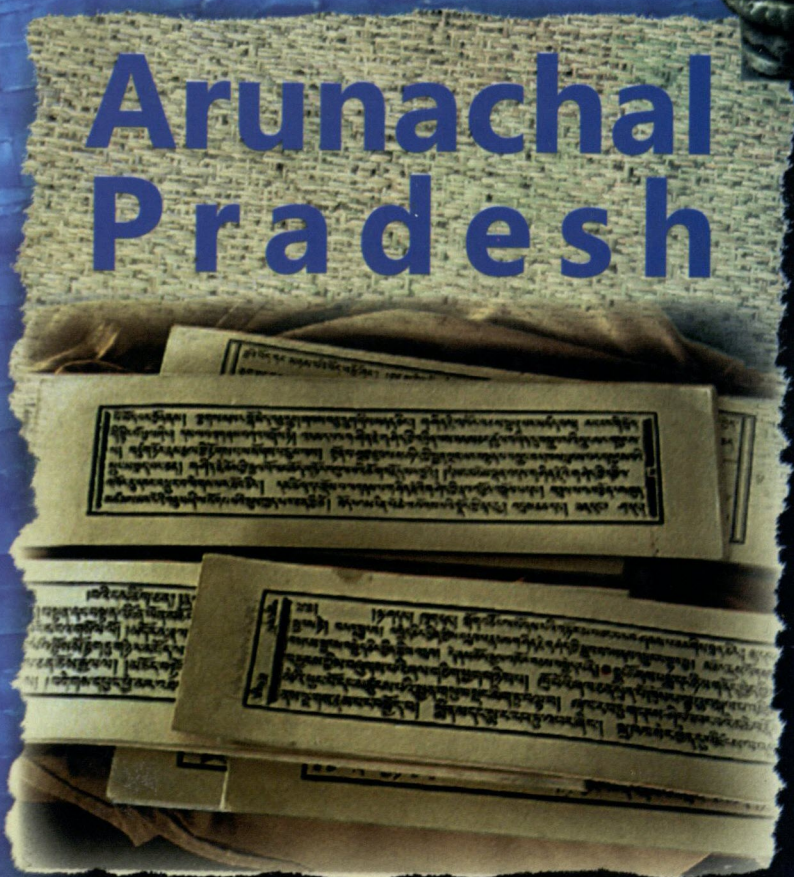


Sources of the  
History of

# Arunachal Pradesh



*Editors*

**S. Dutta • B. Tripathy**

The edited volume entitled *Sources of the History of Arunachal Pradesh* takes into account literary, archaeological as well as oral sources for reconstructing the history and culture of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachalees relation with the Ahoms as well as the British are also discussed on the basis of Buranjis and British archival documents. It also provides various sources for understanding Theravada as well as Mahayana Buddhism prevalent in western and northern and eastern part of the state. This book is the first of its kind to study the existing source materials and has thrown light on many unknown sources for the study of history, culture, religion, society and polity of the people of Arunachal Pradesh.

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# SOURCES OF THE HISTORY OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

*Editors*

**Prof. S. Dutta**

**Dr. B. Tripathy**



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## Sources of The History of Arunachal Pradesh

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# Introduction

Arunachal Pradesh, earlier known as North Eastern Frontier Tracts and North Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) is notable for its history and culture. Being the home of a number of tribes and sub-tribes, the state is considered as a paradise for the study of history and culture of the indigenous people of the state. However, the state is considered as 'terra incognita' till recent period for the historians due to paucity of historical literature. The paucity of written documents and lack of script among most of the tribes except of course among the Monpas (the Bodic Script), the Khamtis (Mon Tai script), the Membas (Hikor Script) and the Khambas (Hingna script) and limited explorations and excavations are the major bottlenecks to understand the history and culture of the people in ancient and medieval periods. However, we are fortunate to have British archival records, which are of singular importance for the study of history of the state during the period.

The history of the state can be traced to the prehistoric period, as gleaned from Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic tools, recovered from various parts of the state. The Parsi Parlo is the only prehistoric excavated site of the state, providing us an idea of evolution of pre Neolithic culture to Neolithic and ferrolithic state. However, our knowledge of prehistoric culture of the state is still in infant stage due to paucity of scientific explorations, excavations, study of associated material culture, settlement pattern of the period etc.

Coming to historical period through the early Brahmanical literatures mentions the Indo-mongoloid people living in the hills and valleys of Himalaya and sub Himalaya north-eastern hills of India under a blanket term "Kirata" it do not provide any concrete information about the land and people of Arunachal Pradesh. Contrary to the general perception that the region was isolated from the mainstream of Indian history, the people of the area had trade and cultural intercourse with the people of Assam, Burma, Tibet and other parts of India, which can be

verified from a number of actual trade routes of medieval period. The post 10<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the prevalence of Brahmaputra valley culture in the foothills of the state, attested by a number of Brahmanical remains such as the temple ruins at Malinithan, Tamreswari at Sadiya etc. The chain of forts and fortifications noticed at Bhishmaknagar, Rukmininagar, near Tezu, Itanagar, Bhalukpong also reveal cultural interaction of the hill people with their neighbouring plain culture. Some of the medieval texts of Assam specifically the *Kalika Purana* and the *Yogini tantra* throw light on some sakta *pithas* and pilgrimage centres like Parsuramkunda, Bhairavakunda, Vyasakunda etc located in the north eastern part of the state.

The coming of the Ahoms to Assam and subsequent expansion of Ahom rule, made them closer to some of the Arunachalee tribes such as the Nagas, the Adis, the Mishmis, the Khamptis, the Singphos, the Miris, the Nyishis, the Akas, the Bhutiyas etc. As such, these tribes are sometimes referred in Ahom *Buranjis*, written in Ahom as well as Assamese language. Infact, the Ahom *Buranjis* are considered as the most important source for reconstructing history of the some tribes of the state during pre-colonial period. Even some medieval vaishnava texts like *katha gunacharita* throw light on some tribes, who were influenced by the teachings of Neo-vaishnavism propounded by Sri Sankaradeva of Assam.

In the medieval period Arunachal witnessed migration of Buddhist people from Tibet as well as Burma. Here it is to be mentioned that the Monpas, a Mahayana Buddhist tribe following Lamaism migrated to their present settlement in the western part of Arunachal sometime from 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. Subsequently the other Mahayana tribes such as the Sherdukpens, the Membas, the Khambas, and the Meyors migrated to Arunachal in subsequent period. Some of the Theravada Buddhist tribes like the Khamptis, the Singphos also came to their present settlement from Upper Burma in 18 century. These Buddhist tribes have their socio-cultural heritage, political institutions nicely decorated monasteries, stupas Buddhist arts and crafts, colourful festivals and rituals.

The British came to Assam during the Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-26 and occupied it. The British economic, commercial

as well as strategic and political interests in the hilly region of the state shaped the trends and pattern of colonial intervention. The British archival documents, in the form of Government letters, military expeditions, monographs, documents, report of the political officers etc provide us some informations regarding history and culture of the people of the state.

After independence, the research Department of Arunachal Pradesh has undertaken limited explorations and excavations at Bishmaknagar, Rukmininagar, Malinithan, Itafort, Naksaparnvat, Gumsi, Vijoynagar etc and the excavated material remains provide some ideas about the culture of the people. The ethnographic museums and archaeological sites museum also contain historical and ethnographical materials, for understanding the people and their culture. Findings of pottery, terracotta, coins, isolated sculptures, a few epigraphs etc are also helpful in reconstructing history and culture of the people.

Though a number of ethnographic and a few historical works have been published about the land, people and culture of Arunachal Pradesh, there are a number of problems pertaining to the study of history of Arunachal Pradesh. One of the major problems is the identification of sources both literary and archaeological, which are few and far between. So far scientific explorations and excavations have not been given importance to study early historical and medieval period of the state. Secondly most of the medieval *Buranjis* written in Ahom and Assamese languages are not published with English translations so far. Thus many scholars not knowing the languages feel difficulties in quoting the original sources. Thirdly, British documents concerning to the people of the state are mostly found in the archives of London, New Delhi and Calcutta. Fourthly, almost all the oral traditions prevalent in the area only can be utilised as a source material with a proper understanding of the language and culture. Besides, limited ethno-historical and ethno-archaeological works have been undertaken in the state which also hampers in the reconstruction of the history and culture of the state.

With the above problems in hand the department of History with the support of ICHR, New Delhi organised a National Seminar during 12-14 March 2003 where more than 30

Scholars presented their papers. The present book is the outcome of the seminar proceedings. By and large the above articles deal with some aspects of sources of history and culture of the people. The essays are not in uniform in their content, analysis, references or otherwise. We hope, this proceeding will be of immense importance for understanding of various sources which will throw light on the history and culture of Arunachal Pradesh in particular and that of north east India in general.

**Prof. S. Dutta**

**Dr. B. Tripathy**