

The NEIHA and its Contributions on the Study of Arunachal Pradesh (Upto 1994).

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Introduction

The seed of the North East India History Association (NEIHA) was sown in a meeting of Historians North East India, who visited Shillong in connection with a Seminar on the 'History and Culture of North East India' held on 27th April 1979 in the Department of History of North Eastern Hill University (NEHU). The meeting was convened by Dr. J.B. Bhattacharjee, then Reader in the Department of History of NEHU, and subsequently the main architect of this organisation. The meeting resolved as follows

The representative meeting of the historians and lovers of history of North East India resolves that an association under the name and style of "North Eastern India History Association" be formed and the draft constitution prepared by the members present to be adopted for the Association.

And thus the NEIHA was born; after which this organisation, one of the premier voluntary academic organisations of the North East India, has a history of steady and glorious growth. But why this organisation? In the words of Dr. S.K. Barpujari, one of the main founders of NEIHA, "Despite some progress in the field of historical research and advanced studies in history through individual efforts universities, North East India remained a virgin field of investigation. The India History Congress, the premier association of the country had not been able to generate much enthusiasm among scholars of North East India." and the Scholars from the North East had been getting negligible attention in national academic forums like the Indian History Congress. The main objective of the foundation of the NEIHA as stated by its constitution read as follows :-

(a) Promotion and encouragement of the Scientific study of the History of the North East India, viz, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura and the adjoining areas historically connected with the region.

(b) Holding of conferences and publication of the proceedings, bulletins, memories, journals and other works.

The historical research and study in North East India has made a remarkable progress in last forty years, particularly at the behest of the North East India History Association. This organisation insists on secular and scientific historiography, study of regional history in national and global context and inter-disciplinary approach to history. While doing so, the young scholars of the region has remembered advice and warning of noted and seasoned scholars like Prof. H.L. Gupta and Prof. H.K. Barpujari who have been associated with this organisation almost from its inception and had presided over its Sessions, Prof. H.L. Gupta in his Presidential address of the regional Agartala Sessions, advised, "National history without regional history will be truncated and incomplete and regional history in isolation will be without moorings"² Prof. H.K. Barpujari warned, "Regional study should be complimentary and not competitive".³

NEIHA : A Brief Assessment

Fifteen years (upto fifteenth Sessions, 1994) in the life of an organisation is not a long period to make a full assessment of its contributions. But during this short period, this organisation has justified its foundation and existence by fulfilling its main objectives. In the words of S.K. Barpujari, "Its growth and direction during this short span of 14, (15 years reflects the awareness that the historical process operating in this region is best understood in terms of subregional variations and specific situation prevailing in the hills and plains within the literate and pre-literate societies"⁴.

So far the fulfillment of the first object is concerned, starting from an humble beginning with a membership of 67, the NEIHA had in its roll upto the 15th session in 1994, 414 members out of which 273 are Life Members with additional 8 institutional members. Till the 15th Session, besides 15 learned presidential addresses delivered by noted and recognised scholars in history and its allied disciplines both from inside and outside the North Eastern region, the NEIHA has published 15 proceeding volumes that contain 651 research articles by both seasoned and young scholars from inside and outside the region on various aspect of the North East and the adjoining areas historically connected with it. Though larger number of these articles relate to

Assam, there is a significant contribution on the States and the hill areas of the North East.

So far the second object of holding conferences and publishing proceedings and other publications, the NEIHA has been able to maintain its tradition of holding its annual sessions every year without any interruption. The idea of holding sessions in every state of the seven states of North East India has also been implemented with proud record of some states holding the Sessions twice or more, and in some cases even in Colleges situated in sub-urban areas. The sessions hosted by different states till the 15th sessions are shows below :-

Assam	-	4
Meghalaya	-	4
Manipur	-	2
Arunachal	-	2
Mizoram	-	1
Nagaland	-	1
Tripura	-	1

(16th session was held in Assam University, Silchar and 17th session is being held in 1996 in Govt. College, Aizawl).

Besides publishing its annual proceeding volumes regularly, that has earned applause from both inside and outside the country, the NEIHA has introduced and published Endowment Lectures and has started publishing thematic volumes on various aspects out of the papers published in the proceeding volumes

NEIHA and Arunachal

But why such specific academic exercise ? In the words of Prof. Sangma, "By taking stock of what had been done in the field of research in the history of the hill tribes of North East India, we come to know where we stand today in comparison with the plains of North East India and India as a whole. This will also enable us to know where we are still lacking, which will in turn, help us to take steps to fill up the lacuna".⁵ And so this attempt has been made on NEIHA and Arunachal Pradesh.

Up to a particular time the study of tribal history remained confined to reports, memoirs, accounts and monographs prepared by administrators, officials, ethnographers and missionaries who were incidentally all from outside. Despite various criticism that can be levelled against these publications, they formed the basic solid sources for understanding different aspects of our societies. Therefore, all these writings and publications supply us abundant materials for the purpose of our research and studies.⁶ Thereafter, on the hill tribes of North East Frontier, valuable contributions have been made by scholars like V. Elwin, B.C. Chakraborty, H.K. Barpujari, V.V. Rao, S.K. Chaube, J.B. Bhattacharjee, P.N. Dutta, M. Horam, M.S. Sangma, P.R.G. Mathews, M.L. Bose and others. The NEIHA has added further on the studies of the hill tribes of the North East. Prof. Phukan has rightly remarked, the quality and number of research papers on the history of the tribes of this region in the sessions of the NEIHA is very encouraging. Happily, students and scholars alike from the tribes themselves are now coming forward to write their one history and culture. The Association's encouragement extended to these scholars is not very insignificant in this respect."⁷

The studies on Arunachal Pradesh, the erstwhile NEFA, have got due attention in the NEIHA Sessions. In its fifteen Sessions under discussion from 1980 to 1994, out of 651 articles published so far in NEIHA proceedings, 53 are on different aspects of Arunachal Pradesh. The percentage of papers on Arunachal thus is 8.1. Most of the contributors have first hand knowledge of the land and people of the state by virtue of their long association because of their service in the area or personal interest in the history and development of the State. A few of the contributors are Arunachalees by birth (The session-wise total articles and articles on Arunachal Pradesh has been shown in Appendix A)

Though casual references have been made to Arunachal Pradesh in most of the 15 Presidential addresses, Arunachal got an exclusive treatment when the 7th session was held in Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat in 1986. Here in this Session, a noted economist of the region, Prof. J.B. Ganguly, one of time principal of the premier Institution of the State, Viz., Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat where the session was held, exclusively dealt with the economic aspect of the State. So also in the 15th Session held at Arunachal University in 1994, the State

got a fair deal from the President of the Session Prof. Milton Sangma who dealt with "British Historical writings on the Hill Tribes of North east India". Here it may be mentioned that the State has the proud privilege of hosting the NEIHA Session twice under the Local Secretaryship of Dr. S. Dutta once in 1986 and the other in 1994.

On the membership profile of the NEIHA from Arunachal Pradesh from only one member of a total 67 in the 1st Session in 1980, in 15th Session (1994) it has gone up to 18 out of a total 414 members in the organisation. As has been generally observed from the membership trend, the number of members increase suddenly, from a particular State when the Session is being held there. Arunachal is also not an exception to it. The highest number of members from the state ie. 29 has been recorded in 1987, when the 7th Session was held in Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasighat. This Session also shows highest number of tribal members ie. from the State. The session wise membership profile of the NEIHA and that from the state has been shown in Appendix-B. The number shown in (brackets indicate session wise tribal members from the state.

Brief Assesment of the Contributions :

The 53 articles contributed upto the 15th Session (1994) may be classified broadly into six categories; (i) Historiographical (2) Historical, (3) Political, (4) Economic, (5) Cultural and (6) Educational.

(1) In five articles on the Historiography, the Scholars have tried to deal with the trend, problems and different perspectives of historiography on Arunachal Pradesh. Three of the articles have specifically dealt with oral sources, which are considered as vital sources of historical information, specially in an area like Arunachal Pradesh where for certain periods of history other historical sources are scanty. Though the opinions of the contributors are not final words on the subject, there are maiden efforts to study an important aspect of the history of Arunachal Pradesh. The aspect on historiography requires more study in a methodical and scientific basis. Out of five contributors in this section, one is from outside the State, three are serving scholars in the State and one is an Arunachalee by birth.

(2) Articles on History Section occupy the large share of the contributions on different aspects of the history of erswhile NEFA

and presented by Arunachal Pradesh with a total contribution of 18 articles. The relationship of the tribes with the Ahoms and the British finds a dominant place in this section, specially with the major tribes like the Adis and the Nishis, with one such article on the Singphos. Only one article has dealt with origin and migration of the tribes. This section thus leaves a very wide gap in the study of relationship of the other tribes with the Ahoms and the British, which is also the case in case of origin and migration of the tribes. This section requires intensive studies on the State in all three periods of history, specially the ancient, period. Of the eighteen articles 2 contributions are from Arunachalee scholars, 10 are from scholars serving in the state and six are from scholars outside the state.

(3) In the political aspects only six articles can be listed one in institution of chieftainship among the Noctes and Wanchos of Tirap district, another on Kembang of the Adis; and two others on growth and functioning of local self governing institution, ie. Panchayatiraj system. The other articles are "Contributions of Assam Tea to formation of Arunachal Pradesh" and "Hind Swaraj, Relevance of Gandhi and Arunachal) A case study of Ayang village)". The section infact leaves a very wide gap of study specially the political institutions of the different tribes in the pre-independence period, political evolution of the State and the functioning of the democratic system in the post independence period. So the political aspect of the area requires serious study both in the pre and post independence periods.

(4) Comparatively the economic aspects of the State has got a fair deal in the Session with a total contribution of nine articles in addition to the learned presidential address of Prof. J.B. Ganguly, which has been referred earlier. Transborder trade of the area in the pre-colonial period with a deep insight into the spread of commercial and colonial tentacles of the British imperialists in the region have been treated exhaustively by two scholars in 4 articles. The five other articles have thrown stray light in five other aspects on the economy of the region like the pioneering

role of the Singphos on tea cultivation of the North East, population growth and economic development in Arunachal Pradesh, agriculture situation in the State, history of co-operative movement and the tribal formation and their economic base in Arunachal Pradesh. There is still a wide uncovered area in this aspects both in the pre-colonial colonial and post-colonial period. Out of the contributors in this section, there are inservice scholars and five contributors are from outside the State.

(5) In the cultural aspect, 12 articles have been traced out from the proceedings upto the 15th session that has covered a wide area of ideals, ideas, philosophy and practice in different aspects of the cultural evolution of the people of the State. Though the opinion of the scholars may be opened for debates, yet they have dealt with their subjects in the way they thought right, on which there is further scope of treatment and elaboration. In the culture section four articles have been contributed by scholars born in the State, that give an insight of the mind of the local intellectuals on the culture of the state that has gone a sea-change in the post-independence period. The other articles in this section are result of studies of contributions having first hand knowledge of the area because of their long association with it by virtue of their service. The number of such contributions are two; the remaining four are from outside the State. In this section also there is wide uncovered area as many tribes are being left untouched till the 15th session.

In the educational aspect three articles have been contributed by two scholars serving in the State. These are "Implications of Historical approach in educational research in Arunachal Pradesh : some thoughts and issues", "Educational Anthropology, Implication for Teacher Education in Arunachal Pradesh", and 'Appropriate Teaching Strategies for the tribal Students of Arunachal Pradesh'. This again is an area which requires further attention.

Conclusion

While concluding, I am tempted to quote from Prof. Sangma, "we have still many more tribes and communities, especially in the

hills of North East India who have not yet found a sentence in the pages of history of not to speak of the history of India but even in the History of North East India".⁸ S.K. Barpujari in his presidential address has rightly mentioned, "The hill tribes of North East India should receive more attention of the scholars. The migration and transformation of the tribes, their life and condition, their system of land tenure, law and justice, system of warfare, traffic in arms and ammunitions, impact of colonial administration and Christianity, emergence of middle class, trend of modernisation in their tradition bound society, economic transition, impact of two world wars and research for identity due to political changes in India, all these require thorough investigation by scholars".⁹ These two remarks can be applied into in case of Arunachal Pradesh also. All the tribes and areas are not getting equal and due attention in articles so far presented in the NEIHA Sessions. Further the emerging problems like the problems on Chakma-Hajong refugees, identity crisis, etc. that has rocked this island of peace' require immediate attention and study of the scholars that can give a guideline for solution of such problems. One should also the aware of the fact that the articles are the result of studies of individual scholars belonging to different disciplines that has made the studies isolated and de-linked, and which do not give a comprehensive and full picture of the land and people of the State.

But inspite of these limitations, atleast some studies have been done at the behest of the NEIHA on certain important aspects of the people of this land, in most cases in a methodical and scientific way. It is hoped that scholars will study the gap areas and tribes not yet covered in the past 15 Sessions of the NEIHA, paving path for a comprehensive study on various aspects of the State. The emerging indigenous scholars, who have started contributing substantially may take a lead in this respect.

Appendix—A

Seminarwise Articles and Articles on A.P.

Session	Total	on Arunachal Pradesh
1st Session, 1980 NEHU, Shillong	19	24
2nd Session, 1981 Dibrugarh University	26	2
3rd Session, 1982 Manipur University, Imphal	26	1
4th Session, 1983 Union Christian College, Barapani	25	0
5th Session, 1984 Aizawl	24	0
6th Session, 1985 P.G. Centre, Agartala	61	1
7th Session, 1986 J.N. College, Pasighat	58	6
8th Session, 1987 Kohima Arts College	49	3
9th Session, 1988 Gauhati University	61	3
10th Session, 1989 NEHU, Shillong	61	4
11th Session, 1990 M.U. Imphal	48	3
12th Session, 1991 Jagoroad, College	56	6
13th Session, 1992 NEHU, Shillong	42	8
14th Session, 1993 B.T. College, Jorhat	51	5
15th Session, 1994 Arunachal University, Itanagar	44	9

(Source : Proceeding volumes of NEIHA)

Appendix—B

Membership Profile

Session	Life		Annual		Total	From A.P.	
	Life	Annual	Annual	Total		From Annual	Tribes
1st Session, 1980 NEHU, Shillong	0	67	67	67	1	0	(0)
2nd Session, 1981 D.U.	3	109	109	112	3	0	(1)
3rd Session, 1982 Manipur Univ. Imphal	10	131	131	141	3	0	(0)
4th Session, 1983 Barapani	22	128	128	150	11	1	(4)
5th Session, 1984 Aizawl	26	139	139	165	11	1	(4)
6th Session, 1985 Agartala	36	247	247	283	12	1	(4)
7th Session, 1986	72	220	220	292	28	1	(6)

Session	Life		Annual	Total	Life	Annual	Total	From A.P. Tribes
	Life	Annual						
Pasighat								
8th Session, 1987	97	200	297	2	16	18	(4)	
Kohima								
9th Session, 1988	126	205	331	3	22	25	(4)	
Guwahati Univ.								
10th Session, 1989	159	217	376	6	16	22	(4)	
NEHU								
11th Session, 1990	170	222	392	5	14	19	(4)	
Imphal								
12th Session, 1991	196	198	394	7	6	13	(3)	
Jagroad								
13th Session, 1992	225	188	413	8	8	18	(3)	
NEHU								
14th Session, 1993	255	158	413	10	7	17	(2)	
Jorhat								
15th Session, 1994	273	141	414	10	8	18	(1)	
A.U., Itanagar								

Source : NEHA Proceedings