

To,

The Director,  
Indian Institute of Technology  
Guwahati  
India

7<sup>th</sup> April 2020

**Subject:** Statement regarding the defamatory write-up by a web-portal **Northeast Now** against Prof. Arupjyoti Saikia.

Dear Prof. Sitharam,

We write to bring to your attention and to also register our strong condemnation of a defamatory write-up against Prof. Arupjyoti Saikia that was uploaded on the Northeast Now, which is a web portal (Kindly refer: <https://nenow.in/education/iit-guwahati-professor-copied-from-jnu-thesis-to-write-book-on-brahmaputra.html>)

The write-up makes the patently false claim that Prof. Saikia's recently published and already much acclaimed *The Unquiet River: A Biography of the Brahmaputra* (Oxford University Press, 2019) was 'copied' from a PhD dissertation that had been submitted at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2010. The Northeast Now write-up not only makes the unsubstantiated charge that *The Unquiet River* was a plagiarised effort but cites as its main evidence a review in *The Book Review* (April-May, 2020, pp.25-26). The review, titled 'At the Centre of Assam's Layered History', while offering critical remarks about the arguments in *The Unquiet River*, however **makes no charge of plagiarism**.

Secondly, the Northeast portal purposefully or otherwise failed to follow the basic minimum ethics of journalism. At no point were the views of Prof. Saikia's solicited nor that of the Oxford University Press or that of any of the distinguished academics who had given ringing endorsements for *The Unquiet River*.

We take this opportunity to reiterate that Prof. Saikia's scholarship has been rigorously vetted over decades, from his presentations at conferences, seminars and workshops to his several academic awards and by his innumerable peer reviewed publications. He is one of the finest historians in the field of environmental history and his writings on the North East region of India have received considerable acclaim and attention.

*The Unquiet River* follows from nearly a decade of Prof. Saikia's research efforts and intense engagements with scholars in the field. It must also be noted that the Oxford University Press carries out one of the most rigorous and demanding review protocols for book manuscript submissions. We are well aware that *The Unquiet River* successfully met all those exacting requirements, which included not only detailed assessments from experts in the field but also

a second round of equally gruelling expert reviews to ensure that the book fulfilled all the standards for originality and scholarly rigour.

As an academic, you are well aware that meaningful scholarship grows through debate, discussion and disagreement. Criticism, in fact, is always welcome as it helps advance clarity and deepens our understanding of a subject. The *Northeast Now* write-up, however, is clearly neither a responsible nor genuine attempt at assessing *The Unquiet River*, leave alone passing judgement on the scholarly worth of Prof. Saikia.

We the undersigned, who have all written public endorsements for *The Unquiet River*, reiterate that our academic assessment of the book stands and we urge that the Institute of Indian Technology (Guwahati) takes appropriate action which can compel the *Northeast Now* to tender an apology to **Prof. Saikia and take down the defamatory and false story from its web page.**

**Prof. Mahesh Rangarajan**

(Professor of Environmental Studies and History at  
Ashoka University, India)

**Prof. James C . Scott**

(Sterling Professor of Political Science, Anthropology, and Environmental Studies.  
Founder and Co-Director of the Program in Agrarian Studies  
Yale University, New Haven, USA)

**Prof. Sunil Amrith**

(Mehra Family Professor of South Asian History  
Harvard University, USA)

**Prof. Ramachandra Guha**

(Satish Dhawan Visiting Professor, Centre for Society and Policy, Indian Institute of  
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**Prof. Prasenjit Duara**

(Oscar Tang Professor of East Asian Studies  
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**Dr. Ling Zhang**

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