

Moments of Serendipity

Shimanta Bhattacharyya reviews an interesting wildlife book – *Incredible Dibru-Saikhowa National Park*

Life is full of surprises. Often when we find ourselves bogged down with the countless demands it makes on us, rehearsing our next moves in an effort to bring a semblance of order into our otherwise chaotic existence, someone or something—quite out of the blue—suddenly takes possession of us; virtually redefining what we once thought constituted the very ground of our being. Admittedly, such experiences are at a premium these days, but nonetheless, they do succeed in providing us with an escape, albeit momentarily, from the drudgery of day to day living.

Recently, I came across a book, *Incredible Dibru-Saikhowa National Park*. I must confess that when I finally made up my mind to read the book, it was not without some misgiving, for, in plain-speak, this was entirely uncharted territory for me. I would rather pick up a novel by Charles Dickens than take the risk of settling down with a book about wildlife. Such books, in spite of their glossy covers and the myriad pictures of flora and fauna that they are apt to carry, ought to be riffled through and not read. At least such was my belief before I stumbled upon the book. How wrong I was!

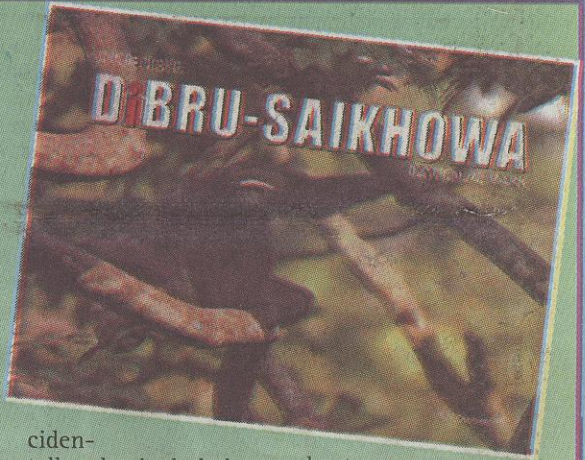
If at all in life there are moments which can be best described as fortuitous, then I should have no hesitation in stating that my discovery of *Incredible Dibru-Saikhowa*, doubtless, bordered on serendipity. The book, which, according to its editor, K.K. Dwivedi, "is a pictorial journey through one of India's least known wildlife destinations," is a collaborative effort of a group of individuals. Its authors include scientists, eco-entrepreneurs, wildlife photographers, managers and even a lawyer. Despite their

diverse backgrounds and dissimilar professional orientation, these individuals do have one thing in common: a singular love of Nature tempered with an indefatigable zeal of conserving their priceless bounty.

Incredible Dibru-Saikhowa offers its readers a kaleidoscopic account of a river-island park nestled "in the lap" of the Lohit, Dibang and the Dāngori; charting out an extraordinary odyssey from its genesis—punctuated with anecdotes culled from the personal experiences of its authors; through a variegated landscape replete with water, sand, grassland and forest teeming with an astounding panoply of wildlife—buffalos, tigers, wild horses, fish, birds et al—to what one might call a circumspect but positive prognosis of the park's future in terms of its formidable potential to develop into a world famous tourist spot.

The pictures that adorn the book's pages are, in a word, breathtaking. They provide a perfect foil to the factual content of the book; often supplying the much needed comic relief to its readers. What is most striking about the book is the fact that its authors have taken great pains to unravel the complex relationship that exists between Man, Nature and Beast and the seminal role it plays in the conservation of the park's ecology.

Incredible Dibru-Saikhowa is a veritable goldmine of information. The neatly arranged chapters not only provide a magnificent account of the park's various creatures, their behavioural traits, activities and habitats, which are at once entertaining and instructive, but also offer a keen insight into the complex tenor of life pursued by its inhabitants, which, in-



cidently, also include humans. For instance, in the chapter, *People of the Park*, human intrusion into the reserve is given a liberal treatment, "... people residing in the Park and the fringe areas are utterly dependent on the reserve for their sustenance. They extract timber, firewood and fish from the forest." Whilst on one hand, the book discusses the multifarious problems faced by park authorities with regard to the destruction of the forest's flora and fauna by its human settlers, it also throws sufficient light on the counter measures adopted by the forest department to curb such activities and the intricacies arising thereof, on the other.

The authors, in one broad sweep, bring into the discussion the manifold steps that park authorities, NGOs and individuals can take to sensitise the locals, especially the people living within the park's fold about the significance of *Dibru-Saikhowa*; offering various suggestions to minimize "the indiscriminate resource extraction currently underway" in the park. "Value-added activities that are compatible with the environment and the traditions of the people," the authors opine, would go a long way in preserving the sanctity of the park. These "value added activities" include, traditional fish cage culture; the involvement of women in handicraft products; development of a ro-

bust cottage industry centered around the production of fishing gear, nets and bamboo items; popularising the concept of dairy farming among the locals; organizing awareness camps besides promoting ecotourism which can "simultaneously generate" employment opportunities, thereby facilitating the conservation of the park's vital resources to a great extent.

The book *Incredible Dibru-Saikhowa National Park* has been for me an eye opener of sorts in a multitude of ways. Besides exploding my pre-conceived notions about books on wildlife, which I had hitherto so fastidiously nurtured, it has enormously broadened my understanding of the simple yet quintessential attributes of what one may call the cycle of life wherein Man, Bird and Beast are on an equal footing; where the green turf is, doubtless, the stamping ground of all living creatures on the planet.

The authors on their part have done an excellent job in that they have produced a book which will not only prove to be a delightful reading experience, but a book that will also discover to its readers the paradisiacal world of the *Incredible Dibru-Saikhowa National Park*, which, to many a peregrinating tourist, still remains a riddle wrapped in mystery inside an enigma!