

**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

ELEVENTH SESSION

IMPHAL : 1990

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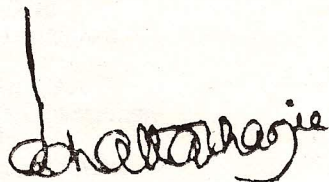
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P R E F A C E

The Eleventh Session of the North East India History Association was held at the Manipur University, Imphal, amidst great enthusiasm and gay. This was for the second time that we were invited by the Manipur University and Professor Gangmumei Kabui, Head, Department of History, Manipur University, created a history for the Association being the Local Secretary for the second time. The delegates will cherish the fond memory of the session for a long time due to the warm hospitality and colourful entertainment programmes, besides the high standard of the academic sessions in keeping with the tradition of the Association.

Shri Chintamani Panigrahi, the Governor of Manipur, inaugurated the session and Shri R. K. Ranbir Singh, the Chief Minister of Manipur, graced the inaugural function as a Guest of Honour. Professor V. K. Ahluwalia, Vice-Chancellor of Manipur University, did the Association a great honour as the Chairman of the Organising Committee and by his welcome address. Shri Kh. Amutombi Singh, Deputy Chief Minister of Manipur, released the publications. About one hundred and seventy delegates attended the session in which more than eighty papers were presented in nine panels. The First H. K. Barpujari Endowment Lectures by Professor B. N. Mukherjee, Carmichael Professor, Calcutta University, was an added feature of the session. Professor Tarasankar Banerjee, Dean, Faculty of Arts, Viswa-Bharati University, presided over the session.

The volume is the proceedings of the eleventh session of the North East India History Association held at the Manipur University on October 25-27, 1990. I am thankful to my colleagues Professor J. P. Singh, Prof. M. S. Sangma, Dr. D. R. Syiemlieh and Shri Atul Dev Sarmah for their help in selecting and editing the papers and publishing the volume. We are thankful to the Indian Council of Historical Research for generous financial assistance to the Association for the session and for publication of the proceedings.



(J. B. Bhattacharjee)
General Secretary

Shillong,
The 15th June 1991

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Folk History and Historiography

T. Tomba Singh

It is to be thought that whether a large number of subjects and disciplines in mushroom growth today can give humanizing effect. Scientific elementalism grows and even a cell has become a universe for the biologists while an event has become another world for the historians. The number of books are more than the population of the mankind as there is no birth control programme in case of the books. Specialists who knows more and more about less and less have come up till he knows nothing about more and more. They built a Cocoon around themselves and have isolated from the larger human community. In as much as human knowledge has become too voluminous for communication a new trend of keeping feeble respect for authority and gurus can be seen. Such neurotic man-made deviations are being controlled by extra-academic means. In this age, may we call it intellectual boom or crisis, bread and butter relation is looked into for the status-quo.

Man and Society are one but subjects are many. A large number of subjects such as Psychology, history, anthropology, sociology, economics, political science study only man and the society. After a study of parts we may also study the whole and we may speak of interdisciplinary approach. The movement of the whole in time is not less important than the movement of parts in the whole. People speak history to be the mother of truth and folk-lore to be mother of emancipation and reconstruction. The historians and folk-lorists may be alarmed. But without a synthesis of such voluminous knowledge in its branches, how we are able to understand the whole in the system. With the above problems in general, we are looking into our specific issue-folk-history and historiography, in the context of India's north east. First let us look into bifurcation of history in its approaches.

To be a member of Nazi, one has to kill one's pet dogs, as a test of cruelty. The question arises as such, on the psychotic behaviour of Hitler and its relation with the course of historical events. Hence, history and its relation with individual psychology, social psychology, abnormal psychology etc. cannot be taken unimpor-

tant or irrelevant. Thus, psychological approach has a place in the historical sciences. Again, in the context of Manipur, Kumbaba, a royal chronicle of Manipur has recorded mass panicky state of feeling in addition to the large number of entries on superstitious beliefs.

At what time of the day, the Britishers or the Japanese had to launch attack or drop bombs against the Manipuris. Would the meal time be an opportune moment of the attack? Did Japanese and Britishers select such a moment to drop bomb at Imphal or launch main attack near Khongjom.?

Thus anthropology, & ethnography are not less important. Do Japanese conform to their culture and take patriarchal type of Capitalism in their own country? To understand the rulers and militant heroes in the history, do the study of history of childhood, the daily life of different groups of people become relevant? The Meiteis in the past prostrated to bow down before the elders of the area on a specific day in connection with Cheiraoba. But, this can not be seen to day in Manipur. Does this create behavioural changes that affect the history of social movement? All such problems calls for interdisciplinary studies. The use of works of anthropologists like Vansina on African kingdoms or Evans Pritchard on devine kingshp among the Shilluk people of Sudan by modern historians can be seen. Again, we come to the study of history of costume and dresses, hair-style fashion, diseases, earth or mortuary behaviour, we have to take help of other disciplines. So history can encompass any discipline, may it be botany or geology.

Thus when we come to the problem of reconstructing the past and other practical problems of historiography, we face a lot of difficulties. Once this writer was informed (in one journal) that the insurgency in the north-east was a part of the research programme for historical experiments to see that a new state or country can be formed in this epoch. The death of Zia in the plane crash and death of high dignitaries can not be taken lightly. Spying has become a historical factor- indeed. Earlier, the historians used museums, archives, diaries and other written documents for writing history. In addition to the written records they took help of other material remains. Thus, in the past, History was completely on written documents and artifacts of material culture even had a little place.

So how to write history of the India's north east or the various African region which have no written tradition or too scanty or young if there be any.

It is a fact that material can decide the tool to be used ; diamond, glasses, wood and metal have different tools to work upon. This is true when we come to the problem of writing history of India's north east or Africa. Hence, folkloristic approach is compulsory.

Let us take up a few cases where written documents do not work. The submission of Meitei kings to and hill-chief or king or their mutual help and co-operation can not be seen in the record. It is said that Janneta Irabot belongs to Huirem families while the records given here as of Hijam family. What Irabot belongs to Huirem is a matter of folkloristic approach. The pains taken by people of duty to serve their masters, nobles and Phamdous in Manipur are not reflected. The sufferings for digging the canals known as Leishangkhang and Takhenkhang are not mentioned. The referant of the British record was to sustain and prolong direct or indirect rule while that of the king and the people may be to shake off foreign yoke.

In a few Chakpa historical tales and records in manuscripts shows Naophangba as the first king of Manipur, while Kumbaba shows Pakhangba to be the first king. Whether the first seven kings were mythological figures remain a riddle. Pakhangba was a man at night but a god in the day-time. But this is a folk motif found also in Africa. What actually Manipuri people thought and believed in the first and second half of this 20th Century even can not be written safely without the study of oral tradition. How the king of Manipur conducted trials or presided for the judgements ? How was the nature and form of trial and punishment in Manipur when we think of history of Jurisprudence ? The history of recruitment in the Manipur royal service and its function are not recorded. So we have to come to the oral sources and folk-history. Folk-history is a branch of folk-lore which deals with historical problems of the folk. This branch has become important as grapho centrisim is helpless where we do not find written source.

Proverbs, tales, songs and performing arts are not completely away from history in space and time. Khongjom Parva a kind of Manipuri epic is based on Khongjom War. It is completely based on historical events. In his Irish folk-history, Prof. Henry Glassie writes, "History is "men's work" and the men who do that work "gather up" the truth of the past and tell the whole tale." The local hisiorians (centralifigures in the Community) tales fly as sounds out of the dark ; they hit the ear, and stick in the mind or vanish. This is the nature. Compared with historical narra-

tives preserved in ink they are less accurate in some details, more accurate in others. Their authors overturn the norms of historians in other traditions and connect to an ancient and vital Irish idea, by ordering history more in space than in time.

The local historians may be vague or inaccurate about dates but they are impeccably precise about locations. Their history is set first in place. But they do not neglect time. They are right about sequences and especially as events approach the present the local historian's spoken accounts are fuller and more complete than the written record " *In his field work, One of the local historian gave an opinion that the trouble with books is that they contain little local history and the historian's responsibility is intensely local.

If he drifts away from home, he snaps free of reliable sources and loses the experience of the repetitions reports that refines his critical faculty. If he attempts to generalise broadly he falls like the writers of books ineluctably into falsehood. Even the community's oral history was studied and insinuated into the curriculum of a little school of the historian. But how he learned was from the talking of the old people. They create stories of history and shape the truthful narratives out of the collective wisdom.

But the songs he found are not narratives of entire events but commemoratives or satirical exciting allusions to events. It expresses social unity or disunity in the forms of stories or songs.

From the folk history and folklore only we can say that in the 17th Century, there were thirty five stalls or vendors in the market of Manipur.

Whereas, the above facts remain true it is therefore proved for conclusion that the folk history project in this area of the north east will be able to contribute in the historiography in general and the writing of history of Manipur in particular.

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