

**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

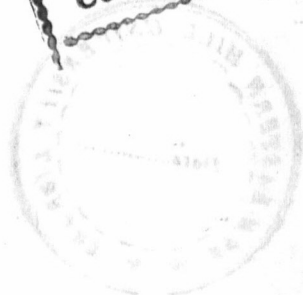


**SEVENTEENTH SESSION
GOVERNMENT AIZAWL COLLEGE
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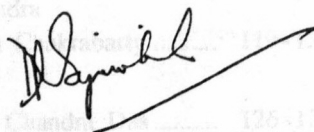
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Preface

The Seventeenth Session of the North East India History Association was held at Government Aizawl College, Aizawl between 3-5 October, 1996. This was the Association's second opportunity to meet in the Mizoram capital. By all counts the session was a success with large numbers attending the Academic Session, particularly the special session on the History of Mizoram. An added attraction of the Annual Conference was the learned lectures of Professor M.M. Sharma, Vice Chancellor of Dibrugarh University, in the second H.K. Barpujari Endowment Lectures. We wish to put on record the Association's appreciation for the hospitality and organization of the Seventeenth Session to the Principal of the College; to Professor Zochungnunga, Head Department of History and this colleagues and studies.

By now the NEIHA proceedings volumes has become a useful reference to historical research in the region. Young researchers have found in NEIHA a platform to discuss this first attempt in writing history. Other members of many years standing continue to see in our Association the need to foster, encourage and stimulate research of the region as a whole or on select themes. The publication of this Proceedings of the 17th Annual Session has been supported by the efforts of our President - Professor J.P. Singh, Professor A.K. Baruah and Dr. M. Sharma in editing and correcting proofs. To them we acknowledge our gratitude. We are thankful to the Indian Council for Historical Research for its generous financial support to the Association. We also thank the proprietor of Kamala Art Press, Shillong for his concern in publishing this volume.



Shillong
1 September, 1997

D.R. Syiemlieh
General Secretary
North East India History Association

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Manipuri Reaction to Purbanchal Pradesh

M. C. Arunkumar

The most controversial area in the history of modern Manipur, at present, is the political status of Manipur in 1947-49, i.e. from the date of independence from British colonial yoke to its merger in India. No doubt, the state had a series of political events in and around the political processes leading to merger of princely states into Dominion India the general picture was dominated by democratisation of political authority, people's pressure for merger and final show. Manipur, too, had its first ever Election to constitute a Democratic Monarchical state in 1948. The Manipur State Congress that lost its battle to form the first ever popular ministry started to look for alternative political manoeuvres. This internal attitude of Manipur State Congress to the emerging political system was further inflamed by the Cachar valley politics after the partition. The 'Prubanchal Pradesh' was the brain child of this two disabled politics.

The demand of Purbanchal Pradesh was referred to the then Working Committee of AICC. In a meeting of the Committee held on July 1 and 2, 1948, the matter was discussed Dr. Rajendra Prasad presided. The members present were; Pt. Jawaharla Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Dr. Profulla Chandra Ghosh, Sardar Pratap Singh, Smt. Sucheta Kripalani, Shri Ahmed Kidwai, Shri Balwant Rai Mahta, Shri S. K. Patil, Shri Shankarrao Deo, and Acharya Jugal Kishore.

Shri Vinobha Bhave and Shri Jagjivan Ram were present by special invitation. Vinobhaji attended on the first day only. Shri Jairamdas Daoulatram, Dr. John Mathai, Dr. Shyama-Prasad Mukherjee, Shri K.C. Neogy and Shri Mohanlal Saxena were invited to attend the afternoon sitting of the working Committee on 1st July, 1948.

The working Committee discussed the question of setting up Congress Organisation in states and considered the AICC Office note which gave a review of the many questions that had a risen in connection with the implementation of the AICC resolution on states

passed in Bombay in April 1948 and that of the Working Committee adopted in May last. The Working Committee appointed a sub-committee consisting of the following members to go into these questions and submit its recommendations to the Working Committee at its next meeting :

1. Shri Shandarao Deo
2. Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya
3. Dr. Profulla Chandra Ghosh
4. Shri Gokal Bhai Bhatt
5. Shri Kanayalal Desai
6. Shri Kamal Nayan Bajaj

The Committee would consider the following matters and make its proposals :

“There is a demand for Tripura, Cachar, Sylhet, Manipur, Lushai Hill states to be constituted into a separate province...”

The merit of the demand, made out by the Purbachal Organization Committee, was focused mainly on India's defence. The evaluation of the North-east zone in terms of its strategic values was, however, a new thing in the modern history of the zone. This was often discussed in post World War - II. An undated note from the Secretary of the Committee sent to Dr. Rajendra Prasad runs “... From a glance at the map of the region (here, Purbachal) comprising Manipur, Cachar, Assam portions of Sylhet, Lushai Hills and Tripura State, it will appear that this insular territory of about 25,000 sq. miles is pressed between Burma on the east and Eastern Pakistan on the West. The southern boundary is also shared between these two states and on the north there is a long range of hills separating this zone from the rest of Assam ... With such winding, dilatory and uncertain system of communication with the rest of India, this frontier territory can ill afford to depend on the supply of civil and military requirements therefrom in times of any emergency..... The surging wave of communism is rolling through the entire South-East Asia and has already dashed against the gates of India through Burma. It has splashed Manipur as will be evident from the results of the election held there recently and is likely to filter down to the Lushai Hills from the latest contacts that are being established be-

tween Burma and Lushai Hills leaders. Commnism fights with a double-edged weapon on the one side it stimulates internal rebellion fed on popular discontent, and on the other it swoops down with its arms at an opportuns moment. It will not be difficult to mislead the Manipuris and the Lushais with their Mongolian affinities. Reports and reaching us to the effect that Communists are amassing arms near the Manipur border... The anti-Bengalee feelings of Assam have left a large section of the Bengalee element in the district of Cachar and Assam portions of Sylhet lukewarm territory consisting of non-Assamese population feel like aliens in Assam politics. ...”

The feeling of the then Maharaja of Manipur on this issue was negative to such carving out a province. In a strictly confidential letter dated July 23, 1948, the Maharaja sent his skeptic mind on the future of the states involved. The letter addressed to Private Secretary to the Maharaja of Tripura explicitly read as : “The geographical, topographical and physical position of the different units proposed is well-known to you and that does not warrant for maturing the proposed scheme. The statement (appeared in some newspapers) that Manipuri public have an inclination for such scheme is also equally incorrect....” In reply to the letter, Tripura expressed, on August 8, 1948 that : “The views of the people of Tripura are quite the same as of Manipur.”

Pointing out that the Purbachal Pradesh move was a a reaction to the linguistic politics of Assam, L.Gogeswar Singh, General Secretary of Manipur State Congress, in a Press statement (*Shillong Times* dated Aug. 3, 1948 and *The Assam Tribune* dated Aug. 5, 1948) expressed : “For some time past a section of the Assamese Press as well as some of their accredited leaders of public opinion including the Socialist Party of Assam have been carrying on a ranging and tearing campaign against the present move for the creation of a congress province comprising Manipur State, Cachar, Tripura state and Lushai Hills. *In the background of the present move there is a long story how it was initiated and how the present ministry in Assam sowed the seed of division in the body politic of Assam and its neighbouring States by its alien attitude in its endeavour to impose Assamese as the provincial languages which is spoken by about 33 p.c. of the total population of the province excluding the states* (the underlined lines are abridged by the *Resistance*, July 4,

1978) ... would appeal to all concerned to desist from all sorts of vile and irresponsible propaganda against the proposal of a new province since the new province is the only panacea of all troubles in Assam and its neighbouring states and with its emergence, Assam also would become a culturally and linguistically homogeneous province.

We may recall here that the Manipur State Congress at that time had two factions : one led by Elangbam Tompok Singh and another by Tomal Singh. Resolution 3 of the working Committee, Manipur State Congress that was endorsed to the Maharaja by L. Mani Sing, Office Secretary of Manipur State Congress on Aug. 9, 1948 runs like : "The Manipur State Congress Committee viwes with deep concern at the proposed move for creation of a Congress province comprising Manipur, Cachar, Lushai and Tripura and does not countenance this move... The working committee deprecates the sponsoring of this move by the Lompok Congress who have got only 4 candidates returned in the general election of the State Assembly of 53 members and who have got a meagre following in the state. It is therefore resolved that the working Committee, All India National Congress, be moved so that even for the Congress organisation itself, Manipur state may be treated as a Congress Province in consideration her peculiar circumstances.

The clashes of interest between two Congress factions was reported in *The Assam Tribune* dated Aug. 19, 1948. The report was based on a press note of Publicity Department of Manipur. Manipur still has two rival Congresses. One of these which supports the proposed Purbachal has got not more than four sats out of 53. This shows the representative character of the party advocating Purbachal.

The majority of the Manipuris in Cachar rejected the proposed province. A letter to Editor published in *The Assam Tribune* dated Aug. 22, 1948 noted that "It is very encouraging and hopeful that the Cachar people are united against this sinister move. The mischievous propaganda in a section of the Calcutta Press and disruptive activities of the outsiders in Cachar failed to induce the indigenous people who all along turn a deaf ear to all these, particularly the naked cry of the weekly 'Surma' of Silchar. The wise decision of the Mizo Union which is of far reaching consequence about the unwillingness of the Mizo people for a separate province will be highly appreciated throughout the whole province and will be a source of inspiration

among the people of the hill districts of Assam. The revised decision of the Manipur State Congress for the support of the proposed province only on condition that Hindusthani be the state language, of the new province will, I am sure, be totally revised if it takes the trouble to go through Surma which stands for Bengali and Purbachal only ... I cannot but appreciate the independence Day speech of S. L. Achaw Singh, a great State leader, regarding the all-round impossibility of the creation of a separate province. The spirit of the resolution adopted by the State Socialist Party on the 8th instant will support of the indigenous people of Cachar and Lushai Hills..."

The Assam Government, too, was not happy to the move. Mr. M. Tayyebulla, Minister, Publicity, Assam wrote a letter on August 4, 1948 to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President, AICC expressing : "Bardoloi must have apprised you of the whole question at Delhi the week before last. Before that you must have received the resolutions of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee on the subject. You will have by this time received also a letter from the President of the Assam Provincial Committee opposing the reactionary move on the part of some gentlemen of Cachar for a separate Province with Cachar, Manipur, Tripura and Lushai Hills.

As Bardoloi must have told you, the overwhelming opinion in Cachar is against this separate Province move ... The Manipuris residing in Cachar, who constitute a considerable section of the people, were found to be strongly opposed to the idea of a new Province."

To this letter, Dr. Rajendra Prasad replied in contrary to many Congress leaders. His letter dated August 30, 1948 addressed to Mr. Tayyebulla read as : "The question of a separate Province of Cachar, Manipur, Tripura and Lushai Hills does not arise unless there be extraordinary circumstances of the same. I do not think that such circumstances exist, specially in view of the facts that you have stated in your letter. In any case the question is not under consideration."

Meanwhile, AICC was in a good mood to create the Province. Dr. Prafullo Chandra Ghosh, ex-Prime Minister, West Bengal and member of Congress Working Committee, came to Manipur to examine the possibility and proposal of the formation of the Purbachal

Pradesh. Mr. K.C. Chakrabarti, Legal Remembrancer of Maharaja of Manipur, who was at that time in Calcutta, wrote a letter to Maharaja introducing Mr. Ghosh on August 20, 1948. The Congressman present in a public meeting held on August 22, 1948. A police informer made a report on the meeting next day. The report mentioned "The meeting was arranged by the Tompok Congress... Dr. P.C. Ghosh speaking at the meeting says everything indirectly... The motto of the Indian National Congress is to make equilibrium i.e. the poor and the rich will live equally at the same stage. Manipur State in order to make equilibrium according to the motto of the Congress requires force. Manipur State along cannot fight for this. So, in order to get this force Manipur State require to be amalgamated with the three places; Tripura, Cachar and Lushai.

This gentleman gives a religious point of view. Vaishnavism which had long since been followed by the Manipuris was founded by Chaitanya Mahaprabu. Most of the people in the four places follow this religion. So the four places are connected with one another as regards religion. So the forming of the province is good."

In the early days of September, 1948, the Working Committee of AICC was busy with many vital issues including Congress Organization is states. On 8th September, 1948 at 8:30 a.m. at 1, Queen Victoria Road, New Delhi, the Working Committee met. "Dr. Rajendra Prasad could not attend the meeting owing to indisposition. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel presided, and the following members were present; Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Dr. P.C. Ghosh, Shri Balwantrai Mehta, Shri Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Sm. Sucheta Kripalani, Shri Shankarrao Deo and Acharya Jugal Kishore.

Congress Organization In States

The report of the states sub-committee appointed by the working committee was discussed in the meeting and the working Committee resolved that :

A - The PCCs enumerated below should be formed so as to include as their component parts unions and states in the following manner ...

(vi) Cachar, Manipur
and Tripura

should be constituted into a separate
bilingual Congress province, with
Bengali and Manipuri as provincial
language..."

By September, however, in Manipur, witnessed strong protest reaction to the Congress decision of the formation of Purbachal Pradesh. On September 15, 1948 at 6 p.m., a joint meeting of MLAs of the then Manipur Assembly was held in the office premises of Manipur State Congress (Tomal). The MLAs from Hill constituencies and of Manipur State Congress (Tompok) did not attend the meeting. The resolution taken in the meeting runs. This meeting regards the recent formation of a Congress Province of the Indian National Congress Organization comprising Manipur, Cachar and Tripura as a forerunner for the formation of an Administrative unit in the near future and strongly protests against it which was based on the support of one political party of Manipur from which only 3 or 4 members were returned at the last election... The people of Manipur will never desire to have such an administrative set-up imposed upon them. What the population of Manipur demand is the existence of Manipur State as a component and distinct unit of the Dominion of India with her own special entity and internal administration undisturbed. In view of the manifold pernicious effects which the apprehended administrative set-up is likely to bring, the people of Manipur are not and will not at all be prepared to welcome any moves towards formation of an administrative unit based on the proposed Purbachal...

Similar resolutions were taken in a mammoth public meeting held on September 18, 1948 with Mr. Parijat Singh in the chair. The meeting was attended by people of both the valley and the hills of the state. In the resolution, they added a proposition to the denial of the formation of Purbachal that² "Manipur ever since the beginning of her existence has been maintaining her position as an autonomous unit of India. Her people living at the North-East frontier of India are quite distinct from other racial groups of India ethnically, culturally and linguistically and hence deserve exceptional treatment. This meeting reiterates the reasonable claim of the people that Manipur, the 15th State in area, be given the same status as the nineteen Major States, the separate autonomous existence of which has been guaranteed in the draft Constitution of India. It is resolved that the

President, Constituent Assembly, be moved to the above effect." This stand was submitted in the form of a Memorandum dated September 20, 1948 by Mr. Tomal Singh, President, Manipur State Congress, to the President, Constituent Assembly of India.

In another letter of same date, Mr. Tomal Singh expressed the following to Mr. Rajendra Prasad, President, AICC : "... They (members of Tompok Congress) found a champion of their cause in Dr. P.C. Ghosh who was also instinctively and purposely out to preserve the hegemony of the Bengalees in Assam by getting a separate province carved out for them at the sacrifice of Assam, Manipur and Tripura.

We have a premonition and that rightly, that attempt will soon be afoot for turning the patched-up congress province consisting of Manipur, Tripura and Cachar into an administrative province. Let the Congress authorities know it clearly and once for all that the people of Manipur who take a strong exception to this arbitrary formation... will resist at any cost any such attempt and that the present move will do nothing except creating and anti-Bengalee feeling among the Manipuris who are otherwise quite friendly to the Bengalees as the the Assamese who are more akin and closely related ... Tompok Congress is the last party to speak for or on behalf of the people of Manipur. If the Congress authorities act on their words things will come to grief soon..."

The Assam Tribune dated October 1, 1948 reported of Manipuri reactions in Assam, once again. The news item datelined Silchar, September 26 that read as : "A mass meeting of the Manipuris was convened at Malugram, Cachar to discuss the so-called movement for the formation of a separate Congress province consisting of Cachar, Manipur, and Tripura State. S. J. Kamal Sinha presided in the meeting.

Prominent among those present were S. J. K. Singh, General Secretary, Assam Manipuri Association, S. J. Binode Behari Sinha of Lakhimpur, S. J. Nandi Sinha of Ramnagar, S. J. Gokul Chandra Sinha of Narsingpur, S. J. Punshi Sinha and others.

Inaugurating the meeting, S. J. Bidyapati Sinha vomitted poison against the Assam Government. He charged them as being indifferent to the legitimate claims of the Manipuri community and said that if remained in Assam their cultural and lingual development would not

be possible and that the majority community in Assam would force their own culture and language on the Manipuris.. He further told that the formation of the new province has the approval of the Maharaja of Manipur and he appealed to the Manipuris to support this new move.

Opposing, Sj. J.K. Sinha, General Secretary, Assam Manipuri Association, criticized Sj. Bidyapati Sinha saying that if he had good faith in the move he should have consulted the Manipuris before he did lend his support actively to this end ... Continuing he said that India's Draft Constitution... provides for the safeguard and development of the lingual and cultural developments of the backward and minority communities and it was wrong to say that if they remained in Assam there would be lingual and cultural annihilation of Manipuris... At the request of Sj. Bidyapati Sinha, resolution was adopted to convene a representative conference of the Manipuris of Cachar, Manipur and Tripura States and decide the issue under controversy in that conference."

The political development in both Manipur and its neighbouring areas threw light on All India Congress Committee to reconsider the move. The letter dated October , 1948 of Jugal Kishore to Dr. Rajendra Prasad highlighted the political development in the area and the need of reconsideration. The letter read as : "Regarding my visit to Cachar, a letter was received by Sardar Patel from Mr. Ba rdloi suggesting that my visit should be postponed as it might lead to the intensification of the agitation for separation of Cachar from Assam and is likely to give a handle to other opponents - the Communists and the Pakistanists - to inflame hatred... I have accordingly done so. But, the problem of Cachar, Manipur and Tiperrah Hills still remain unsolved. The decision taken by the Working Committee at its last meeting on the recommendation of States Committee and of Dr. Prafulla Chandra Ghosh for creating a separate Province for Congress work has been suspended. Unless we make it clear that the question will be taken up at the next meeting of the Working Committee and the parties concerned will be given an opportunity of making a representation to the Working Committee, our action may be suspected by those who are in favour of constituting a separate Congress Province and may lead to strife and bitterness between the differing sections.

The final decision on the issue of Purbachal formation was taken in a meeting of Working Committee, AICC on November 13, 1948 held at Sardar Valabhai Patel's House. "All were present except Shri Ralwant Rai Mehat. Shri Jagjiwan Ram was also present by invitation. Dr. Rajendra Prasad could not attend owing to indisposition. Sardar Patel presided.

The Working Committee received deputations from Assam PCC, Bengal PCC, Cachar PCC, Manipur State Congress, with reference to the question of setting up of a separate Congress Province with Cachar, Tripura State, Manipur State and Lushai Hills.

The report of Dr. P. C. Ghosh with regard to the Congress Organization in Cooch-Bihar state and the formation of a separate province as proposed above was also discussed and the Working Committee passed the following resolution :

Resolved that the Assam Provincial Congress Committee shall comprise the following areas :

1. Assam (including Cachar and Karimganj)
2. Tripura
3. Manipur
4. Lushai Hills

Provided that Cachar and Karimganj shall be free to transact their affairs in Bengali, and provided further that each of the afore-said four units of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee shall be free to conduct its Parliamentary activities including elections to Legislature and Local Boards, subject of course to the control of the Central Parliamentary Board and Central Election Committee, and shall these units shall be free to transact their affairs in their own respective languages...

It is further resolved that the previous resolution passed by the Working Committee at its meeting of 8th September, 1948 providing for the formation of a separate Purbanchal Province is rescinded hereby.

Also resolved that Cooch Bihar shall be under the jurisdiction of the West Bengal Provincial Congress Committee."

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