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AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON BHABENDRANATH SAIKIA'S NOVEL  
'ANTAREEP'

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<i>Keywords</i>	<i>Abstract</i>
<i>Society, Circumstances, Equation, Intimation, Loyalty, Revenge.</i>	Bhabendranath Saikia occupies a prestigious place in the history of Assamese Literature. The prolific writer's large body work includes different literary genres like short-stories, novels, plays, children-literature, lyrics, films etc. His all works get great appreciation from the readers. 'Antareep', the novel of Bhabendranath Saikia, was first serialized in two magazines, 'Ramdhenu' and 'Prantik' respectively from 1979 to 1984. It came out as a form of book in 1986 from the publication house 'Jyoti Prakashan'. The novel tells a story of an aristocratic Assamese family during the last two decades of British colonization of India. Though the general atmosphere of the time might have been politically changed, the novelist only provides glimpses of it in this family drama. The word 'Antareep' means "a place of solitude" or "an isolated island". The title of the novel itself



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	carries deep significance, symbolizing human loneliness and emotional distance. The novel not merely a tale of rebellious woman, it explores so many facts of human psyche, the complex ideas of love, loyalty and revenge; it question our ideas of justice and right or wrong.
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**Objectives of the Study:**

- A] To discuss about the novel 'Antareep' as a whole and minute and lucid description of day to day life of the main character of the novel 'Menaka'.
- B] To discuss about the social consciousness of Bhabendranath Saikia.
- C] To discuss on Bhabendranath Saikia's knowledge about human psychology reflected in this novel.

**Method of the Study:** Descriptive and Analytical methods have been applied for the discussion of the topic. The study is based on Primary and Secondary Sources.

**Scope of the Study:** The paper will discuss about 'Antareep', the novel, written by Bhabendranath Saikia. It will through light on the plot of the novel, protagonist and other characters and the contemporary society.

**Introduction:**

Bhabendranath Saikia is a skillful writer of Assamese Literature. He is expert in creating central emotion even in limited scope. Humanistic consciousness is his prime diction. Though Bhabendranath Saikia is a man of science background, he is deeply related to Assamese Literature and Assamese Film Industry. Saikia edited 'Prantik', an Assamese monthly magazine, and a children's magazine named 'Xafura'. He was also the president of Jyoti Chitran, which was the only one film studio for a long time. For numerous works in Assamese Literature, Culture and Cinema of Assam, he was awarded Prestigious Padmashri award in 2001.

Bhabendranath Saikia has written 03(three) nos of novels such as 'Antareep', 'Ramyabhumi' and 'Atankar Shesat'. 'Antareep' was his first novel and it was published in 1986. The characters of the novel are realistic and psychologically deep. Their emotions and behavior create a strong connection with readers. The story of this novel revolves around complex interpersonal relationships and social dynamics, featuring the prominent character 'Menaka'. The supporting characters represent different aspects of society. This novel was adapted into the Assamese film 'Agnisnaan' in 1985, which was directed by Bhabendranath Saikia himself.



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### **Analysis of the story and characters of the novel 'Antareep':**

'Antareep' was published in 1986. It was serialized in two magazines *Ramdhenu* and *Prantik* respectively from 1979 to 1984. This novel tells a story of an aristocratic assamese family during the last two decades of British colonization of India. This novel reflects a family drama. *Menaka* is an aristocratic housewife and a happy mother of four children, who is well respected in society and also treated as a goddess by her family members. But when it comes to her conjugal life, all the facades drop down to reflect the real servitude of a helpless married woman, who did not know how to protest against circumstances or rather she did not know she should protest, while another woman comes to her equation. Her husband *Mahikanta's* second marriage with a much younger girl *Kiran* shakes *Menaka* from her complacent attitude towards her marriage. Her initial stoicism turns into her desire to be equal to her husband in their relationship. *Menaka* said, "Everything should be equal- be it peace of mind or suffering". She avoided further physical relationship with her husband after his second marriage and developed an intimate relationship with the sympathetic village thief *Madan* and gave a child from his side named *Dhruba*. She rendered *Mahikanta* helpless and fuming by her insolence, and though he knew that *Dhruba* was not his child; societal ignominy forced his mouth shut. The eternal conflict and tensions gradually mounts as the narrative progresses, it is repetitions of these socially accepted- unaccepted relationship equations throughout, even in the lives of the next generation which centers *Menaka's* eldest and introspective son *Indra*. The novel is not merely a tale of a rebellious woman, it explores so many facets of human psyche, the complex ideas of love, loyalty and revenge, it questions our ideas of justice and right or wrong.

*Menaka* is the main and strongest character of this novel. She took revenge to her husband by holding an extra marital physical relationship with a thief of their village named *Madan*. She had some arguments from her side. She had given birth four childrens to her husband, had bared her body and soul to him, but why *Mahikanta*, her husband wants to remarry? What made him to dress a new silk kurta to become a bridegroom once again and leave on elephant-back to take a new wife in his life?

When *Menaka's* dissolute husband *Mahikanta* takes a second wife *Menaka* is disabled by heedless manner in which he squanders her unquestioning loyalty. But after the initial anguish she finds new strength in her womanhood when she embraces a tender but illicit relationship with a village outcast; in her role as fiercely protective mother, and , eventually is a compassionate humanity towards her frail and batter co-wife and needy stepchildren. The story also poignantly explores *Menaka's* troubled but unwittingly exposed to a be wildering world of adult complexities and feel compelled to leave the village.



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*Menaka* is presented as a traditional and conservative woman, yet also someone with great strength of character. She is too proud to allow her husband to come near her as he has hurt her by remarrying which she takes as rejection; at the same time she refused to desert her stepchildren.

She has troublesome but redemptive relationship with her first son *Indra*, who is a silent spectator of the entire drama of adult complexities, and is not at ease with mother due to her illicit relationship with the thief *Madan*.

*Mahikanta* is portrayed as the raving patriarch and villain who oppresses both his wives; he is the wielder of great power in the household.

The novel '*Antareep*' provides a view of the lives, stories, beliefs and culture of the people of that time of Assamese society. For instance, the narration events following the death of *Mahikanta's* mother not only gives a picture of the rituals following a death but also the various superstitious and taboos which ruled people's lives of that time.

It is already discussed that *Menaka* is a very good, beautiful and traditional woman and would always follow all the rituals of patriarchy society as taught by her parents before she got married to *Mahikanta*.

*"Menaka's struggle and her rebellious nature started with the knowledge that her husband Mahikanta is soon to bring a mistress for himself. This news created a bunch of conflict within her. She was confused whether to welcome the mistakes who would take her all rights from her husband or should rebel against it. This avoidance conflicts situation leads to change her personality from move against people. It was tough decision on her part as welcoming a mistress meaning sharing the most integral part of her life with someone else. The inconsistency in her thought processes leads her to believe in a way not approved by her, lead her to experience basic anxiety."* (1)

The title '*Antareep*' literally translate into 'a cape', a pointed piece of land that extends out into a sea, ocean, lake or river. According to a noted Assamese critic Dr. Leelabati Saikia Bora- *"The naming of the novella 'Antareep' is remarkable. Here the 'antorip' (ie. the cape) is that segregated area in the vastness of Menoka's heart which was created by Madan and Dhruva; the burning memory of his creation kept Mahikanto numb till the very last."* (2)

The title is a focal point of novel which also is a way gives us a clue to the novelist's intention of keeping *Menaka* and her emotional journey to the foreground in the narrative. The thoughts, dilemmas and inner struggles of *Menaka* is the core strength of the novel. Saikia reveals the inner world of human beings through psychological analysis.

The characters of this novel fleshed out well with the intricate thought processes in their head being portrayed with precision. Events recounted in the third person narrative add to the authenticity of the story. None of the characters in the book are larger than life and it seems like the author has made



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conscious effort to keep it real to commendable effect. The immense complexities of a joint family, the stifling tension of unspoken boundaries and the constricting pressure of reticence are only a few of the well etched out dimensions of family dynamic. All the characters of this novels are realistic and psychologically deep. Their emotions and behavior create a strong connections with readers.

The style and language of this novel is very simple, clear, yet meaningful language. There is a fine blend of descriptive narration and psychological analysis. The dialogues used here are natural and lively.

### **Conclusion:**

In this novel, '*Antareep*'- the woman *Menaka* neither fights nor resigns to her fate. She gets back for wayward husband, but in a very different way. The novel '*Antareep*'- is touching account of the overwhelming circumstances that the female protagonist encounters in her life. Besides this the readers of this novel also get a glimpse of the status of woman when *Mahikanta* brings in a new wife in the presence of the first one, and also by the fact that Kiran is married off to him simply because she belongs to a poor household and her family was in need of the money which he was willing to offer them.

Characters of the novel '*Antareep*' are fleshed out well with the intricate thought processes in their head being portrayed with precision. Events recounted in third person narratives add to the authenticity of the story. None of the characters in the book are larger than life and it seems like the author has made a conscious effort to keep it real to commendable effect. '*Antareep*' is not just a novel; it is a mirror of the human inner world. Bhabendranath Saikia shows through this work how a person can deeply lonely even while living in a society. This is a psychological and socially relevant novel that beautifully portrays the loneliness, conflicts, and deeper truths of modern human life.

### **AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION**

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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