



Pioneering the Kokborok Novel: A Critical Analysis of Sudhanwa Debbarma's Contribution

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of the novel marked a significant turning point in the development of Kokborok literature. While earlier Kokborok literary works primarily consisted of folk-tale-based literature, folk songs, grammar books, poetry, stories, and essays, the introduction of the novel expanded the literary possibilities of the language. Among the pioneers of this transformation, Sudhanwa Debbarma occupies a unique position as the first Kokborok novelist. His serialized novel *Chethuang* introduced narrative fiction to Kokborok readers, while *Hachuk Khurio* became the first complete modern Kokborok novel published in book form. Through these works, he demonstrated that Kokborok could effectively express complex human emotions, social conflicts, cultural traditions, the transition from old to new agricultural practices, the advancement of education, and historical experiences. His novels portray the everyday life of the Tprasa community while addressing issues such as identity, social transformation, customs, agriculture, moral values, and the relationship between tradition and modernity. Beyond his literary achievements, Sudhanwa Debbarma also contributed to the growth of Kokborok literature through the publication of the pioneering magazine

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Kwtal Kothoma, which encouraged creative writing and established a literary platform for emerging authors. This study critically examines his contribution to the origin and development of the Kokborok novel, evaluates his narrative techniques and thematic concerns, and assesses his enduring influence on subsequent generations of Kokborok writers. The study argues that his contribution extends beyond authorship, representing the foundation upon which modern Kokborok fiction developed.

1. Introduction

The development of literature in any language reflects the intellectual and cultural growth of its people. In Kokborok, written literature evolved relatively late compared with many Indian languages. Early literary efforts concentrated on folk tales, folk songs, and oral traditions, along with the preservation of grammar, dictionaries, translations, and religious writings. Although these works played an essential role in preserving the language, they offered limited opportunities for extended fictional narratives and the psychological exploration of characters.

The emergence of the novel transformed Kokborok literature by introducing a literary form capable of portraying society in greater depth and exploring Tiprasa identity. Unlike poetry or folklore, novels provide a broader scope for depicting social relationships, historical change, individual emotions, and cultural and traditional identity. The appearance of the first Kokborok novel, therefore, represents a milestone in the literary history of the language.

Sudhanwa Debbarma occupies a pioneering position in this transformation. His serialized novel *Chethuang*, a folk-tale-based first novel, published through *Kwtal Kothoma* in the 1950s (1954), laid the foundation for Kokborok fiction and the novel genre. Decades later, *Hachuk Khurio* established the modern Kokborok novel through its publication as a complete volume. Together, these works demonstrated the literary potential of Kokborok and inspired later generations of writers to explore fiction as a major literary genre.

Rather than merely celebrating Sudhanwa Debbarma as the first novelist, this study critically examines how his literary vision shaped the evolution of Kokborok fiction. It evaluates both his achievements and the limitations of his works within the historical context of Kokborok literary development. In addition, Sudhanwa Debbarma deserves to be entitled as the “Father of Kokborok Literature.”



2. Historical Background of the Emergence of the Kokborok Novel

The history of Kokborok literature is closely connected with the oral traditions of the Tiprasa people. As we know, the Kokborok language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. For centuries, folk tales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, ritual chants, and folk songs served as the principal means of preserving the community's history, beliefs, and cultural identity. These oral traditions not only entertained listeners but also transmitted social values, moral principles, and collective memories from one generation to another. As a result, they became the foundation upon which written Kokborok literature eventually developed.

The transition from oral to written literature began during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's with the publication of grammar books, dictionaries, and religious literature. These early publications standardized aspects of the language and encouraged literacy among Kokborok speakers. However, literary production during this period remained largely instructional and religious, with comparatively little emphasis on imaginative prose or fictional narratives. The creative expression found in oral story telling had yet to find a comparable place in written Kokborok literature.

A significant change occurred during the middle of the twentieth century. Social and educational developments in Tripura created a growing readership capable of appreciating literary works beyond traditional folklore. There were several Kokborok writers, from Md. Kazi Daulat Ahmmed to Radha Mohan Thakur, Samarendra Debbarma, Sadu Khuchikrishna, and others, who wrote poems, songs, short stories, folk tales, essays, and other literary works. Increasing access to formal education, the rise of educated Kokborok intellectuals, and expanding cultural awareness generated interest in new literary forms, such as more forms of essays, short stories, and poetry, and eventually the novel, which was first introduced by Sudhanwa Debbarma. This period marked the beginning of modern Kokborok literature, in which writers sought to represent contemporary society while preserving indigenous cultural values.

Among the important developments of this period was the emergence of literary magazines. These publications provided opportunities for writers to experiment with new genres and share their works with a wider audience. One of the most influential was '*Kwtal Kothoma*', established under the editorial leadership of Sudhanwa Debbarma. The magazine became a pioneering platform for creative writing in Kokborok, publishing riddles, songs, translations, poems, essays, short stories, novels, and serialized fiction. It played a crucial role in nurturing a literary culture and encouraging original writing in the language.



Within this literary environment, the serialized publication of *Chethuang*, the first Kokborok novel, represented a landmark achievement. Unlike earlier prose writings, the work presented an extended fictional narrative with interconnected characters, social conflicts, and thematic continuity. It demonstrated that Kokborok possessed the expressive capacity required for long-form fiction. Although published in serialized form rather than as a complete book, *Chethuang* introduced readers to the novel as a literary genre and laid the foundation for later developments in Kokborok fiction.

The publication of '*Hachuk Khurio*' further strengthened this foundation by presenting one of the earliest complete modern Kokborok novels in book form. Its appearance reflected the growing maturity of Kokborok literature and confirmed that the language could successfully sustain complex narratives comparable to those found in other Indian literary traditions. Together, '*Chethuang*' (1954) and '*HachukKhurio*' (1987) marked the transition of Kokborok literature from its predominantly oral heritage to a modern written literary tradition centred on prose fiction.

The emergence of the Kokborok novel therefore cannot be understood merely as the publication of individual books. It was the outcome of a broader literary movement involving language development, educational progress, cultural awakening, and the commitment of pioneering writers. Among these pioneers, Sudhanwa Debbarma occupies a central position because he not only produced some of the earliest novels but also created the literary environment that enabled the novel to flourish. His contribution represents both the beginning of Kokborok fiction and an important stage in the modernization of Kokborok literature.

3. Sudhanwa Debbarma: Early Life

Sudhanwa Debbarma was born into a farmer, lower-middle-class family on 26 February 1917, in Sutarmura village, under Bishalgarh Sub-Division, Tripura (Princely State), which is presently located in Sepahijala District. His father's name was Budhiram Debbarma, and his mother's name was Indrapati Devi. He began his primary education at Sutarmura M.E. Lower Primary School, after which he moved to Agartala for higher education. He completed his higher secondary education at Umakanta Academy, after which he went to Bangladesh for his graduation studies at Sree Kail College, Comilla. During his studies, his father passed away, and he was supposed to discontinue his education. However, his elder sister inspired him and supported him in continuing his education. He also worked hard to support himself financially by teaching children as a private tutor. According to information obtained from his eldest son, Prasanta Debbarma, Sudhanwa Debbarma also received considerable help with his studies from the owner of the house he rented. During that time, one of his classmates was from Manipur. One day, when they had an examination, his friend was sleeping. Sudhanwa Debbarma asked him what had happened. His friend answered that it was



the Manipuri language examination that day, but the question paper had not yet arrived at the college from the state of Manipur. Hearing this, Sudhanwa Debbarma was astonished. The Manipuri language was much more developed, whereas Kokborok had not yet started to be taught at the primary level. This incident inspired him to work for the development of the Kokborok language. It should be mentioned here that Sudhanwa Debbarma was the first person from the rural villages of the Twipra State to attempt the B.A. examination, although he could not perform well in the examination. After that, he started teaching at Umakanta Academy as an Assistant Teacher. He died on 15 August 1999, at the age of 80–81, in Agartala.

5. Sudhanwa Debbarma: As his Political Career

Sudhanwa Debbarma was an Indian by birth, a Kokborok writer, political leader, and member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). He was a former Speaker of the Tripura Legislative Assembly (1978–1983). He was a veteran leader of the Ganamukti Parishad. He was a member of the Tripura Legislative Assembly from the Takarjala Vidhan Sabha Constituency between 1977 and 1988.

Sudhanwa Debbarma and other activists started a movement against the king of Tripura to spread education among the Tpirasa population. They established the Tripura Janashiksha Samiti in 1945, with Sudhanwa Debbarma as the founding president of the organization. The king issued arrest warrants against the leaders of the Janashiksha Samiti, and he and other leaders were arrested. Among them were Akhil Debbarma, Agur Debbarma, Dasarath Dev, and others. During his imprisonment, Sudhanwa Debbarma started writing the novel *Hachuk Khurio*. This movement led Sudhanwa Debbarma and other leaders of the Janashiksha Samiti to demand the right to life and livelihood of the Tripuri people. On 15 August 1948, Sudhanwa, Dasarath, Hemanta, Bidya, Agur Debbarma, Akhil (Ramesh Chandra) Debbarma, and other leaders formed the Ganamukti Parishad in opposition to the torture and oppression by the bureaucrats and police of Tripura. He was inspired by communist ideology and became a member of the Communist Party of India. When the Communist Party split in 1964, he took the side of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and was elected to the Tripura State Committee of the CPI(M). In the 1977 Tripura Legislative Assembly election, he was elected for the first time on a CPI(M) ticket from the Takarjala Vidhan Sabha Constituency.

6. Sudhanwa Debbarma as a Revolutionary Leader

Tripura Janasiksha Samiti:

On 27 December 1945 AD (11th Pousa of 1352 BE), the Tripura Janasiksha Samiti came into being at Durga Choudhury Para under the Jirania Block. This organization was established by several enlightened Tripuri youth, including Dasarath Deb, Sudhanwa Debbarma, Hemanta Debbarma, Agure Debbarma, Akhil



Debbarma, and others, with the purpose of setting up schools and spreading education among the downtrodden Tripuris in the state of Tripura. The movement of the Janasiksha Samiti rapidly transformed into a mass movement. Among the demands of the tribal students was the desire to study in their own mother tongue, Kokborok. At that time, Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Debbarman's Education Minister, Brown Sahib, was compelled to open nearly three hundred schools in rural areas. The Samiti established 488 primary schools in different remote areas of the state with its active cooperation. Subsequently, in 1950–51, most of these schools were recognized by the State Government.

7. Sudhanwa Debbarma: His Literary Vision of Mother Tongue Kokborok

Sudhanwa Debbarma occupies a distinguished place in the history of Kokborok literature as one of its earliest modern literary pioneers. His contribution extends beyond the authorship of novels; he played a decisive role in shaping the direction of Kokborok literary development during a period when written literature in the language was still in its formative stage. Through his writings, editorial activities, and commitment to the promotion of Kokborok, he demonstrated that the language possessed the capacity to express sophisticated literary ideas while preserving the cultural identity of the Tiprasa people.

Growing up in a society undergoing rapid social and political change, Sudhanwa Debbarma witnessed the gradual transformation of traditional Tiprasa life. Expansion of formal education, administrative reforms, economic changes, and increasing interaction with other linguistic communities influenced the cultural landscape of Tripura. These changes created new opportunities but also raised concerns about the preservation of indigenous language, customs, and collective identity. His literary works reflect an awareness of these changing realities and reveal an effort to document and interpret them through fiction rather than through historical or political writing.

Unlike many early writers who concentrated primarily on poetry or folklore, Sudhanwa Debbarma recognized the unique possibilities of the novel. He understood that the novel could portray human relationships, moral dilemmas, and social transformation with greater depth than shorter literary forms. This understanding encouraged him to experiment with extended prose narratives at a time when Kokborok literature had little precedent in this genre. His decision to write novels therefore represented not only personal creativity but also a conscious attempt to expand the literary boundaries of the language.

An equally significant aspect of his literary vision was his commitment to making literature accessible to ordinary readers among the Tiprasa in the Kokborok language. His language is generally clear, direct, and rooted in everyday Kokborok speech. Instead of relying on highly ornamental expressions, he preferred



natural dialogue and realistic descriptions that reflected the experiences of rural communities. This stylistic choice enabled readers to identify closely with the characters and situations presented in his novels, thereby strengthening the relationship between literature and society.

Sudhanwa Debbarma also viewed literature as a means of preserving cultural heritage. His novels incorporate traditional customs, social institutions, agricultural practices, festivals, kinship systems, and moral values that characterize the life of the Tiprasa community. Rather than presenting culture as static or romanticized, he depicts it as a living tradition confronted by the pressures of modernization. His characters often struggle to balance respect for ancestral customs with the demands of a changing society, such as the transition from Jhum cultivation to the process of preparing plain land, tilling the soil by clearing Jalai (untilled soil), and preparing paddy fields. This tension between continuity and change becomes one of the defining features of his literary vision.

Another important dimension of his contribution was his role in encouraging literary activity among other Kokborok writers. Through the publication of the literary magazine *Kwtal Kothoma*, he provided a platform for creative expression at a time when opportunities for publication in Kokborok were extremely limited. The magazine promoted poetry, short stories, essays, and serialized fiction, thereby nurturing a generation of emerging writers and readers. In this sense, Sudhanwa Debbarma functioned not only as an author but also as an institution builder whose efforts contributed significantly to the growth of modern Kokborok literature. The names of other Kokborok writers who continually wrote in the literary magazine *Kwtal Kothoma* include Ram Chandra Debbarma (*Para Rwchaphmung*), Brajakumar Debbarma (*Kokphil*), Jyotilal Debbarma, Ratimanik, Ruburung Devi (*Phumukmung*), Pulin Debbarma (*Tamo Sadi*), Nabalaxmi Debbarma (*Sikla bai Sikli Rwchaplaimani*), Rabindra Debbarma (*Kokconai*), Ratiranjan Debbarma (*Sanma*), Dasarath Debbarma (*Gandhijini Koklam*, *Chin Deshni Ganatantra*, *Muitu Khwlaidi*, *Khurio Achugwi Khokchai Phuichai*), Jagat Debbarma (*Masing Chakra*), Manmohon Debbarma (*Khajama*), Rajmani Debbarma (*Tamo Sadi*), Nakul Debbarma (*Sivchawi Phaio*), Mahendra Debbarma (*Tripura Sabdartha*), and Nagendra Debbarma (*Phumukmung*).

From a critical perspective, however, his literary vision also reflected the limitations of a pioneering writer working within a developing literary tradition. Because the Kokborok novel was still in its infancy, his narratives occasionally display a straightforward plot structure and limited psychological complexity compared with more mature novels in established literary traditions. Some characters are presented primarily as representatives of moral or social values rather than as deeply individualized personalities. Similarly, descriptive passages sometimes take precedence over intricate narrative techniques. These



characteristics should not be viewed merely as weaknesses but rather as indications of a literary tradition that was in the process of establishing its own conventions.

Nevertheless, the historical significance of Sudhanwa Debbarma lies precisely in his willingness to undertake this pioneering task. He transformed Kokborok prose from a medium largely associated with instructional or documentary writing into a vehicle capable of sustaining extended fictional narratives. His literary vision combined cultural preservation with artistic innovation, creating a foundation upon which later Kokborok novelists could experiment with more complex themes, styles, and narrative structures.

Consequently, Sudhanwa Debbarma should be understood not simply as the first Kokborok novelist but as one of the principal architects of modern Kokborok literature. His contribution is measured not only by the novels he wrote but also by the literary possibilities he opened for subsequent generations. Through his creative imagination and commitment to the advancement of his mother tongue, he established a tradition of prose fiction that continues to influence Kokborok literary production today.

8. Sudhanwa Debbarma: His List of Works

Sudhanwa wrote novels, essays, poems, and short stories. The first Kokborok magazine, *Kwtal Kothoma*, was published by him in 1954 AD.

NOVELS

Title	Publisher	Year	Description	Reference
<i>Chethuang</i>	Naba Chandana Prakashani. Compiled by N. Ch. Dev Varma	1954	A Kokborok novel (folk-tale-based fiction)	<i>Kwtal Kothoma</i> , 3rd Edition
<i>Hachuk Khurio</i> (Part 1)	Kokborok Sahitya Sabha	1987	The first modern Kokborok novel	[19][20]
<i>Hachuk Khurio</i> (Part 2)	Kokborok Sahitya Sabha	1994	The first modern Kokborok novel	[21]

POEMS

Title	English Title	Publisher/Reference	Year
<i>Himdi Do</i>	Let's Walk	<i>Kokborok Bhasa O Sahitya</i> , pp. 109–110, by Kumud Kundu Chowdhury	1983
<i>Kha Kwraak</i>	Courage	<i>Lama</i> , March 1983	1983

DRAMA



Year	Title	Publisher	Description	Reference
First Edition – 1950–55; Reprint – February 2005; Second Edition – 2013	<i>Egiyee Cholo</i> (1948)	Kokborok Sahitya Samsad; 2nd Edition by Prativa Debbarma and Sunil Debbarma	The first bilingual drama in Kokborok and Bengali	—
1949 (approximate)	<i>Porikhit Bidruho</i>	—	Agitation against the king	Someone has taken the copy but has not returned it
1954 (approximate)	<i>Bisarjan</i>	—	Translation from Bengali into Kokborok	<i>Kokborok Bhasa- Sahityer Kramabikash</i> , p. 28

ESSAYS

Year	Title	Publisher	Description	Reference
2013	<i>Tripura Upajatini</i> (<i>Tongmung-Chamung</i>) <i>Sanskriti Biyangtwi Kochok</i> <i>Phaikha</i>	Akshar Publications	The ways in which Tripura's tribal culture is developing	<i>Kokborok Kokbwkhal Bwchap</i> , p. 13, by N. C. Dev Varma & Suranjan Kundu Chowdhury
1954	<i>Kokborok Chin Deshni Jati</i> <i>Bangyarokni Kok</i>	—	—	<i>Kwtal Kothoma</i> , 2nd Edition
1954	<i>Bwthai Thaikhe Bedek</i> <i>Kongo</i>	—	—	<i>Kokborok Bhasa-Sahityer Kramabikash</i> , p. 28
1954	<i>Kok Borok</i>	Akshar Publications	—	<i>Kwtal Kothoma</i> , 1st Edition; <i>Kokborok Bhasa-Sahityer Kramabikash</i> , p. 28
1954	<i>Kokma</i>	Akshar Publications	—	<i>Kwtal Kothoma</i> , 4th Edition; <i>Kokborok Bhasa-Sahityer Kramabikash</i> , p. 28
1954	<i>Kokma (Adikotha)</i>	Akshar Publications	—	<i>Kwtal Kothoma</i> , 5th Edition



Year	Title	Publisher	Description	Reference
—	<i>Jati Chapthani Ganatantrik Thansani Samung Akorog</i>	Akshar Publications	To make a nation a republic, unity is very essential	<i>Kokborok Bhasa-Sahityer Kramabikash</i> , p. 28
2011	<i>Borokni Kok Chini Kok</i>	Akshar Publications	Our language is the people's language	<i>Rang Bwtang</i> , p. 93, by Dr. Dipankar Chakrabarty

9. “*Chethuang*” and the Beginning of Kokborok Fiction Novel

The emergence of *Chethuang* marked a decisive turning point in the history of Kokborok literature. Before its publication, creative writing in Kokborok was largely confined to poetry, folk narratives, songs, and short prose compositions. Although these genres played an important role in preserving the cultural heritage of the Tiprasa people, they lacked the structural complexity and narrative continuity that characterize the novel. By introducing an extended fictional narrative through serial publication in ‘*Kwtal Kothoma*’, Sudhanwa Debbarma established a new literary direction for Kokborok literature.

The importance of *Chethuang* lies not merely in its chronological position as the earliest known Kokborok novel but in its demonstration that the Kokborok language possessed the expressive ability required for sustained prose fiction. At a time when the literary capacity of many indigenous languages was often underestimated, the novel challenged such assumptions by presenting a coherent narrative rooted in the social and cultural realities of the Tiprasa community. It proved that Kokborok could effectively convey emotional depth, social conflict, and philosophical reflection without sacrificing its linguistic authenticity.

Examples of Songs Sung During Jhum Cultivation:

Nugrai:- E---hu---hu---hu Kolija khju khamani khwnaichuk bahra

Nagor hamani bahra.

Khjuno naide kha hapyo tongno

Khaju takhumtwirogno.

Mokolno naide kha hapyo tongno

Mokol muruimurogno.

Koromoti :- kuchuk tokling ching pungwi tongphuru



Swbano uansuklangnai?

Maji bilato bubar raija-no tongo,

Bubuno kholwi kannai?

Bwkhani kokno sana-le muchungo

Sabo bai salailangnai?

Haping khum chaksa chaksai-no tongo

Bubuno kholwi kannai?

One of the most remarkable features of '*Chethuang*' is its close relationship with indigenous society. Rather than imitating themes or settings from main stream Indian literature, Sudhanwa Debbarma constructed his narrative around the everyday experiences of the Tiprasa people. Village life, agricultural practices, family relationships, customary traditions, and communal responsibilities form the foundation of the story. These elements are not presented merely as background; they actively shape the decisions, values, and conflicts experienced by the characters. Consequently, the novel functions both as a literary work and as a cultural document reflecting the social environment of its time.

The characterization in '*Chethuang*' reflects the author's emphasis on community over individualism. The principal characters are closely connected to their families, clans, and villages, and their actions are often influenced by collective responsibilities rather than purely personal ambitions. This approach differs from many modern novels that focus primarily on individual psychological development. Instead, Sudhanwa Debbarma portrays human identity as inseparable from the social and cultural structures within which individuals live. Such characterization accurately represents the collective nature of traditional Tiprasa society.

Thematically, *Chethuang* explores questions of morality, social responsibility, cultural continuity, and human dignity. The conflicts presented in the novel emerge naturally from everyday life rather than from extraordinary events. Family obligations, interpersonal relationships, ethical choices, and changing social conditions create situations that require characters to balance personal desires with communal expectations. Through these conflicts, the author illustrates the moral values that sustain social harmony while acknowledging the challenges posed by an evolving society.



Another significant achievement of the novel is its use of language. Sudhanwa Debbarma employs a style that remains accessible without diminishing literary quality. His prose reflects the rhythm and vocabulary of spoken Kokborok, making the narrative familiar to readers while preserving linguistic elegance. Dialogues are natural and culturally appropriate, contributing to the realism of the story. This linguistic approach strengthened readers' confidence in Kokborok as a language capable of supporting sophisticated literary expression.

From a structural perspective, however, *Chethuang* also reveals certain characteristics typical of a pioneering work. Because it appeared in serialized form, some episodes progress independently before contributing to the broader narrative. The pace occasionally varies, and descriptive passages sometimes receive greater emphasis than psychological analysis. Character development, while convincing within its cultural context, is generally less intricate than that found in later modern novels. These features reflect the experimental nature of early Kokborok fiction rather than deficiencies in the author's literary ability.

A critical evaluation also suggests that the novel places greater emphasis on representing society than on formal literary experimentation. Symbolism, multiple narrative perspectives, and complex psychological narration receive relatively limited attention. Instead, Sudhwanya Debbarma prioritizes clarity, cultural authenticity, and social realism. This choice was appropriate for a literary tradition taking its first steps into novel writing, where establishing readability and cultural relevance was arguably more important than adopting advanced narrative techniques.

Despite these limitations, the literary significance of *Chethuang* remains unquestionable. It created a model for subsequent Kokborok novelists by demonstrating how indigenous experiences could be transformed into sustained fictional narratives. The novel encouraged later writers to explore themes such as identity, social change, historical memory, education, and cultural preservation within the framework of prose fiction. In doing so, it broadened both the thematic range and the artistic possibilities of Kokborok literature.

Therefore, *Chethuang* should be understood not simply as the first Kokborok novel but as the foundational text of Kokborok prose fiction. Its greatest achievement lies in opening a new literary path that later generations could refine and expand. While subsequent novelists introduced greater stylistic complexity and broader thematic concerns, the pioneering contribution of Sudhanwa Debbarma remains central to the history of Kokborok literature because he transformed the novel from an unfamiliar literary form into an accepted and respected medium of cultural expression.

10. *Hachuk Khurio* and the Development of the Modern Kokborok Novel



The publication of *HachukKhurio* represents another landmark in the history of Kokborok literature. While *Chethuang* established the foundation of Kokborok fiction through serialized publication, *Hachuk Khurio* demonstrated the maturity of the novel as a complete literary work published in book form. It signifies the transition from experimental narrative writing to a more structured and cohesive form of prose fiction. Consequently, *Hachuk Khurio* is widely regarded as one of the earliest complete modern Kokborok novels and an important milestone in the evolution of indigenous literature.

Unlike *Chethuang*, which introduced readers to the possibilities of long-form storytelling, *Hachuk Khurio* presents a more carefully organized narrative with greater continuity between events and characters. The novel exhibits a stronger sense of structural unity, allowing the storyline to develop naturally from beginning to end. This improvement reflects Sudhwanya Debbarma's growing confidence as a novelist and his deeper understanding of the artistic demands of the genre.

A defining characteristic of *HachukKhurio* is its realistic portrayal of social life. The novel explores the experiences of ordinary people rather than focusing on heroic or extraordinary figures. Rural communities, family relationships, traditional occupations, and village institutions form the social setting within which the narrative unfolds. By concentrating on familiar experiences, the author creates a work that resonates with readers and reflects the realities of Tiprasa society during a period of gradual transformation.

One of the central themes of the novel is the tension between tradition and change. The characters are frequently confronted with situations in which long-established customs encounter new social influences. Education, economic change, modernization, and shifting cultural values create challenges that require individuals and families to reconsider inherited beliefs and practices. Sudhanwa Debbarma neither rejects tradition nor embraces modernity uncritically. Instead, he presents social change as a complex process requiring wisdom, adaptability, and respect for cultural identity.

The novel also demonstrates a more refined approach to characterization than earlier Kokborok prose. Characters are portrayed with greater emotional depth and moral complexity. Their decisions arise from conflicting responsibilities rather than simple distinctions between right and wrong. Family loyalty, personal aspirations, community expectations, and ethical considerations interact throughout the narrative, producing believable human conflicts that enhance the realism of the story.

Language continues to be one of the novel's greatest strengths. Sudhanwa Debbarma employs fluent and natural Kokborok that reflects everyday speech while maintaining literary dignity. The dialogues reveal



differences in age, social status, and personality without appearing artificial. This linguistic authenticity strengthens the cultural identity of the novel and reinforces its value as a representation of indigenous life.

Another notable feature of *Hachuk Khurio* is its detailed depiction of customs and traditions. Ceremonies, agricultural activities, kinship practices, festivals, and communal cooperation are woven naturally into the narrative rather than being presented as isolated descriptions. These cultural elements contribute to the development of both the plot and the characters, illustrating how social institutions influence individual lives. As a result, the novel serves not only as a work of fiction but also as an important record of the cultural heritage of the Tiprasa people.

From a literary perspective, *Hachuk Khurio* demonstrates clear progress in narrative technique. The transitions between scenes are smoother, the sequence of events is more coherent, and the overall composition is more balanced than that of earlier works. The novel maintains readers' interest through gradual narrative development instead of relying on isolated episodes. These qualities indicate the emergence of a more mature Kokborok prose tradition.

Nevertheless, certain limitations remain evident. The novel occasionally adopts a didactic tone, with moral lessons becoming more explicit than implicit. Some supporting characters receive limited development, functioning primarily to advance the central themes rather than existing as fully independent personalities. In addition, symbolic and psychological dimensions remain less developed than in contemporary novels written in more established literary traditions. These characteristics reflect the historical stage of Kokborok fiction, which was still establishing its artistic conventions.

Despite these limitations, *Hachuk Khurio* occupies an exceptional position in Kokborok literary history. It demonstrated that Kokborok novels could achieve narrative coherence, thematic depth, and cultural authenticity within a complete book-length format. The work strengthened public confidence in Kokborok as a literary language and encouraged subsequent writers to pursue fiction as a serious form of artistic expression.

When considered together, *Chethuang* and *Hachuk Khurio* illustrate the gradual evolution of Sudhwanya Debbarma's literary craftsmanship. The former introduced the concept of the Kokborok novel, while the latter refined and consolidated the genre through improved structure, richer characterization, and broader thematic exploration. This progression confirms his role not merely as the first Kokborok novelist but also as the principal architect of the early development of Kokborok prose fiction.

11. Critical Evaluation of Sudhanwa Debbarma's Kokborok Literary Contribution



Sudhanwa Debbarma's contribution to Kokborok literature extends far beyond the distinction of being the first Kokborok novelist. His literary achievements must be understood within the broader context of a language that was still developing its modern written tradition. At a time when Kokborok literature consisted primarily of poetry, folklore, religious writings, and grammatical works, he introduced the novel as a new literary form capable of representing the complexities of human life. His contribution therefore lies not only in producing literary works but also in expanding the creative possibilities of the Kokborok language itself.

One of his greatest achievements was his ability to transform indigenous experiences into literary narratives without compromising their cultural authenticity. His novels are deeply rooted in the social realities of the Tiprasa community. Instead of borrowing settings or themes from dominant literary traditions, he drew inspiration from village life, traditional customs, kinship relations, agricultural practices, and the moral values that shaped everyday existence. This commitment to cultural realism enabled Kokborok readers to recognize their own society within literature, fostering a stronger connection between language, identity, and creative expression.

Another significant strength of his work is the preservation of indigenous knowledge. His novels document many aspects of traditional Tiprasa life that were undergoing gradual transformation due to modernization, urbanization, and changing socio-economic conditions. Customs, festivals, social institutions, family relationships, and community values are portrayed not as historical curiosities but as living cultural practices. Consequently, his novels possess both literary and ethnographic importance, serving as valuable sources for understanding the cultural history of the Tiprasa people.

From a stylistic perspective, Sudhanwa Debbarma adopted a language that was simple, natural, and accessible. His prose reflects everyday Kokborok speech while maintaining literary quality. This stylistic simplicity broadened the readership of Kokborok literature and encouraged new readers to engage with long-form fiction. His use of realistic dialogue further strengthened the authenticity of his narratives by allowing characters to communicate in a manner consistent with their cultural and social backgrounds.

His contribution as an editor and literary organizer deserves equal recognition. Through *Kwtal Kothoma*, he provided one of the earliest platforms for creative writing in Kokborok. The magazine encouraged the publication of poems, essays, short stories, and serialized fiction at a time when opportunities for Kokborok writers were extremely limited. In doing so, he helped create an intellectual environment that nurtured future generations of writers and promoted the steady development of Kokborok literature.



Despite these remarkable achievements, a balanced critical assessment requires acknowledgement of certain limitations. As a pioneer working within an emerging literary tradition, Sudhanwa Debbarma had few established models of Kokborok fiction upon which to build. Consequently, some aspects of his novels appear comparatively simple when evaluated against mature literary traditions. Plot development occasionally follows a linear structure, and psychological exploration of characters remains relatively limited. Many characters primarily represent social values or moral ideals rather than displaying the complex inner conflicts found in later modern fiction.

Similarly, his narratives generally emphasize realism over formal experimentation. Literary techniques such as multiple narrative perspectives, symbolic structures, stream-of-consciousness narration, or nonlinear storytelling receive little attention. However, these apparent limitations should be interpreted within their historical context. His principal objective was to establish the novel as a viable literary genre in Kokborok rather than to experiment with advanced narrative forms. In this respect, simplicity became an advantage because it made the new genre more accessible to readers who were encountering novel writing in Kokborok for the first time.

The influence of Sudhanwa Debbarma on later Kokborok literature is substantial. His pioneering efforts demonstrated that Kokborok could sustain extended fictional narratives and inspired subsequent writers to explore broader themes, including education, social inequality, political change, women's experiences, indigenous identity, and contemporary social issues. Later novelists expanded upon the foundation he established, introducing greater stylistic diversity and thematic complexity while continuing to draw upon the cultural heritage that he had emphasized.

His legacy also extends beyond literature into the broader movement for linguistic and cultural preservation. By producing original creative works in Kokborok, he strengthened public confidence in the language as a medium of intellectual and artistic expression. His novels contributed to the growing recognition of Kokborok as a language capable of supporting modern literary genres alongside other Indian languages. This achievement became particularly significant during later efforts to promote Kokborok in education, academic research, and cultural institutions.

Viewed from a contemporary perspective, Sudhwanya Debbarma's importance lies not simply in being the first Kokborok novelist but in establishing a literary tradition that continues to evolve. Every developing literature depends upon pioneers who are willing to explore uncharted territory despite limited resources and uncertain recognition. Sudhwanya Debbarma fulfilled this pioneering role with remarkable dedication. His



works provided the initial framework within which later generations could refine the artistic possibilities of Kokborok fiction.

Therefore, his literary contribution should be evaluated not solely by the technical features of individual novels but by their historical significance, cultural authenticity, and enduring influence. He transformed Kokborok prose into a medium capable of sustaining imaginative literature, preserved important aspects of Tiprasa cultural life, inspired future writers, and laid the foundation for the continued growth of the Kokborok novel. His place in the history of Kokborok literature remains secure as one of its most influential pioneers and one of the principal architects of its modern literary identity.

12. Conclusion

The development of the Kokborok novel represents one of the most significant achievements in the history of Kokborok literature. The transition from a literary tradition dominated by oral narratives, folk songs, poetry, and grammatical writings to the emergence of the novel reflects the gradual modernization of the language and the growing literary consciousness of the Tiprasa community. Within this historical process, Sudhanwa Debbarma occupies an exceptional and enduring position.

This study has demonstrated that his contribution extends beyond the recognition of being the first Kokborok novelist. Through *Chethuang*, he introduced long-form prose fiction into Kokborok literature and established the foundation upon which subsequent novelists could build. His later work, *Hachuk Khurio*, further strengthened this foundation by presenting a more structured and mature example of the Kokborok novel in book form. Together, these works transformed the literary possibilities of the language and proved that Kokborok could successfully accommodate complex narratives, realistic characterization, and meaningful social themes.

A critical examination of his novels reveals several enduring strengths. His commitment to portraying the lived experiences of the Tiprasa people gave his works authenticity and cultural significance. By incorporating indigenous customs, traditions, village life, kinship systems, agricultural practices, and moral values into his narratives, he created literary works that serve not only as artistic achievements but also as important records of the cultural history of the community. His simple yet expressive language further contributed to the accessibility and popularity of his works, enabling readers to connect with literature in their mother tongue.

At the same time, this study recognizes that his novels reflect the characteristics of a pioneering literary tradition. Their relatively straightforward narrative structure limited psychological complexity, and



restrained experimentation with literary techniques are understandable within the historical context of early Kokborok fiction. Rather than diminishing his achievement, these features highlight the challenges of establishing an entirely new literary genre in a language whose written tradition was still developing.

Sudhanwa Debbarma's influence extends beyond his own literary productions. His editorial leadership through *Kwtal Kothoma* encouraged creative writing and provided one of the earliest literary platforms for Kokborok authors. By nurturing emerging writers and promoting original literary expression, he contributed significantly to the growth of modern Kokborok literature. His efforts created an environment in which the novel could develop into an accepted and respected literary form.

The lasting importance of Sudhanwa Debbarma lies in his role as both a creator and a catalyst. He not only wrote pioneering novels but also inspired future generations to explore new themes, styles, and literary techniques. Contemporary Kokborok fiction continues to benefit from the foundation he established. Many later writers have expanded the thematic and artistic scope of the Kokborok novel, yet their achievements remain connected to the literary path first opened by Sudhanwa Debbarma.

In conclusion, Sudhanwa Debbarma should be remembered not merely as the first Kokborok novelist but as one of the principal architects of modern Kokborok literature. His literary vision, cultural commitment, and pioneering spirit transformed Kokborok prose into a powerful medium of artistic expression. His contribution remains indispensable to understanding the origin, development, and continuing evolution of the Kokborok novel. Future research may further examine his works through comparative literary, linguistic, cultural, and postcolonial perspectives, thereby deepening scholarly appreciation of his enduring legacy within indigenous Indian literature.

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