

THE INDIAN HISTORY CONGRESS AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH IN NORTH EAST INDIA

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The Indian History Congress (IHC) was founded in 1935 with a threefold objective: to serve as a clearing house of Indian historical research, to give impetus to research on an all-India basis and to prepare a comprehensive and scientific history of India.¹ Before the establishment of the Indian History Congress, several regional research societies like the Madras Literary Society, the Andhra Research Society, the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, the Varendra Research Society, and the Assam Research Society (the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti) had already been in existence. The Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, for instance, had been established in 1912 and started publishing its Journal in 1933. The IHC had shown its awareness and even its appreciation for the work of the Samiti as early as 1943 when in its sixth session, the General President, Rao Bahadur K.N. Dikshit, mentioned the contributions of this Samiti in his presidential address.² The present paper tries to analyse the contributions of the scholars of this region when placed on an all-India platform, in the light of the objectives of the IHC mentioned above. The third objective, that is, the preparation of a comprehensive and scientific history of India may for the moment be overlooked as the project, though taken up at the beginning of the foundation of the Congress is yet to be complete.

Membership Profile

An organization is what its members are, and an analysis of the participation of the members of this region in the IHC sessions will also help us to determine the volume and character of the contributions of this area to the IHC. A profile of this region's membership can be seen through Appendices 'A' and 'B'. While Appendix 'A' provides a comparative statement of the yearwise strength of the representation of this region to the total representation in the IHC, Appendix 'B' gives a list of the members of this region showing the particular years in which they were IHC members. This is not possible to assess in the case of Life Members as, once they became life members, their names continue to appear every year in the list. However, the list of annual members (it is suggested that they be termed 'annual' members instead of 'ordinary' members), gives a fair picture of the representation of this area in the IHC.

The two Appendices seem to highlight the fact that representation of this region has been dismally low in the all-India forum. There was at least one year (1950) when the representation was nil when the total membership (Life and Annual) was 273. In two of the sessions (1954 and 1968) when the annual membership was more than 300 (in one case, 387) the number of members from this region was just 1. In fact, out of 38 years for which membership data is available, the membership from this region was ten or less in more than 25 sessions. Even when the IHC membership registered an all-time high of 1715 (in its fortyfirst session at Bombay in 1980), there were only 33 members from this region (excluding life members), yielding a percentage of less than 2.

And here it is important to note that 1980, like 1978, was a freak year with a large number of one-year or one-time members (in the Bombay session there were 12 such members while in 1978 in the Hyderabad session there were 17). Incidentally, the North-East India History Association which was founded the same year as the Bombay session, had 67 members. In 1986 (the last year for which we have the membership data available for the Indian History Congress) there were 292 members in the regional Association as against a meagre 38 in the Indian History Congress.

This phenomenon of low representation of this region in the IHC sessions seems all the more strange when we consider the fact that awareness of and interest in the study of history in this region manifested itself quite early. Thus, the practice of maintaining chronicles, i.e. Buranjis constitute almost a unique feature of historical writing in India. Secondly, though it was the English in India who pioneered the establishment of research societies in India beginning with the Asiatic Society in Calcutta; the Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti, or the Assam Research Society, must be one of the earliest and still surviving Research Societies established entirely by Indians, having been founded as early as in 1912 with Pandit Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Dhireswara Kaviratna and Pandit Padmanath Bhattacharya Vidyavinod as the leading lights of the Society. Though the Society did have Englishmen as members, and even received government grant as early as 1915-16, its executive was always dominated by Indians. Also it is to Assam that credit should go for having one of the earliest, if not the earliest, Directorates of Antiquarian and Historical Studies and an Indian, Dr.S.K. Bhuyan as a full-fledged Director as early as in 1933.

There may be, of course, several reasons to explain this low level of representation of this region in the IHC sessions like the population profile of this region, the paucity of institutions of higher learning and what perhaps would seem to be obvious, the communication problem which served as a deterrent factor for the members of this region to travel long distances to participate in the IHC sessions. It is, however, being suggested here that these reasons are not sufficient to explain the low level of participation. Take for example, the question of distance and the problems of communication. Looking through Appendix 'A', we can see that the greatest number of delegates from this region went to what would be the furthest points: Hyderabad and Bombay, in 1978 and 1980 respectively. On the other hand, sessions held at nearby places like Calcutta, Patna, Allahabad, and Bhagalpur never recorded a high representation. The most surprising, from this point of view, is the case of the Gauhati session, when the total number of delegates who attended this session was 360 and the number of members from this region itself was just 4, including one life member.

The reason for the low representation of this region in an all-India organization may perhaps be revealed through a comparison of the membership trend in the IHC with that of the North East India History Association. This Association started in 1980 with 67 members (all annual). Its membership had swelled to 292 in 1987, including 72 life members. The membership (from this region) in the IHC on the other hand, varied between nil and 38. For the first seventeen years of its existence, the IHC did not have a single life member from this region. The first life-member, Dr. H.K. Barpujari, became so in 1955, and for a long fifteen years, remained the sole life member

before being joined by Dr. Arun Bhattacharya in 1972 in the Muzaffarpur session. Even now, there are only 6 life-members when the total has crossed the 300 mark.

This perhaps leads us to one conclusion, that is, the practitioners of history in this region are by and large inward looking and insular in their attitude. They would like to confine their attention and activities to the region and seem a little hesitant to participate in the all-India organization of historians. What has to be seen now is whether this psyche is reflected also in their contributions, with reference to subjects taken up for study as well as the point of view brought to bear upon their treatment. It is, therefore, necessary to analyse the trends reflected in the papers contributed on subjects dealing with the north east.

Profile of Contributions

While analysing the contributions of the members of this region to the proceedings of the IHC, one fact can be stated straightway: that is, since the membership in the IHC itself is on the low side, the contributions in terms of the number of papers presented cannot be substantial. This is further evident from Appendices 'C' and 'D'. While Appendix 'C' gives a sessionwise list of papers presented at the IHC sessions on subjects dealing with the north-east, Appendix 'D' provides comparative statements of papers presented on subjects dealing with the north-east with the total number presented at IHC sessions in the ancient, medieval and modern sections respectively. Appendices 'B' (consisting of the list of IHC members from the north-east) and 'C' considered together will show that while on the one hand,

out of 40 IHC sessions for which data is available, there were six sessions in which there were no papers on any subject dealing with the north-eastern region, on the other, out of nearly 145 members who attended one or more sessions of the IHC, less than 20 members presented any paper (which was published in the IHC proceedings). For the rest, nearly 20 papers were presented on this region by members from outside the region. Of the members from this region who contributed to IHC proceedings, four stand out prominently: K.N. Dutt and Dr. J.B. Bhattacharjee with ten and nine papers respectively, and Drs. S.K. Barpujari and H.K. Barpujari with seven and six papers respectively. What is remarkable is that all the four scholars are basically scholars of modern India (although Dr. J.B. Bhattacharjee contributed two papers in the medieval section also). Their fields of specialization, however, are different. Of Drs. H.K. Barpujari and K.N. Dutt, who stand out as pillars of the north-eastern region in the IHC in its earlier years, the former leaned more towards economic history while K.N. Dutt towards political. Thus of the 9 papers of K.N. Dutt, as many as 7 deal with political history centering mainly around Assam's resistance to British rule whereas H.K. Barpujari tried to explore British economic interests in and through this area with China and Bhutan. Both the scholars had something to say about the echoes of the 1857 uprising in Assam but with, as we shall see later, extremely divergent viewpoints. Both the scholars contributed papers in a symposium held on "Lacunae in the study of Indian history" in 1961, and both presided over the modern section of the IHC: K.N. Dutt in 1961 and H.K. Barpujari in 1972.

About Drs. J.B. Bhattacharjee and S.K. Barpujari, it is interesting to note that both made their entry in the IHC the same year (1969), both read papers at the same sessions (with the difference that Dr. Bhattacharjee read two papers at two of the sessions), and both seemed to bow out of the IHC the same year, in 1978, when they made their last contributions: although they have continued their membership to-date. While Dr. S.K. Barpujari seemed to specialize in Naga history, with five out of his seven papers devoted to the British relations with the Nagas, the interests of Dr. Bhattacharjee seem to be more diverse with four papers on the Garos, three on Cachar, one on the Jaintias and one comprehensive survey of the "Genesis and pattern of British Administration in the Hill Areas of North-Eastern India".

Although all the four scholars who contributed substantially to the IHC proceedings, specialised in the modern period and as Appendix 'D' reveals, as far as the north-east is concerned, the number of papers contributed in the modern section is more than the combined number of those presented in the ancient and medieval sections, nevertheless, contributions in modern history made a delayed entry in the IHC proceedings. It is significant to note that upto 1950, that is, for the first thirteen sessions, there was not a single paper contributed in the modern history section. Interestingly, the same trend can be seen in the general publications on the history of the north-east. In the pre-independence period, there is practically no significant publication on modern history whereas the earlier periods were covered through the notable works of Kanaklal Barua (Early History of Kamarupa, 1933), Nagendranath Basu (Social History of Kamarupa, 1922-33), S.N. Bhattacharya

(A History of Mogul North-East Frontier Policy, 1929), Jøgesh Chandra Dutta (Old Relics in Kamarupa, 1891), Umanath Gohain (Assam Under the Ahoms, 1942), Banikanta Katakai (The Mother Goddess Kamakhya, 1948), Jadunath Sarkar (Assam and the Ahoms, 1915), and U.N. Barua (A Glimpse of Assam, 1946). The three outstanding names in the early years of the Congress who worked in modern history, S.K. Bhuyan, K.N. Dutt and H.K. Barpujari began to write only after 1951, when in the Jaipur session of the IHC, contributions in modern history were made for the first time by the scholars of this region (K.N. Dutt and H.K. Barpujari). S.K. Bhuyan's single contribution made in the pre-independence period, is, significantly, on Rudra Singha; perhaps the most powerful Assamese ruler in the pre-British period. Now the question is, was this hesitancy on the part of the historians of this region, to examine, analyse, and perhaps criticize British policies during the British period, a result of the paucity of original materials or because of their deference towards the British. It seems a bit difficult to accept the paucity of material theory because we find numerous contributions on the British period of Indian history made by historians from other regions during the time the historians of this region preferred to maintain silence on British rule. Whatever it be, a fuller picture of this region's contributions in the all-India body can emerge only after we examine its contributions in all the three periods of Indian history: ancient, medieval and modern.

Ancient Period

Although papers on the ancient period of Assam's history were more numerous than on the modern period in the pre-independence

period, they became insignificant in number once scholars began to concentrate on modern history, leaving the total number of papers on the ancient period to less than 20 over some forty sessions of the IHC. Of these, as many as five were presented in one session: the one held at Gauhati in 1959.

Of the papers contributed in the ancient section, four deal with art and architecture in Assam. In his⁴ paper on "The Kamarupa School of Sculpture," Sarbessar Kataki attempts to prove the existence of a distinct school of sculpture in Kamarupa as opposed to those scholars who hold that there was no evolution of a separate school of sculpture in this region and if there was, it was soon submerged in the Orissa school of Kalinga or the Pala school of Bengal. Kataki divides the Kamarupa sculptures into four groups: those belonging to the mythical period; those comprising constructions by the Varman kings; those belonging to the Kachari kings and finally those of the Ahoms. The author feels that the existence of these four groups of sculptures prove that this region had its own school like the Bharhut or the Gandhara school of sculpture.

This is an important article and one would have thought that with this as the nucleus a full-length of study would be made of the development of sculpture or the plastic arts in Kamarupa. Such a study still seems to be awaiting a serious scholar of art.

Any comprehensive study of art and architecture in Kamarupa will naturally centre around the Kamakhya temple. R. Das Gupta made a detailed survey of the architectural features of this temple in his article contributed in 1959.⁵ Giving details of the temple plan including its vertical and horizontal views,

the author says that in view of the temple having been rebuilt and renovated a number of times has now lost traces of the influence of Gupta architecture and feels that the construction carries traces of the medieval Chalukyan school and that patronised by the Koch kings of eastern India.

According to R.D. Choudhary, the Gupta art style never really conquered Kamarupa although it did influence the development of art in this region for the reason that politically too the rulers of Kamarupa acknowledged and suzerainty of the Gupta Kings although never completely conquered by them.

One of the most interesting articles in the ancient section is Y.C. Talukdar's "The Buddhist Pillar of Hajo,"⁷ if only for the highly improbable theories it sets forth. The author, for instance, would like us to believe that Pragjyotishpur was the name of a university, and that Hajo was the place where the Mahaparinirvana of the Buddha took place.

In spite of these fantastic conclusions, the author is probably right when he observes, "It is really surprising that Assam does not possess a good written record of this dark period."⁹ Indeed if this was not so, then there would hardly be scope for putting forth such hypotheses.

It is agreed to by the general historian of this region that its sober history emerges only with the line of the Varman Kings. The IHC contributions also bear witness to this by carrying four articles in the ancient section on Bhaskarvarman and his dynasty.

D.C. Sircar in his article on "Harsha and Bhaskarvarman"¹⁰ argues that Bhaskarvarman

was neither a feudatory of Harsa nor was equal in status with him but 'a subordinate ally', towards the close of Harsa's reign. V.S. Agarwala, on the basis of Bana's Harsacharita gives a detailed list of presents given by Bhaskarvarman to Harsa thus implying that Bhaskarvarman was certainly not equal in political status to Harsa.

With his "Revaluation of the Nidhanpur Copperplates",¹¹ Radhakrishna Choudhary joins the controversy as to where the lands mentioned in these copperplates lay, and comes to the conclusion (like K.L. Barua) that the "scene of the Nidhanpur grant lay somewhere¹² in the district of Purnea in north Bihar." This would imply that the conquests of Bhaskarvarman reached far and wide. One of the methods by which the Kings of ancient India established their suzerainty over other lands was through performing the Asvamedha. D.P. Barooah in his article on¹³ "Performance of Asvamedha in Ancient Assam" describes how the predecessors of Bhaskarvarman also adopted this method to establish their might. According to the author, it was Mahendravarman (and not Narayana-varman as was argued by D.C. Sircar) who was the first Assamese King to have performed the Asvamedha, followed by Bhutivarman who performed this sacrifice twice.

Besides the papers discussed above, the Ancient India section of the IHC has three papers on the historical geography of this region: one on the¹⁴ identification of Harikel by P.C. Chakravarti and on the delimitation of eastern India by Pranab Bhattacharya.¹⁵ Shastri's paper on "The Holy Hills, Rivers and Places of Kamrup"¹⁶ tries to identify important historical places in the region on the basis of Puranic and Tantric texts. It

is perhaps unfortunate that the proceedings carry only a summary of what seems to be an interesting and a scholarly paper.

Karunananda Datta's paper "New Light on the Early History of Assam", gives details of three copper-plate grants, namely, the Khonamukh grant of Dharmapala, the Dubi grant of Bhaskarvarman and the Parbatiya grant of Vanamala besides the Badaganga rock inscription of Bhutivarman.¹⁷ All these finds, now well known and given in detail in M.M. Sharma's Inscriptions of Ancient Assam, were subsequent to the publication of K.L. Barua's Early History of Kamarupa and thus Datta was among the first scholars to have provided a historical analysis of these important finds.

From a look at the papers discussed it will be obvious that the IHC proceedings carried some very important contributions on the ancient history of this region and quite a few of these were contributed by scholars from outside the region. It must also be admitted that considerable and valuable gaps continued to remain. The very fact that the number of contributions was very limited rendered it obvious that information-wise not much would be attained by a scholar through a study of these papers. K.N. Dutt in his article on "Problems in the History of Assam"¹⁸ discussed areas in the ancient history of this region to which scholars had not directed their attention: unfortunately these areas continue to remain unexplored. The principal reason for this was spelt out as early as 1933 by J.P. Mills in his article "Assam as a field for Research,"¹⁹ when he lamented that the chief tool of the archaeologist, the spade, had hardly been used for research in this region, and whatever systematic digging had been done had been done

"with the object of looting ancient graves".²⁰ It is indeed obvious that without a systematic archaeological exploration of this region - although the task is fraught with immense difficulties - it will not be possible to construct a systematic, coherent and meaningful history of the ancient period of this region.

Medieval Period

Interestingly we notice the same historiographical trends in the medieval section which we did in the ancient. Here too the number of papers contributed is extremely small: about 15 papers contributed in about 40 sessions for which we have the data. A look at Appendix 'E' will make it obvious that these contributions are few and far between. Thus, for nearly thirteen years, (1946 to 1955) there was no contribution with the single exception of one paper in 1953. Any discussion on the medieval period must revolve largely around the Ahoms as it does around the Varman Kings when discussing the ancient period. Thus of the 15 papers, we find that as many as 8 papers deal with one or the other aspect of the Ahom rule in Assam. Of these, Debasis Sen's paper discusses the Ahom military system²¹ and N.N. Acharyya, the Ahom administrative hierarchy.²² Both these articles become important when we consider that Gogoi in his nearly 550 page book on the Tai and the Tai Kingdoms devotes less than 15 pages to Ahom administration and their military system.²³ Debasis Sen, while giving details of the different ranks of the Ahom military set-up also discusses the drawbacks which were inherent in the system while Acharyya outlines some of the unique features of the Ahom administrative system. It is unfortunate that the IHC Proceedings carry only a summary of this paper. Yet another paper which should

have been carried in full in the Proceedings is Syed Hassan Askari's "Versified Account in Persian of Islam Khan's Campaign in Assam."²⁴ This article is based on an almost unknown source, Fath-i-Assam by Muhammad Quli and Salim which deals with Islam Khan Meshhadi's (Governor of Bengal) incursions in Assam in 1635-39. It seems Askari had provided English translations of those verses of this work which carried historical facts about this invasion and it must be deemed unfortunate that these were not published in the Proceedings.

Another paper dealing with the Muslim invasion in Assam is G.C. Raychaudhuri's "Did Sultan Hussain of Bengal invade the Ahom Kingdom?"²⁵ In this article the author bases his account on another contemporary source, the Bathiyya-i-'ibriyya which recounts Mir Jumla's campaign in Kuch Bihar and Assam, together with Riaz-Us-Salatin, and concludes that although Sultan Hussain may have invaded Kamata, there is no solid evidence of his having come in conflict with the Ahoms. Gogoi in his Tai and the Tai Kingdoms while mentioning the fact of Sultan Hussain's invasion of the Ahom Kingdom "with initial success,"²⁶ agrees with Raychaudhuri's main argument that there is no reference of Sultan Hussain's invasion in any of the extant Ahom histories.

The Muslim invasion of Assam figures again in Bharat Kalita's "Pre-Mughal Military Expedition to Assam"²⁷ and in S.K. Bhuyan's article on Rudra Singh,²⁸ but the more important is his "Assamese Historical Literature."²⁹ Although the Buranjis enumerated by him in the article are fairly well known by now and valuable studies on this branch of historical literature have been done by S.L. Baruah³⁰

and Lila Gogoi,³¹ Bhuyan's article is perhaps the first to highlight their importance in the reconstruction of Assamese history. What is specially interesting is the concluding remarks of Dr. Bhuyan in which he tells us: "Copies of English translation of some Buranjis, prepared under the direction of Sir Edward Gait are in possession of Sir Jadunath Sarkar in their MSS. form vide his History of Aurangzeb Vol.III, 1916, Foreword and Chps. 31-32". The question which arises is: have we lost these valuable manuscripts forever?

Another article, which like Bhuyan's, was more important for the time when it appeared is J.N. Phukan's "Studies in the Land-Grant Copper-Plates of the Ahom Kings".³² Dr. Phukan not only enumerates the copper-plate grants but also gives their broad characteristics. These grants together with the Buranjis form the main source of Ahom history today.

Such historical sources, tells us S. C. Rajkhowa, are extremely meagre for the period between the 12th Century to that preceding the rise of Koch power under Biswa Singha.³³ He tries to piece whatever information is available, especially literary, and gives us glimpses of the Kingdoms of Kamarupa and Kamata in the 14th and 15th centuries.

The other articles in the medieval section concentrate mostly on cultural aspects with two papers on Sri Sankaradeva by N.N. Acharyya³⁴ and K.N. Dutt.³⁵ Birinchi Barua discusses the characteristics of Assamese painting, especially the art of illustrating the manuscripts in the medieval period in Assam,³⁶ while S.L. Baruah's paper on "the Muslim Population in Pre-British Assam"³⁷ discusses the results of the interaction between the Muslims and the local population in medieval Assam and outlines the process of the former's assimilation in their cultural life.

Thus we see that although the contributions on this region's history in the medieval period in the IHC proceedings may not be very large numerically, they do cover a wide range of subjects. But as in the case of the ancient section, here too are yawning gaps when we see that there is not a single article on archaeology, and with the exception of J.B. Bhattacharjee's two articles³⁸ on "The Mughal Policy Towards the Garos"³⁹ and "Jayantia-Heramba Relations, 1536-1708", and S.L. Barua's "Ahom Policy towards the neighbouring Hill Tribes",⁴⁰ tribal history has been somewhat neglected.

Modern Period

The profile of contributions in the IHC on subjects dealing with the north-east changes substantially when we enter the modern period. The first factor which strikes one is the numerical difference. As against less than twenty contributions in the ancient and the medieval sections, we have more than 40 papers in the modern. It is interesting to note that the same tendency is apparent in the North East India History Association. In between 1980 and 1985, over six sessions, of the 181 papers presented, more than a hundred deal with the modern period. The two major categories which can easily be identified in this section are papers dealing with the British policies of trade and administration and those dealing with aspects of the freedom struggle. Thus, of the nearly 45 papers presented in the modern section of IHC, about 10 deal with the freedom struggle and as many with the British policies of trade and administration in this region. Although the most comprehensive survey of British administrative policy in this region was provided in 1975 by J.B. Bhattacharjee, the scholars who contributed most to these

aspects were K.N. Dutt and H.K. Barpujari. While the latter concentrated more on British trade with Bhutan and China, Dutt applied himself more to British policies of administration and the freedom struggle in this region. Dutt's most important contribution⁴¹ was "The Post Mutiny Raj-Mels of Assam". Here one finds all the elements of subaltern studies or history from below and Dutt highlights the aspect of popular participation in the struggle against the British earlier hinted at in his paper "Freedom⁴² Movement in Assam", contributed in 1954. These 'Mels' were a unique institution in India and certainly if the general historians of India were more aware of the history of this region, the resistance put up against the British by these peoples' assemblies would have figured more prominently in any of the histories of our freedom struggle. Amalendu Guha does devote space to the Raj-Mels in his *Planter Raj*⁴³ but one would have thought that since he was specifically dealing with the freedom struggle as carried on in the Assam Legislature, he would highlight the comment of the leading newspaper of the day, *The Bengalee* on Rashbehari Ghosh's questioning the Government on the incident. *The Bengalee* pointed out the reluctance of the Government to give clear and specific answers in the Legislature and revealed that the answer given by the Government in this case was "misleading and inconsistent with the facts" - thus shedding light on the character of the Legislature at the time.

Besides the scholars mentioned above, others who contributed to studies on British policies and the freedom struggle were B.P. Barua and M.L. Bose⁴⁴ who analysed British policy in Chittagong and the North-East Frontier⁴⁵ respectively. S.L. Prajapati made

a study of the "Chamuadari Settlements",⁴⁶ P.N. Dutta shed light on the Jaintia rebellion,⁴⁷ and S.D. Goswami on the Phulaguri uprising;⁴⁸ G.P. Singh presented profiles of some of the important tribal leaders who took part in the freedom struggle,⁴⁹ and Lal Dena pointed out the⁵⁰ weakness of the I.N.A. movement in Manipur.

Among others, S.K. Barpujari made significant studies of the Nagas⁵¹ and J.B. Bhattacharjee on the Garos and the Cacharis. The latter's paper on "The Vakeels and Social Exploitation in the Non-Regulated Province of Cachar (1832-1874)"⁵² is, if not the only, certainly the most significant paper on social history during the British period.

The same year which saw Bhattacharjee's paper on the Vakeels also saw the first of the two papers, both significant, of Amalendu Guha. While his first one was on "East Bengal Immigrants and Bhasani in Assam Politics: 1928-47",⁵³ his second was on "Imperialism of Opium: Its Ugly face in Assam (1773-1921)".⁵⁴ The article on East Bengal Immigrants traces the genesis of the problem which acquired such serious overtones as to lead to the partition of Bengal in 1947 and provides a picture of the machinations of Maulana Bhasani in the whole affair. His article provides an interesting lesson on how the doings of a handful of individuals have the potential to change the entire course of a country's history. It is fortunate that we escaped by a hair's breadth and were able to maintain the integration of Assam in the Indian Union.

Dr. Guha's second article on "Imperialism of Opium", once again goes to the very root of the problem and traces its development

over more than a century. This article also highlights a major trend noticeable in the historiography of this region. Some scholars like Amalendu Guha and J.B. Bhattacharjee would like to paint the British rule all black while scholars like H.K. Barpujari would seem more sympathetic to the British and scholars like K.N. Dutt adopt a more objective view of things, criticizing and praising British policies wherever criticism and praise would seem to be due. To give some examples of these different trends: Amalendu Guha in his article on opium shows the British in the darkest colours for having first introduced and then seen to the expansion of the opium habit in Assam and highlights the resistance of the Indians to this vice. But then while discussing this he would like to overlook the fact that the first attempt to curb the opium habit in Assam was made not by the Indians but by the British themselves when in 1860-61 they sought to restrict the cultivation of opium and ban its cultivation because according to them, opium had converted the Assamese "once a hardy, industrious (and) enterprising race into an effeminate, weak, indolent and degenerate people".⁵⁵ Again while stressing the resistance of the Indians against the opium policy of the British, Guha slips over the fact that the early attempts of the British to suppress the opium habit among the people of Assam met with such strong resistance from the indigenous population so as to lead to the Phulaguri uprising. Similarly J.B. Bhattacharjee in his paper on "Colonialism and Feudalism: South Cachar in the Nineteenth Century",⁵⁶ while arguing that the British through their disapproval of the "Khels" and introduction of private ownership of land introduced the element of feudalism in Cachar, would like to overlook the fact that with the abolition

of the "Paik" system and the introduction of the "ryotwari" system besides their conversion of India's economy into a capitalist one, the British were the agents to bring about the decline of feudalism not only in Assam but in a large part of the country.

In sharp contrast to these scholars stands Dr. H.K. Barpujari. He praises the British for their conduct in dealing with the Bhutan officials and writes disparagingly about the spread of the 1857 mutiny to Assam which to him was an "infection" engineered largely through the machinations of the Saring Raja and his followers.⁵⁷ In fact, his whole account of the echoes of the mutiny in Assam is extremely favourable to the British as is made explicit in his concluding remarks: "The abortive mutiny of the Sepoys in Upper Assam strengthened the belief of the common men in the unbounded power of the British⁵⁸ to preserve the law and order in the country."

How the views of two historians can differ even while dealing with the same set of events is perhaps best demonstrated by the stands taken by Drs. H.K. Barpujari and K.N. Dutt on the spread of the waves of the 1857 - uprising to Assam. While to Barpujari the events constituted a mutiny, to Dutt, they were in the spirit of a revolution⁵⁹ and the first war of independence in India. About the trial of Maniram Dewan, the chief actor in the entire series of the 1857 events in this region, once again the two historians adopt diametrically opposing stands. Thus, while K.N. Dutt refers to Maniram's trial by Captain Holroyd as "a mockery of a trial",⁶⁰ to Dr. Barpujari, "... Captain Holroyd, supposed to be the arch-enemy of the rebels, handled the situation so cautiously and tactfully that

not a voice of protest was heard from the Regiment, nor was there much commotion in the Civil Population"⁶¹

This is not to say that Dutt is always critical of the English. He, for instance, not only absolves the British of the charge of premeditative designs for expanding their influence in Assam⁶² and praises the British for their zeal and sincerity in preparing an objective and comprehensive assessment of the conditions prevailing in Assam but goes on to add: "... it is to be remembered that it was the Imperial British Power that moulded the destiny of this frontier region as an integral part of India and 130 years of the story of that integration are to my mind certainly more important historically than the isolated story of her past".⁶³ The contributions in the IHC are ample evidence that he was one scholar gifted with the ability to present a comprehensive picture of this period objectively. It is to be regretted that with all his erudition, his contribution in the historiography of Assam remains confined to the small book "Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam". For the rest, there are his papers in the IHC and a survey of historical records in the Assam Secretariat.

The British rule in Assam, as Dutt points out, resulted in her modernization, transformation of her economy and even partly the re-orientation of her social and cultural heritage,⁶⁴ but it also left behind at least one legacy which continues to haunt us to the present day, and that is the Sino-Indian border dispute. The issue being so sensitive and remaining so over such a long period of time, one would have thought that the scholars of this region would be exercised over the problem and make substantial contribution towards putting the entire question in proper perspective.

Unfortunately and also surprisingly this has not been so. There have been valuable studies on the subject but almost all of them have been done by scholars from outside the region. Dr. H.K. Barpujari gives a list of studies done on the border question in his "Presidential Address" in the Modern History Section of the IHC in 1972⁶⁵ but the list does not consist of any name from this region save his own. Through two articles on "The Problem of Buffers on the North East Frontier, 1823-35",⁶⁶ and "Early Military Expeditions on the North-East Frontier, 1826-1858",⁶⁷ in the IHC, Dr. Imdad Hussain has shown his interest in the problem although a comprehensive study of the frontier problem is yet to emerge from his pen.

Besides Dr. Hussain, two other scholars contributed to frontier studies: Sam Frank who attempted to give a history of the McMahon Line and its controversy⁶⁸ (the IHC should have carried the article in full instead of merely giving a summary of it): and V.C. Bhutani who made a "Study of the North-East Frontier and its Sources".⁶⁹ One is at a loss to understand as to what led the IHC authorities to commit what seems an unpardonable error by including this paper in the section dealing with "Countries other than India". A similar error seems to have been made about S.L. Baruah's paper "The Burmese and the North-East",⁷⁰ which deals with the Burmese invasions in the north-east in the latter half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth to the final extinction of their power in India by the British through the 1826 Treaty of Yandabo.

Conclusions

To sum up, an analysis of the participation of the scholars of the north-eastern region

in the Indian History Congress and papers contributed in the IHC on subjects dealing with the north-east reveals that neither the participation has been substantial nor have the contributions been either substantial numerically or adequate from the point of ground covered. A statement of the session-wise membership of the IHC shows that the members of this region have been hesitant to attend the sessions even when they were held at places not very far off from this region. This factor together with a comparison of membership of the IHC and the NEIHA would seem to strengthen the argument that the scholars of this region have by and large been inward looking and insular in their attitude and approach to the study of history.

This is moreover reflected in the contributions too. While scholars from outside the region, like D.C. Sircar, V.S. Agarawala, Syed Hasan Askari, Sam Frank, Radha Krishna Choudhary, V.C. Bhutani, and others have contributed valuable papers on the study of this region, few scholars of the region have taken up for study, subjects dealing with areas outside the region. What is perhaps worse is that the scholars have failed to look at different aspects of the history of the region from an all-India angle.⁷¹ Not that there was no awareness of this factor among the historians. In fact, all the three scholars who presided over sessions of the IHC, that is, S.K. Bhuyan, K.N. Dutt and H.K. Barpujari were acutely aware of this and S.K. Bhuyan and K.N. Dutt specifically advocated the demolition of these artificial frontiers pleading for looking at Assam and Assamese history in the totality of Indian history. The point was perhaps stated best by K.N. Dutt in his Presidential Address:

The ancient and medieval history of Assam was insular in character no doubt, but it cannot be said that history was quite cut off from the History of India. Time and again a window opens at the political drama enacted in the rest of India, time and again a blast of political wave in India lashes against that window or even smashes through it to be expelled again⁷²

Speaking of the modern period, Dutt felt that the most outstanding fact of this period was Assam's political integration with the rest of the country.⁷³ S.K. Bhuyan too emphasized this aspect when he stated "... physically remote, Assam was not outside the cultural hegemony of Aryavarta and Dakshinayata. Its inhabitants had been influenced by the great religious upheavals that swept over India."⁷⁴ And again, "A thorough knowledge of Assam is therefore a matter of vital necessity to Indians in general and to the people of the province in particular".⁷⁵ The ideals of an integrated approach in historical analysis pleaded for by these senior historians still awaits realization although a sort of ideal framework was provided by Amalendu Guha in his "Presidential Address" (1983) in which he selected as his theme "Nationalism: Pan Indian and Regional in a Historical Perspective", and examined the growth of nationalism in Assam in the wider all-India perspective.⁷⁶

The analysis of the contents of the IHC proceedings also reveals, and is further supported by a look at the contents of the six sessions of the NEIHA, that the practitioners of history of this region have preferred to confine their

attention to the modern period of history and here too, they have by and large been concerned with aspects of the British policies and the freedom struggle in this region showing practically a total neglect of social and cultural history. Even frontier history, which would seem a natural subject for scholars of this region for study, has not received the attention which is due. Economic history, though covered, still needs greater and deeper attention.

For all this criticism, however, one cannot overlook the fact that in view of the limited facilities of education and research, scholars of this region have quite a substantial contribution to their credit. A more accurate picture of historiography in this region can, of course, be acquired only when we also consider the studies done outside the Indian History Congress. Scholars like Amalendu Guha and J.B. Bhattacharjee together with a host of younger scholars are devoting themselves to areas which have been left uncovered in the IHC proceedings. These include works on art and archaeology and new subjects like State and Nationality Formation. One can only hope that there is greater participation of such scholars in the Indian History Congress and that their achievements in the new fields of research are reflected in the IHC proceedings also thus leading to greater awareness and understanding on a mutual basis between scholars and studies of this region and other parts of India.

Notes and References

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3. These figures do not include Presidential Addresses and Papers presented but not published in the IHC Proceedings.
4. **PIHC**, IV, 1940, pp. 64-5.
5. **PIHC**, XXII, 1959, pp. 483-92.
6. **PIHC**, XXXVIII, 1977, pp. 742-6.
7. **PIHC**, XXII, 1959, pp. 473-6.
8. **Ibid.**, p. 476.
9. **Ibid.**, p. 474.
10. **PIHC**, VI, 1943, p.48.
11. **PIHC**, XXII, 1959, pp.465-72.
12. **Ibid.**, pp. 483-92.
13. **Ibid.**, p. 496.
14. **PIHC**, XXIV, 1961, pp. 88-9.
15. **PIHC**, VII, 1944, pp. 195-203.
16. **PIHC**, XXVII, 1965, pp. 74-7.
17. **PIHC**, XXII, 1959, p. 501.
18. **PIHC**, XII, 1949, pp. 154-9.
19. **PIHC**, XXIII, 1960, pp. 164-9.
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22. **PIHC**, XL, 1979, pp. 552-56.
23. **PIHC**, XXVII, 1965, p.204.
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36. K.N., Dutt, "Sri Sankaradeva and Assamese Culture", **PIHC**, XXIV, 1961, p.180.
37. Birinchi Kumar Barua, "Early Painting of Assam", **PIHC**, VII, 1944, pp. 397-8.
38. S.L. Barua, "The Muslim Population in Pre-British Assam: Their Social Status and Role in Cultural History", **PIHC**, XXXIX, 1978, pp. 570-80.
39. **PIHC**, XXII, 1970, Vol. I, p. 436.
40. **PIHC**, XXXIII, 1972, pp. 251-54.
41. **PIHC**, XVIII, 1955, pp. 216-32.
42. **PIHC**, XVII, 1954, pp.380-1.
43. Amalendu Guha, **Planter Raj to Swaraj**, ICHR, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 50-6.
44. B.P. Barua, "Extension of British Administration to Chittagong Hill Tracts", **PIHC**, XXXIII, 1972, pp. 514-9.
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46. S.L. Prajapati, "Chamuadari Settlements in Assam", **PIHC**, XLIII, 1982, pp. 494-7.

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48. Shruti Dev Goswami, "The Phulaguri Uprising, An Appraisal", pp. 557-65.
49. Girish Pd. Singh, "Evaluation of the Role of Some Tribal Leaders of North-East India in the Struggle for Freedom: From the Beginning of the Swadeshi Movement to the End of the Gandhian Age, 1905-47", **PIHC**, XLI, 1980, pp. 554-62.
50. Lal Dena, "The INA Movement in Manipur: Myth or Reality", **PIHC**, XXXVI, 1974, pp. 365-9.
51. **PIHC**, XXXI, 1969, pp. 369-75;
XXXII, 1970, pp. 78-89;
XXXIII, 1972, pp. 522-9;
XXXIV, 1973, pp.24-5;
XXXIX, 1978, pp. 660-70.
52. **PIHC**, XXXV, 1974, pp. 330-40.
53. **Ibid.**, pp. 348-65.
54. **PIHC**, XXXVII, 1976, pp. 338-46.
55. S.D. Goswami has provided a detailed study of the Phulaguri Uprising in his article in **PIHC**, XL, 1979, pp.557-65.
56. **PIHC**, XXXIX, 1978, pp. 832-5.
57. H.K. Barpujari, "The Echoes of the Mutiny in Upper Assam", **PIHC**, XX, 1957, pp. 275-80.
58. **Ibid.**, p. 280.
59. K.N. Dutt, "The 1857 Revolution in Assam", in **Ibid.**, pp. 318-9.
60. **Ibid.**, p.319.
61. Barpujari, **Op.cit.** (The Echoes), p. 280.
62. K.N. Dutt, "Assam in 1835", **PIHC**, XIV, 1951, (pp.264-75), p.265.
63. K.N. Dutt, "Presidential Address", (Mod. Sec.), **PIHC**, XXIII, 1960, (pp.3-13), p.12.
64. **Ibid.**

65. **PIHC**, XXXIII, 1972, p.424.
66. **Ibid.**, pp. 452-8.
67. **PIHC**, XXXIV, 1973, pp. 197-200.
68. **PIHC**, XXVII, 1965, pp. 300-1.
69. **PIHC**, XXXVIII, 1977, pp. 595-602.
70. **PIHC**, XLIV, 1983, pp. 609-13.
71. The list of papers would show that two scholars of this region, Prof. N. Subrahmaniam and P. Sudhir, contributed articles dealing with the history of areas outside the north-east (See **PIHC**, XXXVII, 1976, pp. 63-9 and 363-7 respectively); but as we know, these two cannot be actually considered to be the scholars of this region. Both hailed from South India, served in NEHU for a while and then went back to the South.
72. K.N. Dutt, "Presidential Address" (Local Hist. Section), **PIHC**, XXII, 1959, p.464.
73. **Ibid.**
74. S.K. Bhuyan, "Presidential Address", (Local Hist. Sec.), **PIHC**, XXII, 1959, p.464.
75. **Ibid.**, p.465.
76. **PIHC**, XLIV, 1983, pp. 331-59.
77. It has been suggested that one of the basic reasons inhibiting frontier studies is the closure of records dealing with the subject. Valid as the point is, we cannot neglect the fact that studies have been carried out on the subject by other scholars as is shown in the list given by Prof. H.K. Barpujari (See Note 65).