



HIGHWAY 39

Sudeep Chakravarti

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In Highway 39: Journeys through a Fractured Land, Sudeep Chakravarti attempts to unravel the brutal history of Nagaland and Manipur, their violent and restive present, and their uncertain and yet desperately hopeful future, as he travels along Dimapur, Kohima, Senapati, Imphal, Thoubal, and their hinterlands—all touch points of brutalized aspiration, identity, conflict and tragedy. These are the lands that nurture deadly acronyms—like AFSPA, an act of Parliament that with impunity hurts and kills citizens. Lands where militants not only battle the Indian government but also each other in a frenzy of ego, politics and survival, and enforce ‘parallel’ administrations. Sudeep Chakravarti’s journey introduces the reader to stories that chill, anger and offer uneasy reflection. A fourteen-year-old Naga girl who dies resisting a soldier’s attempt to rape her—and is now an icon. An eleven-year-old girl abducted by police in Manipur because they want to trap her parents. A faked encounter in Imphal that kills a former rebel, and also an innocent lady and her unborn child. A family in Kohima still trying to come to terms with the death of their youngest child in a mortar attack. Chakravarti also interacts with security and military officials, senior bureaucrats, top rebel leaders, and human rights and social activists, to paint a terrifying picture of a society and a people brought repeatedly to breakdown through years of political conceit and deceit, and stress and conflict.

In prose suffused with a rare understanding of the region and its people, and with remarkable insight into its convoluted politics, Highway 39 brings into focus a region long neglected and often forgotten by Mainland India, a region surrounded by nations historically inimical to India—and yet, which offer a dream gateway to the markets of East Asia. A region India can continue to ignore only at the peril of the very idea of India.

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