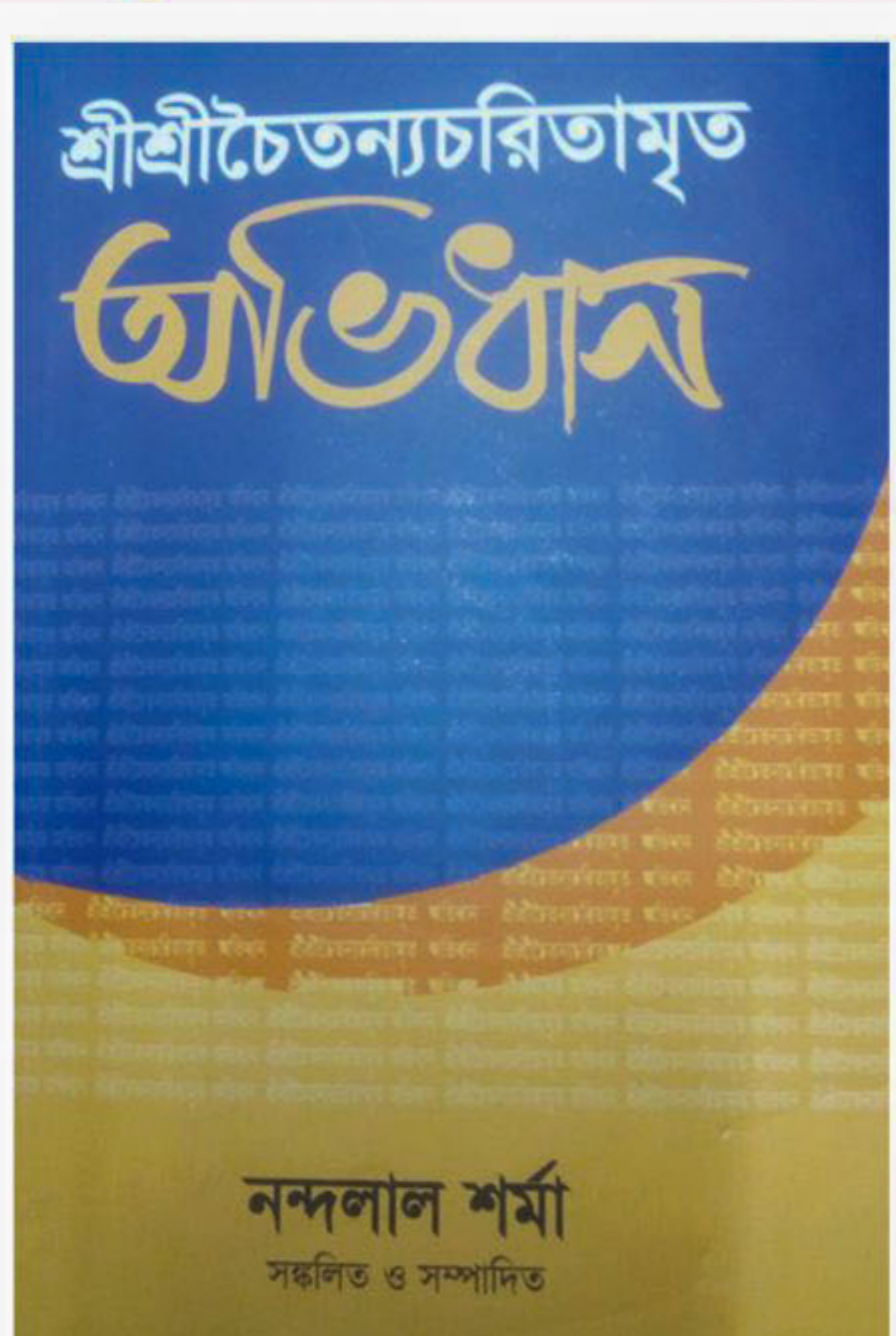


Sreesree Chaitannya Charitamrita Avidhan: A Lexicon of Medieval Bengali Thesaurus

Edited by Nandalal Sharma

Reviewed by Mahfuz ul Hasib Chowdhury

SREESREE Chaitannya Charitamrita Avidhan is a lexicon enriched with the words and phrases found in the maxims and discourses propagated by Sree Chaitannya Mahaprabhu (1486-1534), a highly venerated monk and theologian in the history of the Indian Subcontinent. He was born in 1486 in Nabadwip, a municipality in Nadia District of present day West Bengal. On top of practicing monasticism, Sree Chaitannya used to work for beneficial transformations of the society around him through his theological knowledge and philanthropic roles. Professor Nandalal Sharma has recently capped off a massive research-oriented task by compiling a voluminous Bengali dictionary with interpretations of the words and idioms he came across while scrutinizing the biography of Sree Chaitannya. By doing so, Professor Nandalal Sharma has actually developed a compendious corpus of medieval Bengali language which takes the readers back to different trajectories of 15th century Bengali literature, linguistics and Bengali philosophy.



ables are concerned. At present the young readers of Bangladesh, regrettably, have very little interest to explore the depth and luminosity of Bengali language and the Bengali literary works of current and previous centuries. Our young readers may be encouraged to acquire knowledge on our own long-cherished values and heritage by making them familiar with latest books on the linguistic and literature-oriented texts written in Bengali.

It needs to be presented categorically that *Sreesree Chaitannya Charitamrita Avidhan* is not a book of theology. Neither does it intend to idealize the image of a hermit. This book contains a good number of words linked directly with ascetic and theological notions, but that is not the only content of the book. There are hundreds of words which are closely associated with the day-to-day chores of our lives. This book is vital for comprehending the way Bengali language changed its course through last several centuries and arrived at its present shape. So, it would be a palpable text for language experts to excavate to mitigate their bibliophilic appetite. However, this book stands within the understanding power of general readers too as it's written in a decipherable and explicit diction.

Lives of theologians, social reformists, humanists teach us valuable lessons. Their words and the roles they play for the betterment of mankind work as a driving force behind the progress of human civilization. The life-sketch of Sree Chaitannya as illustrated by Professor Nandalal Sharma is a tale that beautifully stitches worldly matters with the celestial height of divinity. The spiritual thoughts expressed through the disquisitions by Sree Chaitannya have a profound bond with mankind's life on earth because life in this world is a prelude to life hereafter or another life after death, according to people believing in metempsychosis. Strikingly enough, Jalal Uddin Rumi of ancient Persia, Kahlil Gibran of Lebanon, Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman of 19th century America—they all depicted metempsychosis in most of their poetry and prose.

The reviewer is Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Metropolitan University, Sylhet.

Professor Nandalal Sharma is a widely acclaimed educationist and philologist of Bangladesh. He had been a teacher of Bengali language and literature for around thirty years. For last few years, he has been teaching at Metropolitan University, Sylhet in the capacity of a Professor, Controller of Examinations and Proctor. He has so far written over fifty books on the linguistic, literary and cultural history of Bangladesh and some of his books are often named as references in publications by other authors and researchers.

While going through this lexicon, some amazing things caught my vision. Sree Chaitannya's biography was perused by Karl Marx and he referred to Sree Chaitannya as a social reformist, according to *Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* by Lawrence Krader. Moreover, German scholar Otto Stursberg and Edward C. Dimock, Professor Emeritus of University of Chicago, USA also penned research papers on Sree Chaitannya's monkhood and humanitarian contributions. Lexicography is a broad arena of linguistic

studies and blending lexicography with theological adages and monastic musings would certainly lead to an innovative approach to any lexical work. This book *Sreesree Chaitannya Charitamrita Avidhan* is a firm evidence of this statement. Most of the words found in this dictionary by Professor Nandalal Sharma originated from ancient Sanskrit language; however, there are lots of words which are used in current Bengali language too. This book may also be consulted as a deeply conducive text for better understanding of medieval Bengali literature as well. By looking into medieval Bengali language and offering a semantic dimension to this book, Professor Nandalal Sharma has made a valiant effort to regenerate eagerness in the minds of readers to pick up and peruse classical and primitive Bengali verses and prose. From this point of view, this scholarly publication by Professor Nandalal Sharma is a plausible work to refurbish our love for classicism as far as the gemstones and jewels of Bengali creeds and

Political Parties in Bangladesh: Challenges of Democratization

Author: Rounaq Jahan

(Dhaka: Prothoma Prokashan, 2015, pp. xix + 212, ISBN 978 984 90039 3 9, price Taka 550)

Reviewed by Dr. Al Masud Hasanuzzaman

THE book *Political Parties in Bangladesh: Challenges of Democratization* written by Professor Dr. Rounaq Jahan and published by the Prothoma Prokashan is indeed a timely endeavor. Since recent times the politics of this country is characterized by politics of crisis and the crux of such predicament stems from malfunctioning of party politics and more specifically inter-party conflicts and confrontations. As such comprehensive and in depth research on political parties in Bangladesh is deeply significant. However, there is scant research works on parties along with a lack of appropriate methodical analysis and investigation. The book under review is a praiseworthy attempt to fill this void for which Professor Jahan deserves our special appreciations.

The book is organized into six broad chapters. The introductory section deals with theoretical explanations of political parties and political development followed by a detail description of the nature of party systems under different regimes of three distinct phases since independence of Bangladesh. From 1972 through 1975, from a one party dominance to single party rule, during 1975 - 1990, party building under state sponsorship by politically ambitious military rulers, and from 1991 until present, a system of burgeoning two party managed politics characterized by conflicting political scenario. The subsequent analyses cover: major traits of political parties including ideology, organizational structure, leadership, support base, factionalism and intra-party democratic practice involving democratic policy process, leadership, candidate selection, representation, funding, party-persuaded violence and affairs of party politics at the local levels. The concluding section furnishes key findings of the study and remedial measures.

In modern states the inevitable roles of political parties in practicing and building democracy can hardly be over emphasized. Both in political and governmental processes the omnipresence of political parties is greatly visible through their participation in electoral politics, national representative institutions and state organs. In a democratic political system, political parties work as tools for exercising political power. It is through their activism political parties influence the lives of the citizens and in the process they appear as guide and change agent of the people to set value goals for the society by preserving normative relationships. As such political party building as institutions is extremely significant for the overall socio-political development and for ensuring proper role-playing human organizations.

Because of the extended role and wide ranging effects of parties, democracy is explained positively by scholars as 'partyocracy'. However, partyocracy can also signify pessimism in the context of the parties' unremitting command, manipulation, and monopoly over the affairs of representation and governance and the mass of the people keep on just as quiet or silent watchers.

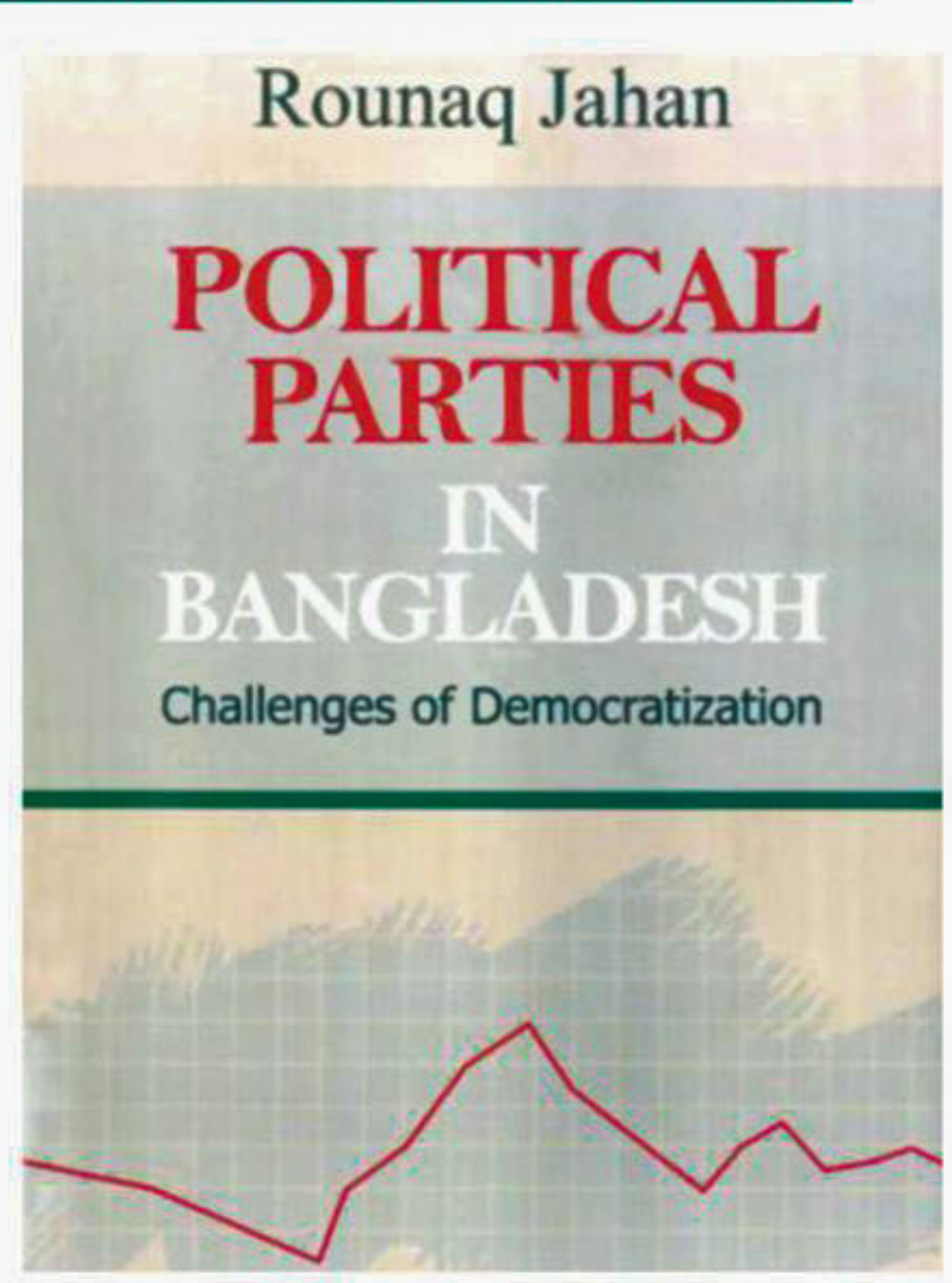
The concept of political party and party system has been western. The origin and perspectives of party formation in western liberal democracies are quite different compared to the history and growth of parties in developing countries like ours. As such in the studies and research on such parties, full application of western approaches may not be fairly compatible. Therefore the concepts of European traditional party mode, Maurice Duverger's mass-base party or Karsheimer's catch-all-party may not blend in their entire forms in our contexts. The multidimensional challenges, crises, and problems that remain in the transitional phase of the developing societies need to be considered in course of their party research. The issues of sociology of political parties and country specific perspectives hence are significant in the process.

However, there is uniformity in the theoretical performances of political parties throughout the world. Accordingly the common party functions have been political socialization, interest articulation, interest aggregation and political communication. It is indeed the functions that are imperative for ensuring democratic governance depend on the efficacy of party system and parties. The emphasis is thus placed on the institutionalization of parties and positive correlation between political system and party system. In fact the successful roles of parties in the political process, parties in government and in opposition, and the constructive relations between parties and electorate contribute to transform parties from a mere organization to the height of institutionalization.

The issues that come under the investigation of party performance include-the extent of the roots of parties within the society, the implementation of party ideology and programs, an analysis of party leadership, organizational structure, integration, as well as the two-way relations between party and the masses, party and civil society and the role process according to party constitution and manifesto.

Theoretically Bangladesh conceives the principles of pluralism, democracy, and a functional multi-party system. There are, however, gaps between theory and its practice. The trends that persist in our party formation and functions include personality centered party pattern, weaknesses in performing political input tasks, consider elections as the ultimate goal of democracy, post poll mass-distancing, structural erosion and factionalism, clientele politics and patron-client ties, intra party conflicts and parochialism all that prevent parties from developing into rational organizations. Owing to ineffective parliamentary structures, coercive attitude of the authority, opposition only for the sake of opposition, mutual intolerance, and the like, detrimental consequences prevail in the political process. Against public interests, sustained boycott of the House and nonstop hartals are called for the concerned party interests that often lead to violence and anarchical situation severely threatening human security. All these affairs are greatly irreconcilable with a functional party system.

Rounaq Jahan's research highlights the follow-



ing trends: practice of politics under the influence of two major parties and political alliances since 1990; limitations of internal democracy within parties; criminalization of politics; ascription instead of achievement motivation in party structures; consolidation of authoritative control of the party chiefs; involvement of non-political elements in electoral politics; continued dominance of the business interests in politics and commercialization; centralized decision process; and non-transparent political finance.

Against the backdrop of negative consequences of 'partyocracy' there arise the matter of demanding party responsiveness and accountability. In recent times in the developing world greater emphasis is given on party responsibility functioning through legal binding and introducing structural reforms. In this regard various legal measures have also been taken in Bangladesh and one important stride is reforming the Representation of People's Order or RPO. Its major features include compulsory registration of political parties with the Election commission, formulation of democratic constitution, declaration of income and expenditures, submission of statement of audited accounts and transparency in party funding. Nevertheless until now the proper application of RPO procedures have not been visible.

In the book under review the major issues of structural set up of the major political parties in Bangladesh, their leadership selection, decision-making process, electoral campaigning and funding, nomination procedure, candidate selection, representation of women and marginal social groups, and yearly financial matters as per the RPO have been scholarly analyzed with proper theoretical explanations, illustrations, elucidations, information and examples. Nonetheless, there are limits in obtaining primary information and data from the parties as the author rightly says in the preface of her book. For the purpose of investigation four mainstream parties namely the Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamat have been selected. It can however be mentioned that for the sake of a more representative research the author could have included at least one left party actively involved in the country's politics.

It is mentionable that both facets of intra and inter-party relations within the party-system intensely influence the practice of politics and democracy. When political power becomes the sole determinant of socio-economic and political processes then control and competition for such power tend to be vicious and violent in nature. In Bangladesh perspective where there is a lack of consensus on state fundamentals and electoral democracy, hostility and unconstitutional methods are recurrently followed as exemplified by recent inter-party fierce relations. In the book intra-party affairs are analyzed from different dimensions but a simultaneous discussion on inter-party ties responsible for the problems of democratization also remains imperative.

Professor Rounaq Jahan in her book precisely examines the growth of our party system over the last 43 years underscoring in detail the challenges of democratic consolidation. Although pro-democratic movements in this country are led by political parties, prevailing corrosion and erosion in party structures create hindrances towards establishing good governance. As the prime intent of the contending parties is to control state power, increasing their support-bases by distributing patronages gets more importance even at the cost of party ideology and guidelines. Deadly competition for state resources strengthens patron-client bond, corruption and belligerent practices that severely hamper traditional party performances. For democratic renovation the author emphasizes on abandoning the parties' undemocratic behavior and giving up a culture of parliament boycott. Other major suggestions contain 'all parties ruling as well as opposition, need to stop using violence to settle inter-party and intra-party conflicts', 'an urgent need to separate the party organization and the government', instead of promoting corporate business interests, detailed policy programs for the majority marginalized sections need to be chalked out and above all ensure internal democracy within parties.

Finally it can be said that in order to precisely explicate the political dynamics of Bangladesh more comprehensive and follow up in depth party research are imperative. In this respect the research findings of Professor Jahan highlighted above remain very significant. We are definitely thankful to her for such a commendable academic piece of work. Indeed all her articles, monographs, and books are considered as valuable academic resources for our social and political science disciplines. The book under review is a required reading for all concerned.

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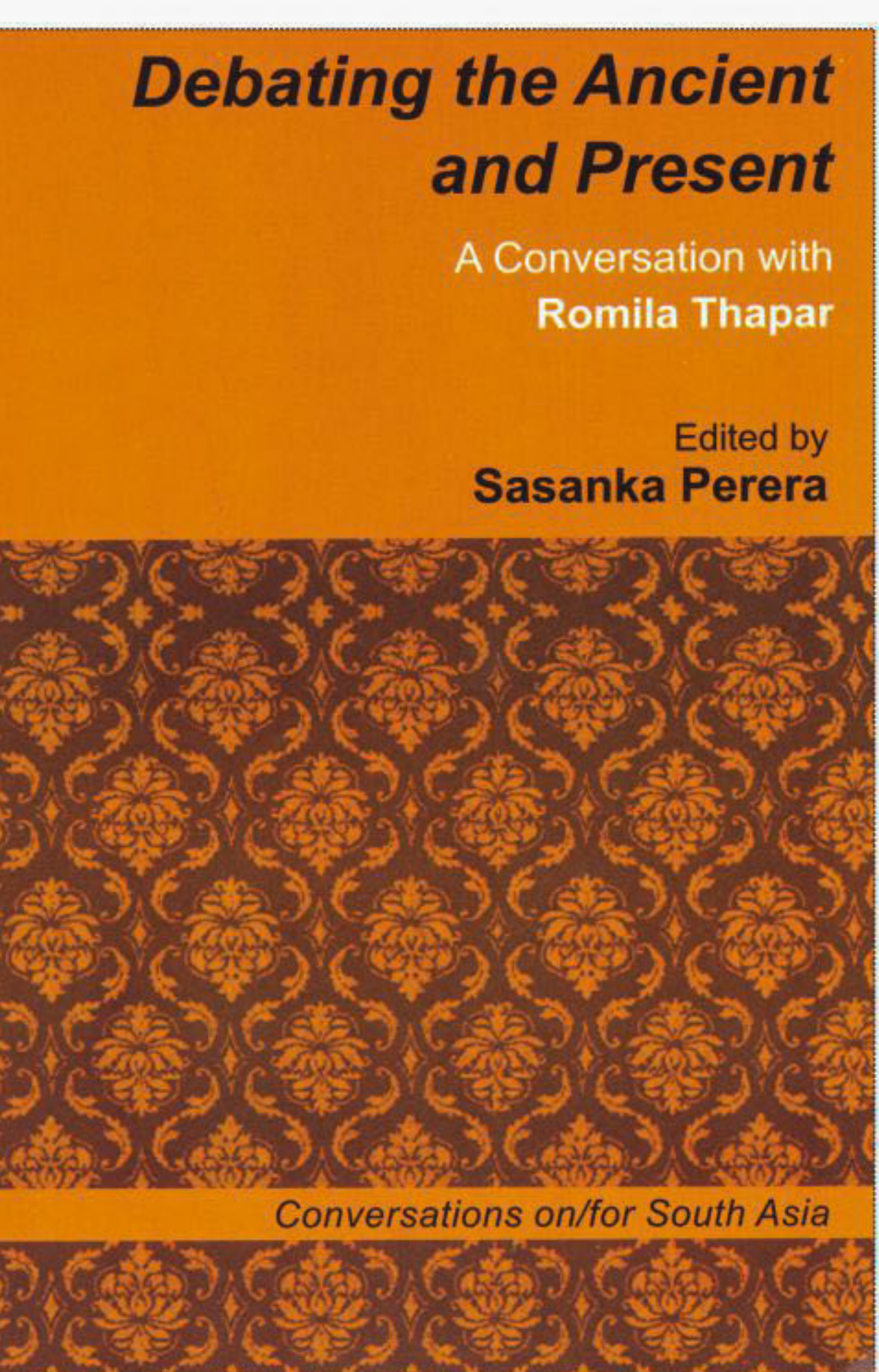
Debating the Ancient and Present: A Conversation with Romila Thapar

Edited by Sasanka Perera

(Delhi: Aakar Books and Department of Sociology, South Asian University, 2015, pp.75, INR.125.00 (Paperback).

Reviewed by Renny Thomas

THE 'Past' decides the 'Present' in India. The past is an everyday word, in politics, academics, culture and science in India. The 'Present' questions of the 'Past' are often seen as ideological constructions. What is the past? Can we think of the Past and the Present in a dialogical way? Can they talk with each other? How do we think about the Past in the Present? These are some of the everyday questions Indians often deal with. It is in this context that the book edited by Sasanka Perera, speaks to the readers: How do you think about the past in contemporary India? This book is an outcome of a unique conversation with Prof. Romila Thapar held at the Dept. of Sociology, South Asian University, New Delhi. The University itself was set up in New Delhi in 2010 by SAARC. It is important to note that a discussion on the past is held at a department of sociology, and it is also important to highlight the fact that the department is concerned with the 'past', which many conventional sociology departments dare not deal with. This conversation with Prof. Thapar held on August 22, 2013, was chaired and moderated by Prof. Rustom Bharucha of Jawaharlal Nehru University. Members from the audience asked questions based on the writings of Prof. Thapar, which ranged from the methodology of studying the past to the controversies of studying the past. The book, *Debating the Ancient and Present: A Conversation with Romila Thapar* is the first instalment in the publication series, 'Conversations on/for South Asia' launched by the Department of Sociology at South Asian University in 2015.



of her responses that history as an academic discipline should not be compared with general opinions, and it is the trained historians who have the responsibility to write history and decide the constitution of evidence. As she puts, "Historians are responsible for the interpretations because they're the ones who're interpreting it. The evidence doesn't speak by itself. The historian has to make the evidence speak and so what one's listening to is the historian making the evidence speak" (p.58). This should not

be seen as a dogmatic treatment of history, as we live in a time where people with no understanding of history comments on historical events and try to communalise the past with their versions of history. It can also be seen as the anxiety of a committed historian at a time when the past gets distorted by rightwing ideologues. At a time when rightwing ideologues attempt to impose their own version of history and any serious historical writing is abusively labeled as 'Marxist', it is important to think with Thapar about the future of historical writing in India. Thapar's discussion on how various myths being 'represented' as history is significant as it conveys the message that one should be very careful of communally charged opinions of the past. The discussion on the Somanatha temple in this context is interesting.

The book discusses very important questions such as the challenges historians face especially when the state interferes in the writing of history. It directly speaks to the public about the dangers of distorted history - and the need for understanding the past without politicizing it. It speaks to the public the significance of opposing propagandist history, and encourages them to read and engage with histories written by professionals. This little book on the 'Past' is useful not only to students of history, but to anyone who wants to understand history unclouded by emotions. Though Thapar speaks in the context of understanding the Indian past in the present, much of what she has to say is of relevance to all attempts at dealing with the past in South Asia and beyond.

We should have more of these conversations and interactions, and it should be published widely for the larger audience. The attempt by the Department of Sociology at South Asian University has to be congratulated, and one hopes that there would be more conversations on/for the Past.

The reviewer is Assistant Professor and Social Anthropologist of Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi, New Delhi.