

**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

ELEVENTH SESSION

IMPHAL : 1990

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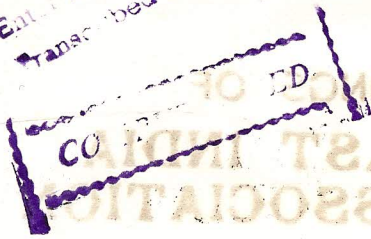
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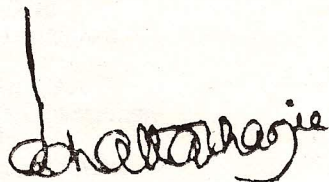
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P R E F A C E

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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The Bearing of the Inscriptions on the History of Manipur

L. Kunjeswori

Epigraphy, which represents the transformation of the human thoughts, actions and ideas in the form of writing mostly on stones and metals is an important element of Historical Archaeology. The writing medium on less perishable material marks a turning point in the history of India. In Manipur a few records are found, which belong to the late historical period. These inscriptions deal with clan, tribe, origin, culture, religion, order of the kings, tribal taboos, customary laws and historical events etc.

For example, the stone inscriptions discovered from Khoibu Maring village belong to the period of Marjit Singh (1813-1819 AD). but they contain accounts of Sameirang* (518-568 A.D.); Pai-khomba (1666-1697 A.D.) and Mathangsoi, the progenitor and reclamer of Khoibu Maring village.

These inscriptions are on rough sandstone slabs, and a few on copper and iron plates. All the stones of early period are written in archaic Manipuri script except some which are written in Devanagari and Bengali scripts of a later period. The stone inscriptions of Konthoujam and Khoibu Stone I describe the status of the village people. The Koibu Stone (iii) as well as the stone inscription of Heisnam Lairembi depict the religious and cultural tradition of the localities concerned. The stone inscription of Bhuvan ching (hill) shows the demarcation of Manipur and Cachar. The stone inscriptions at Kohima and Chibu refer to the domination of Manipuri kings over the tribal chiefs. The Karong inscription records the grant of a market place. One inscribed stone found at Nungba partially dealing with religious beliefs of the people is believed to be a tribal inscription.

Two copper plates and one iron plate inscriptions are also discovered. The one provides an exhaustive information about the religion and culture and other about political developments in the contemporary situation. This is followed by the detailed description of the available stone inscriptions and copper plate grants in a chronological order.

The inscribed stone, which is located at Konthoujam village, 14 kms. away from Imphal, is the earliest one in Manipur. The inhabitants of Konthoujam are a sub-tribe of Haorok Konthou tribe, who are also associated with Kha-Nganba tribe. The Konthou's family is popularly known as Konthoujam. They believed that the Goddess was a clan lady of their community. But she was called Ching Thang Laileima.

This inscription is erected by king Charairongba. This is the order of the king given to the Konthoujam clan to enjoy the privileged class of the village and to forbid the Haoku clans to enter into the enclosure of the Konthoujam Lairembi. The language used in this inscription is Manipuri and script in archaic Meitei. The style and nature of the inscription can closely be compared with those of the neighbouring states and countries of South East Asia, which are mostly dated in Mediaval period.

There are three stone inscriptions at Khoibu Maring. All the three inscriptions are undated. The names of four kings, kiyamba (1467-1505 A.D.); khagemba (1597-1652 A.D.); Naophanba (428-518 A.D.) and Sameirang (518-568 A.D.) figure of course in the said inscriptions respectively. But we cannot affirm with any certainty that they belonged to their periods. These inscriptions belong to a much later period because there was an established tradition of mentioning the activities of the past which might have been given in the inscriptions during the period following the mentioned kings in conformity with the tradition.

After analysing the date contained in them we find that they deal with the past history and culture. They show the extension of the political sway of the mentioned kings in the outlying areas, the contemporary social and political life, the religious beliefs, the artistic activities with regard to the continuation of the prehistoric practice of erecting the megaliths etc.

The inscription at Ningel on the eastern side of Manipur is dated as in the sponsal year of Gamol or Komol Lamcha (orphan) in 1665 Friday, the first day of Meitei Lunar month of Lamda (March and April). The stone inscription can be compared with the events recorded in the royal chronicles (*Cheitharol Kum'aba*, p. 701, Satjal p. 79).

The stone was inscribed in Archaic Manipuri script and the language is Manipuri mixed with some Sanskrit words. This inscription records the policy of the king to protect the colonies of the royal slaves from the frequent raids of the surrounding hill tribes. Many omens and curses are mentioned therein which be-

fell the hill tribes, if they tortured the official-in-charge of the colony. On the other hand, a boon is also mentioned, which could be given to them if they worked in co-operation with the Officer-in-charge and the people of the colony. The writing style of the inscription is a bit different from that of others. From the time of Garibaniwaz onwards more advancement in the writing style of inscriptions can be seen with reference to the use of soft sound consonants therein.

The inscription at Leisangkhong mentioned the declaration of a market place opened by Mayangamba, popularly known as Marjit Maharaja or Birachandra (1813-1900 A.D.) at Leisangkhong in 1819 A.D. under the name and style of Mayangamba Keithel (market place).

Some of the inscriptions also throw light on the socio-political life of the contemporary age.

Prior to 1891 A.D. people in Manipur were conscious of preserving the records on less perishable materials such as metal plates rather than stone. One of the copper plates is preserved in Manipur State Museum, Imphal, and other plates are believed to be in private possessions in Manipur.

The earliest available inscribed metal plate is the Iron plate at Chothe, a Naga village in Manipur South District. The iron plate was inscribed during the reign of Maharaja Bhaigyachandra (1759-1762 A.D. and 1763-1793 A.D.) The language is Manipuri but the script is Bengali-Assamese. The first evidence of writing on copper plate was recorded in native chronicles during the reign of Loirenkhomba popularly known as Labanyachandra (1793-1801 A.D.).

And no other records as well as specimen of writing on metal beyond the period of Maharaja Bhaigyachandra are available, except the Phayeng copper plate, whose antiquity is very debatable.

From the above epigraphical records one can easily learn the political, and socio-cultural position of the past history of kings.