



# “THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN KOKBOROK LITERATURE: A STUDY ON THE CHARACTER OF SABITA IN THE NOVEL ‘*HACHUK KHURIO*’.”

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## **Abstract**

This paper offers a critical study of the character of Savita in *Hachuk Khurio* (1987), a notable Kokborok novel by Sudhanwa Debbarma with the aim of understanding how characterisation functions as a medium for representing social reality and cultural ethics within the Tiprasa community of Tripura. The study situates the novel within the broader tradition of Kokborok literature, tracing its roots from oral culture to the emergence of the novel as a significant literary form. By focusing on Savita's life journey from her upbringing in a traditional rural household to her role as a wife and mother the paper examines how emotional restraint, familial duty and moral discipline shape female identity in indigenous society. Savita's character is analysed as a realistic and culturally grounded representation of womanhood, where personal desires are negotiated within social expectations rather than expressed through overt rebellion. The paper highlights how Sudhanwa Debbarma employs subtle narrative techniques to portray gender roles, emotional maturity and cultural continuity without dramatization. Through close reading and contextual analysis, the study demonstrates that Savita is not merely a supporting character but a thematic anchor through whom the novel articulates ideals of responsibility, sacrifice and fulfillment. Ultimately, the paper argues that *Hachuk Khurio* uses character-centred narration to preserve indigenous values while offering a nuanced portrayal of women's lived experiences in rural Tripura, thereby contributing significantly to the literary and cultural discourse of Kokborok fiction.

**Keywords:-** Language, Kokborok, Literature, Novels, Characteritics.

## Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research methodology to analyse the character of Savita in Sudhanwa Debbarma's *Hachuk Khurio* (1987). As the paper is literary and interpretative in nature, it relies primarily on textual analysis and critical reading of the novel, supported by contextual and theoretical perspectives drawn from literary and cultural studies. The methodology is designed to examine how characterisation functions as a narrative tool to represent social values, gender roles and cultural ethics within the Tiprasa community. The primary source for this study is the Kokborok novel *Hachuk Khurio*. Close reading is employed to analyse Savita's actions, relationships, dialogues and emotional responses as presented in the text. Particular attention is given to key episodes that reveal her psychological development, moral outlook and social responsibilities. This method allows for a detailed understanding of how the character evolves from childhood to adulthood and how her identity is shaped within a traditional family structure. In addition to primary textual analysis, secondary sources such as critical essays, research articles, books on Kokborok literature and studies on indigenous narratives are consulted to situate the novel within its broader literary and cultural context. These sources help in understanding the historical development of Kokborok literature, the emergence of the novel as a genre and the socio-cultural background of the Tiprasa community. Secondary materials also assist in framing the analysis within existing scholarly discourse and identifying gaps that the present study seeks to address. The study further employs a character-centred analytical approach, focusing on Savita as a representative figure of indigenous womanhood. This approach enables the exploration of gender roles, emotional restraint and familial duty without isolating the character from her social environment. Elements of cultural studies are used to interpret how customs, kinship patterns and moral values influence individual behaviour and identity formation in the novel. Since the research is qualitative, no statistical or empirical methods are applied. The emphasis remains on interpretation, explanation and critical reflection. The study maintains academic objectivity by grounding interpretations in textual evidence and avoiding subjective generalisation. Through this methodological framework, the paper aims to offer a systematic and insightful reading of Savita's character while contributing to the critical understanding of Kokborok fiction and indigenous literary traditions.

## Introduction:

The novel as a literary form provides a comprehensive representation of human life by combining narrative structure with emotional and social realities. Among its essential components, character holds a central position, as it is through characters that readers experience the world of the text. Characters give voice to cultural values, social norms, personal struggles and moral ideals, transforming abstract ideas into lived human experiences. A critical study of characters, therefore, becomes an effective way to understand both the artistic vision of the writer and the society reflected in the literary work.

*Hachuk Khurio*, written by Sudhanwa Debbarma and published in 1987, is a significant contribution to Kokborok literature. The novel presents a realistic depiction of a Tiprasa family living in the rural landscape of Tripura. Through its simple yet powerful narrative, the text captures the rhythms of village life, familial relationships and cultural practices of the Tiprasa community. The novel does not rely on dramatic events alone; rather, it draws its strength from ordinary experiences and emotionally grounded characters making it a valuable text for literary and cultural analysis. Characterization in *Hachuk Khurio* plays a vital role in shaping the narrative and conveying its thematic concerns. The characters are not merely functional elements of the story but represent social ideals, emotional resilience and cultural continuity. Through their actions, relationships and moral choices, the novel explores issues related to family responsibility, social duty, gender roles and emotional discipline within a traditional community structure. Each character contributes to the realistic texture of the narrative, reinforcing the novel's social relevance. Among the various characters in the novel, Savita occupies a central and influential position. Her character reflects the lived reality of a woman shaped by circumstances, family values and social expectations. Raised without her parents, Savita's life unfolds within a supportive yet disciplined family environment, which influences her personality and moral outlook. Her journey from childhood to adulthood reveals emotional depth, restraint and acceptance, making her character significant for understanding the novel's portrayal of womanhood. The character of

Savita is particularly important because it illustrates how personal emotions are negotiated within social boundaries. Her silent affection, sense of duty and later transformation into a responsible wife and mother highlight the cultural ideals associated with women in Tiprasa society. Through Savita, the novelist presents a subtle commentary on love, sacrifice and fulfillment within the framework of traditional values. This paper will examine the character of Savita in *Hachuk Khurio* in order to understand her role in the narrative and her contribution to the thematic structure of the novel. By focusing on her characterization, the study aims to explore how Sudhanwa Debbarma uses character as a literary device to reflect social realities and cultural ethics embedded in rural Tripura.

### **Kokborok: Language, Origin and Cultural Significance:**

Kokborok is the indigenous language of the Tiprasa (Tripuri) community, the original inhabitants of the present-day state of Tripura in North-East India. It belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family and has been spoken for centuries as a medium of communication, cultural expression and collective memory among the Tiprasa people. The term “Kokborok” itself is derived from two words “kok” meaning language and “borok” meaning human or man. So, together signifying “the language of the people.”

Traditionally, Kokborok existed as an oral language transmitted through generations by means of folktales, myths, songs, rituals and everyday speech. Oral traditions played a crucial role in preserving the history, belief systems and social values of the Tiprasa community. Through these oral narratives, the language became deeply intertwined with indigenous knowledge systems, ecological awareness and spiritual practices. In the modern period, Kokborok has gradually acquired a written form, leading to its use in education, administration and literary production. Although debates continue regarding its script Roman, Bengali and others. The language has gained institutional recognition and academic importance. Kokborok is now taught in schools and colleges in Tripura and is recognised as an important regional language that represents indigenous identity and cultural heritage. Beyond communication, Kokborok functions as a marker of ethnic identity and cultural continuity. It carries within it the worldview, social customs and lived experiences of the Tiprasa people. The language reflects close relationships with nature, community life, kinship systems and indigenous spirituality. As such, Kokborok is not merely a linguistic system but a cultural framework through which the Tiprasa community understands and interprets the world.

### **Kokborok Literature:**

Kokborok literature refers to the body of literary works consisting of both oral and written produced in the Kokborok language. Its roots lie in oral traditions, including folktales, legends, ritual chants, lullabies, proverbs and folk songs. These early forms of expression served as vehicles for moral instruction, cultural preservation and social cohesion. Oral narratives often focused on themes such as harmony with nature, ancestral wisdom, communal life and spiritual beliefs. The emergence of written Kokborok literature is closely linked with social change, education and cultural awareness in the twentieth century. With the introduction of formal education and the efforts of indigenous intellectuals and writers, Kokborok began to be used in written forms such as poetry, short stories, novels, plays, essays and translations. This transition from orality to literacy marked a significant phase in the literary history of the language. Modern Kokborok literature reflects both continuity and change. While it draws inspiration from traditional themes and indigenous experiences, it also addresses contemporary issues such as identity, displacement, gender roles, social inequality, political consciousness and cultural survival. Writers use literature as a space to question social norms, document historical experiences and assert indigenous identity in the face of marginalisation. The novel has emerged as an important genre in Kokborok literature, as it allows for detailed representation of social life and character development. Through novels, writers portray rural realities, family structures, emotional conflicts and cultural values of the Tiprasa community. Character-centred narratives often highlight the moral and emotional dimensions of indigenous life, making the literature socially grounded and emotionally resonant. Kokborok literature also plays a vital role in preserving cultural memory. Many literary works document rituals, customs, belief systems and oral histories that might otherwise disappear under the pressure of modernisation. In this sense, literature functions as an archive of indigenous knowledge and a

means of cultural resistance. From a critical perspective, Kokborok literature holds significant literary value because of its authenticity, thematic depth and cultural specificity. It contributes to the broader field of Indian and indigenous literatures by offering alternative narratives that challenge dominant cultural representations. As an emerging literary tradition, Kokborok literature continues to evolve, gaining recognition in academic discourse and enriching the multicultural fabric of Indian literature.

### **Kokborok novel:**

The emergence of the novel in Kokborok literature marks a significant shift from an oral and performative tradition to a sustained written narrative form. While Kokborok literature was initially dominated by folktales, songs and dramas rooted in indigenous memory and ritual life, the appearance of novels enabled writers to explore complex social realities, historical transitions, identity conflicts and cultural transformation of the Tripuri community. The Kokborok novel has thus become an important medium for documenting lived experiences, collective anxieties and aspirations of an indigenous society negotiating modernity.

#### 1. *Hachuk Khurio* (1987) by Sudhanwa Debbarma.

This is a significant Kokborok novel. The novel presents a realistic portrayal of a Tiprasa family living in rural Tripura. It vividly depicts village life, social relations and everyday struggles of the community. Through simple narration, the writer highlights Tiprasa culture, values and lived experiences.

#### 2. *Khong* (1996) by Shyamlal Debbarma

Khong is regarded as one of the early foundational novels in Kokborok literature. The novel reflects the inner struggles of tribal life in the context of socio-economic change. Through its narrative, the text foregrounds issues such as displacement, erosion of traditional values and the tension between ancestral customs and emerging modern influences. The novel plays a crucial role in establishing the Kokborok novel as a serious literary form capable of psychological depth and social critique.

#### 3. *Rung* (2001) by Nanda Kumar Debbarma

In Rung, Nanda Kumar Debbarma presents a sensitive portrayal of human relationships shaped by cultural norms and emotional conflict. The novel explores themes of longing, loss and the fragile bond between individuals and community. Nature and landscape are intricately woven into the narrative, symbolizing both continuity and change in Tripuri life. The novel contributes significantly to the emotional and aesthetic expansion of Kokborok fiction.

#### 4. *Mwnakni Pohor* (2002) by Kunju Bihari Debbarma

Mwnakni Pohor can be read as a narrative of awakening and social consciousness. The novel critically engages with issues of tradition, moral responsibility and communal harmony. Kunju Bihari Debbarma employs realistic storytelling to expose the silent struggles within rural tribal society, making the novel an important text for understanding social reformist tendencies in Kokborok literature.

#### 5. *Langmani Rukungo* (2003) by Sunil Debbarma

This novel focuses on cultural identity and resilience. Langmani Rukungo portrays the Tripuri community's effort to preserve dignity and self-respect amid socio-political challenges. The narrative voice reflects collective memory and indigenous worldview, emphasizing cultural pride and resistance. The novel stands out for its strong cultural consciousness and narrative rootedness.

#### 6. *Halok* (2004) by Kunju Bihari Debbarma

Halok deepens the exploration of social injustice and marginalization. The novel addresses economic hardship, moral dilemmas, and the silent suffering of common people. Through symbolic storytelling, Kunju Bihari Debbarma highlights the ethical complexities of human actions within a changing social order contributing to the thematic maturity of Kokborok novels.

7. 1980 (2005) by Dr. Atul Debbarma

The novel 1980 is historically significant as it engages directly with a critical period in Tripura's socio-political history. Dr. Atul Debbarma uses fiction to document conflict, fear, displacement and psychological trauma experienced by indigenous communities. The novel functions as both a historical testimony and a literary archive, preserving memory through narrative form.

8. *Tongthai Naitugwi* (2007) by Shyamlal Debbarma

In this novel, Shyamlal Debbarma returns to themes of survival, struggle and hope. *Tongthai Naitugwi* presents ordinary lives shaped by extraordinary circumstances, emphasizing endurance and moral strength. The narrative style is grounded and realistic, reflecting the everyday experiences of tribal society while questioning social inequality and injustice.

9. *Dolai Twima Naro* (2008) by Dr. Bijoy Debbarma

*Dolai Twima Naro* explores emotional conflict, familial bonds and cultural responsibilities. The novel highlights how individual choices are deeply connected to collective values in indigenous society. Dr. Bijoy Debbarma's work contributes to the psychological dimension of Kokborok fiction, offering introspective character development.

10. *Lokhopoti* (2010) by Sefali Debbarma

*Lokhopoti* is significant for foregrounding women's experiences within tribal society. Sefali Debbarma presents female subjectivity, agency and resilience in a culturally sensitive manner. The novel questions patriarchal norms while remaining rooted in indigenous ethics, making it a landmark text in gender representation in Kokborok literature.

11. *Athuk* (2014) by Naresh Chandra Debbarma

In *Athuk*, the focus shifts towards generational change and cultural continuity. The novel reflects the tension between inherited traditions and contemporary aspirations. Naresh Chandra Debbarma presents characters who navigate identity, education and modernization, symbolizing the evolving nature of Tripuri society.

12. *Khorang Bukcha Khalwng* (2015) by Sefali Debbarma

This novel continues Sefali Debbarma's engagement with social realities, particularly injustice and inequality. The narrative exposes structural oppression while highlighting empathy, moral courage and resistance. The novel strengthens the social realist tradition within Kokborok fiction.

13. *Bubagrasa* (2018) by Nanda Kumar Debbarma

*Bubagrasa* represents a mature phase of the Kokborok novel. The narrative is layered with symbolism, memory, and cultural reflection. It addresses themes of identity, loss, and survival in a rapidly changing world. The novel illustrates how Kokborok fiction has evolved to engage with complex philosophical and cultural questions.

## Character and the Importance of Character in a Novel

In literature, a character refers to a person, animal or sometimes an abstract figure represented in a narrative such as a novel, short story or drama. A character is not merely a name or figure in a story; rather, it is a carefully constructed identity shaped through actions, thoughts, dialogue, relationships and inner conflicts. Characters function as the living agents of a narrative, giving direction and meaning to the plot. Through them, writers communicate emotions, moral values, social concerns and philosophical ideas. In a novel, characters may be realistic or symbolic, simple or complex, static or dynamic but each plays a specific role in the overall structure of the narrative.

A character often embodies human experience and psychological depth. Novelists design characters to reflect personal motivations, emotional struggles and cultural backgrounds. The effectiveness of a character depends on how convincingly the author presents both the inner and outer life of that character. A well-developed character appears consistent and life-like, allowing readers to connect with the character's experiences and decisions. Thus, character is not an isolated element; it works closely with plot, setting and theme to shape the narrative as a whole.

The importance of character in a novel is fundamental because characters are the primary means through which a story unfolds. Without characters, a novel would lack emotional depth and narrative movement. Characters drive the plot through their desires, conflicts and choices. The sequence of events in a novel is largely determined by how characters respond to situations and challenges. Even the most intricate plot gains significance only through the actions and experiences of the characters involved. Characters are also essential for expressing the themes and central ideas of a novel. Abstract concepts such as love, power, identity, freedom, oppression and morality become meaningful when represented through characters. Readers understand these ideas more clearly when they witness how characters struggle, suffer or grow within specific circumstances. In this way, characters transform theoretical or philosophical ideas into concrete human experiences. Another important function of character is to create reader engagement and emotional connection. Readers often identify with characters, sympathize with their struggles or critically judge their actions. This emotional involvement encourages readers to reflect on their own values and life experiences. Memorable characters remain in the reader's mind long after the novel ends, making the literary experience lasting and impactful.

### **Character of Sabita in the Novel *Hachuk Khurio***

In the novel *Hachuk Khurio*, many characters contribute to the social and emotional structure of the story. Among them, Sabita occupies a central and memorable position. She is portrayed as a gentle and responsible woman whose life journey reflects moral values family bonding emotional purity and fulfillment. Through Sabita the novelist presents an ideal image of womanhood rooted in love duty and quiet strength. Sabita's character is shaped by early loss and emotional resilience. She grows up without her parents, as both her mother and father are absent from her life. Despite this emotional void she does not become bitter or withdrawn. Instead she is lovingly brought up by her grandfather Baktamani, her brother Bharat Chandra and her sister-in-law Banamala in the village of Dongor. This family environment plays a crucial role in shaping her personality. Her grandfather provides moral guidance and protection while her sister-in-law offers motherly affection and care. Sabita lives with them happily and grows up in an atmosphere of warmth discipline and emotional security. As a granddaughter, Sabita shows deep respect love and obedience towards her grandfather. She follows his advice sincerely and values his words. Her behaviour reflects traditional values of respect for elders and gratitude towards those who nurture her. She never questions his authority and instead treats him as a guiding force in her life. This relationship highlights her humility and strong moral foundation. Sabita's relationship with her sister-in-law Banamala is another important aspect of her character. Banamala loves Sabita deeply and treats her with kindness and affection. In return Sabita shows respect cooperation and emotional understanding. Their bond is harmonious and free from conflict which reflects Sabita's ability to maintain peaceful relationships within the household. As a sister and family member she is caring obedient and supportive which strengthens the unity of the family. In terms of personal qualities Sabita is portrayed as humble down-to-earth loving and well-mannered. She possesses admirable habits and always follows the guidance of her elders. From a young age she shows responsibility by managing household work efficiently. Her ability to handle domestic duties reflects her maturity discipline and sense of responsibility. Cooking is one of her notable skills and she performs it with care and dedication not as a burden but as an expression of love. Sabita's friendship with Naren adds emotional depth to her character. Their relationship begins in childhood and is marked by innocence sincerity and mutual affection. They spend time playing together searching for birds and enjoying the simplicity of rural life. Although they separate during mealtime their emotional bond remains strong. Over time Sabita develops feelings for Naren and keeps a special place for him in her heart. However she never expresses her emotions openly. Her silence

reflects her modesty moral restraint and emotional purity. She respects social boundaries and maintains dignity in her feelings. A significant episode that highlights Sabita's domestic ability and gentle nature occurs when her grandfather invites Naren for lunch. Sabita prepares the food with great care and devotion while her sister-in-law serves it. Naren enjoys the meal greatly which leads the grandfather to tease them by saying that Sabita is a great cook and Naren is a good young man and that they would make a good pair. This moment subtly reveals Sabita's suitability as a life partner. However Naren is bound by his duties and responsibilities and cannot accept this suggestion. Instead he arranges Sabita's marriage with Bimal, a suitable and responsible man. After marriage Sabita continues to uphold her values and responsibilities. She becomes a devoted wife who builds a happy and stable family with Bimal. Her married life is marked by understanding adjustment and emotional balance. She supports her husband and contributes actively to the harmony of the household. Later she becomes a loving and caring mother to a son. Motherhood adds maturity depth and fulfillment to her character. She raises her child with affection care and moral values. Towards the end of the novel Sabita's character reaches a stage of complete fulfillment. When Naren returns to his hometown after completing his MBBS degree he visits Sabita at her in-laws' house. He notices her child playing near Bimal's poultry farm and later meets Sabita at her residence. Naren observes that Sabita has become even more beautiful as a mother and appears content peaceful and satisfied with her family life. This observation confirms that Sabita has achieved emotional fulfillment through acceptance responsibility and family life rather than unexpressed love.

## Conclusion

The character of Savita in *Hachuk Khurio* occupies a central place in understanding the novel's thematic depth and cultural significance. Through her life story, Sudhanwa Debbarma presents a realistic and emotionally restrained portrayal of womanhood rooted in the social structure of the Tiprasa community. Savita's character reflects the values of discipline, responsibility and acceptance that govern traditional family life in rural Tripura. Her silent affection, moral strength and ability to adapt to changing roles illustrate how personal emotions are shaped and regulated by social expectations rather than individual desire alone. Savita's journey from a parentless childhood to her role as a devoted wife and mother highlights the continuity of cultural values across different stages of life. The novelist does not present her as a tragic or rebellious figure but as a balanced and dignified individual whose fulfillment emerges from duty, emotional maturity and social harmony. This portrayal challenges simplified readings of female characters by showing that agency in indigenous contexts may operate through patience, resilience and moral choice rather than overt resistance. Through Savita, *Hachuk Khurio* demonstrates how characterisation serves as a powerful literary device to reflect social realities, gender roles and ethical frameworks embedded in Kokborok culture. The novel thus transcends individual storytelling and becomes a cultural document preserving indigenous life, values and emotional worlds. A critical study of Savita's character reveals the artistic sensitivity of Sudhanwa Debbarma and affirms the importance of Kokborok novels in contributing meaningful perspectives to Indian indigenous literature. The paper concludes that Savita's character stands as a symbol of cultural continuity, emotional strength and socially grounded womanhood within the evolving landscape of Kokborok fiction.

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