garo spoken in Bangladesh. He mentions three groups of people the book is intended for. The first group comprises the people “...whose goal is to learn one of the Garo dialects”. “The second group is professional linguists and Tibeto-Burmanists”. And the third group of people consists of “...people who speak Garo as their native language”.

Although the book is a descriptive study of the grammar of the dialect of Garo spoken in Bangladesh, the author has successfully tried to compare some of the structures of this dialect with those of the Garo spoken in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya. Each section of a particular chapter has been assigned “one of three levels, elementary, intermediate, and advanced”. In addition to assigning each section to one of three difficulty levels, the author has labeled the levels as A, B, and C respectively.

An inexperienced reader may find it confusing about the fact that similar things are not discussed under the same topic

(e.g., noun phrases are described in chapters 5, 8, and 12; different types of postpositions have been described in two different chapters, viz., chapters 8 and 9; etc.). Also, one finds a lot of repetitions (e.g., the minor word classes have been discussed twice in chapters 5 and 11). We perhaps cannot blame the author for this. RB clearly states in the introduction to the book that "...Do not try to work straight through the book from the beginning to the end. You would get hopelessly bogged down. This is not that sort of book" (p.6), and that "...As such, I have permitted myself a good deal of repetition" (p.7).

In the first chapter of the book, RB talks about the concepts the "Mandis" (of Bangladesh) have about the "A'chiks" (of Garo Hills in Meghalaya). He points out that the Mandis identify their dialect as "a form of "A'beng" and that Mandi has several mutually intelligible dialects spoken in Bangladesh. According to RB, the Garos of Garo hills are "less often bilingual in any language than those who live in Bangladesh..." (p.15), and Mandi is heavily influenced by Bengali.

The second, third, and the fourth chapters are dedicated to the description of the phonology of Mandi. The phonological description is quite adequate. The *glottal stop* or "Raka", one of the prominent phonological features of Mandi/Garo, has been dealt in detail (pp.32-41). The description given is clear and comprehensive. It would have been better, at least from the point of view of a linguist, if the author had presented a detail description of the phonetic and phonemic aspects of the various segmental sounds, viz., consonants, monophthongs and diphthongs; consonant sequences/clusters; distinctive features of the segments, etc.

The section on morphophonemics (pp.71-76) gives a concise description of some prevalent morphophonemic rules in the language. Though some interesting morphophonemic rules of the verb patterning in the language have not been dealt with in detail, such patterning is covered in other places. This section presents a

beautiful description of the variations found among the various dialects. RB finally describes the changes in pronunciation due to the linguistic influence of Bengali and English on the Mandi language. For instance, the phoneme /s/ never occurs in word- or syllable-final position in older Mandi, but the "...Bengali borrowings have established /-s/.." (p. 87), and, as a result, now we find words like *dos* 'ten', *bas* 'enough', etc.

The fifth chapter attempts to provide a brief overview of the "core grammar" of Mandi, and describes the structure of simple sentences, verbs, noun phrases and minor word classes.

The description of the verbal structure of Mandi has been presented in chapters six and seven. The distinction between a "verb base", a "verb stem", and a "verb" (sic) is important in Mandi, and RB has explained the distinction very clearly (p.107). RB points out (p.112) that the Garo dialects do not have separate transitive and intransitive verbs. The transitive verb-forms are obtained by adding the causative affix *-et-* or *-it-* in Mandi and *-at-* in A'chik (Garo). The suffixes like sentence completing suffixes, tense-aspect suffixes, imperative suffixes, subordinating suffixes, nominalizing suffixes associated with verbs (pp.120-136), and adverbial affixes such as progressive *-ing-*, *-eng-*, *-ong-*; negative *-ja-*, etc. (pp. 139-153) have been discussed in great detail in these two chapters. One wonders why RB includes the 'causative' affix, *-et- ~ -it- ~ -at-*, which is generally associated with verbs, among the adverbial affixes. A detail study of the auxiliary verbs, conjunct verbs and compound verbs would have increased the usefulness of the book, especially for the language learners.

The eighth chapter deals with the nouns in Mandi. In this chapter, RB discusses the "category prefixes" (classifiers) associated with nouns, formation of plural, case markers, and final noun suffixes. I feel that some of the so-called final noun suffixes, e.g., *-sa ~ -ha* 'only' (p.205) should have been described as emphatic particles.

Chapter nine is on nominals, and describes the pronouns, question words, postpositions, and borrowed Bengali case markers and postpositions (such as *a-ge* 'before, ago', *po-re* 'after' etc.). The description of case markers and postpositions could have been presented along with the brief description of the same in the previous chapter. Also, the nouns and adjectives could have been described in this chapter as they, too, are nominals.

The Mandi numerals have been described in the next chapter (chapter ten). RB identifies *gip-a* as the ordinal numeral marker. Thus *sa* 'one': *sa-gipa* 'first (one)', *gin* 'two': *gin-ipa* 'second (one)', and so on.

The numeral classifiers (pp.247-256) such as *ak-* ~ *sak-* 'people', *mang-* 'animals', *rong-* 'round', *kol-* 'holes', *king-* 'thin flat things', etc. have been described under the headings 'core classifiers', 'shapes, materials, places', 'pieces, parts, groups, bundles, loads', 'containers', etc.

In the eleventh chapter, adverbs, locative words (e.g. *-cheng-* 'before'), defective nouns, "*gi*-type" adjectives, courtesy expressions, interjections, conjunctions, reduplication, echoes, etc. have been described as minor parts of speech.

The next chapter presents a brief description of the structure of the complex noun phrases in Mandi.

Chapter thirteen describes the structure of subordinated sentences in Mandi. Instead of having a separate chapter just on subordination and briefly mentioning the word order, the author should have discussed various processes like coordination, passivization (described in chapter fourteen, p.340), interrogation; negation; conjunctive participle construction (RB gives just one example without having mentioned the construction on p.346 in chapter fourteen) etc.; structure of conditional sentences; relative-correlative constructions (described in chapter fourteen, p.333) in one place, and he should have devoted a complete chapter on word order in Mandi describing the order of noun and adjective,

postpositions, noun and genitive, adjective and numerals, etc. The last section of the chapter talks about the equational sentences (p.329), but it does not consider the existential sentences.

In the last chapter titled 'restructuring', RB talks about the relative-correlative construction involving *je* and *ba* in great detail. Here, RB notes that *je* occupies the same position as the demonstrative pronoun in a noun phrase. Although *je* has been borrowed from Bengali, Mandi/Garo has "...not borrowed the full complexity of the Bengali relative system" (p.334). The *ba*-relatives, according to RB, "are less common than the *je* relatives". The other constructions discussed in this chapter include "balanced questions", passive, comparative with *-kal-* and *-bat-*, postposed noun phrases, postposed subordinate clauses, and subject fronting.

Appendix A contains four Garo folk-tales with interlineal translation. These tales "are taken from a book written by Kohima Daring called *Mandi Di sarangna Golpo: Stories for Garo Children*" (sic). Appendix B contains questions for study based on the contents presented in each chapter. In Appendix C, RB provides readers with a very useful glossary of linguistic terminology.

The sections dealing with various aspects of syntax are not comprehensive in scope. A separate section on word-formation in Garo/Mandi would have enhanced the beauty of the book. The way this book uses certain grammatical terms leaves the reader uneasy. One such term is "balanced questions".

One of the most distinctive features of the book under review is the overall approach used by the author to describe the categories and structures at the levels of syntax, morphology, and phonology. Various grammatical constructions (e.g. imperative, negation, etc.) and categories (subject, case suffixes, etc.) are described in terms of their form as well as their pragmatic function(s).

Additionally, the author's discussion on the interaction of grammatical structure with contextual factors such as the variation of styles and the social class/status of the speakers, etc. will be

valuable particularly for sociolinguists. This book is the first descriptive grammar, which includes analysis of syntax, morphology, and phonology of Garo/Mandi in one place.

On the whole, the author covers a wide spectrum of topics related to grammar of Modhupur Mandi (Garo). This is a good and worth reading book with lots of information on the grammatical structure of Garo, though there are a couple of small lapses that may be ignored when compared with its merits. RB deserves praises for writing a commendable book on the grammar of Garo providing the findings hitherto unexplored. RB has made an invaluable contribution to the Tibeto-Burman linguistics. This book will also be useful for the teachers/learners of Garo as a second language.

The efforts of the author are laudable and the book is worth collecting for the people interested in the study of languages and cultures of tribal population of India and its neighboring countries.

The printing of the book is clear and quite pleasing to the eye.

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2. Periodicity : Biannual
3. Printer's Name : Deputy Director, NEHU Publications
Address : Bijni Complex, Shillong-793003
4. Publisher's Name : Deputy Director, NEHU Publications
Nationality : Indian
Address : Bijni Complex, Shillong 793003
5. Editor's name : T. B. Subba
Nationality : Indian
Address : NEHU Publications, Bijni Complex,
Shillong 793003
6. Name and Address of individuals : North-Eastern Hill University,
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