

A REPORT ON THE
1st INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL SYMPOSIUM
NORTH EAST INDIA AND JAPAN - THE WAY AHEAD

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First time in the history of Presidency College, Motbung, a Two-days International symposium was held at the College, during 27-28 February, 2018. The symposium was jointly organised by the organising committee, International Cultural Symposium-North East India & Japan (ICS-NEI&J) and Presidency College, Motbung. More than 100 participants including 16 delegates from Japan and other states of India participated the programme. 9 research papers have been presented by various resource persons which included Dr. Yoshihiro Kaburagi, Lecturer (retired), Osaka University of Commerce & Mr. Kazuki Nakajima, Nara Systematic Goodwill Guide on the topic –“ *Culture in Forest Belt of Shinnery Leaves as a Common Root for India and Japan & Fusion between Buddhism and Shinto, Nature Worship*”; Dr. Tingneichong Gangte, Principal, Presidency College on the topic –“ *Manipur Culture*”; Dr. Manabu Koiso, Professor, Kobe Yamate University on the topic –“ *Animistic Beliefs among Nagas and Meiteis in Manipur Before and After Conversion*” ; Dr. Aishwarya Sugandhi, Lecturer, Dept. of English, Bukkyo University on the topic – “*The Religious Outlook of the Japanese with Specific Reference to the Jichin-sai, Ground-breaking Ceremony*” ; Dr. Haruhisa Asada, Associate Professor, Dept. of Geography, Nara Women’s University on the topic - *Farm Abandonment in Japan and Assam*” ; Mr. Hemant Singh Katoch, Battle of Imphal Tours on the topic – “*The Battle of Imphal and Manipur’s Experience of World War II*” ; Mr. Tomio Isogai, Adjunct Professor, Ajeenkya DY Patil University –“ *Look East, Act Global - Prospects for Indo-Japanese Partnership*”; Dr. Rohan D’Souza, Associate Professor, Graduate School of Asian & African Area Studies, Kyoto University & Dr. Pallavi Bhatte, Senior Lecturer, Dept. of Cultural Coexistence, Kyoto University on the topic –“ *Re-imagining the North-East in India: Did Geography Sidestep History in Vision (2020) ?*” and Dr. Naosekpam Ajit Singh, Senior Scientist, DST-Centre for Policy Research, Panjab University on the topic – “*Japanese Technology with Potential for Socio-Economic Impact in North-East India*”. A meaningful discussion on various aspects of developing closer relationship between Japan and North-East India was held after the presentations of research papers. Finally, some recommendations were made. A core committee consisting of 7 members including Dr. Tingneichong Gangte, Principal, Presidency College, Motbung among others was formed in order to take up follow up actions of the recommendations of the Symposium. Cultural programmes participated by both Japanese and Manipuris were also performed at the end of the symposium.

The concept of holding the international symposium is elaborated briefly hereunder. The symposium focusses more on an informal exchange of ideas rather than formal academic papers. The objective of the symposium was to build close cultural, academic and regional contacts between the states of North East India and Japan. Participants from all disciplines were engaged in an exchange of ideas especially Historians, sociologists, anthropologists, literate, folklorists, exponents of music, dance martial arts, sports, artisans and craftsman.

The Battlefields of Imphal during the Second World War have always aroused the interest of both the Japanese and the Allies who fought both in Imphal and Kohima. But great interest in these battles commenced only about a decade ago, when a young resident of Delhi, Hemant Singh Katoch came to Imphal to research the subject, and became a pioneer of battlefield tours around Imphal. After his research was completed, his work was continued by the Manipuri Tourism Forum and the 2nd World War Imphal Campaign Foundation who organized a spectacular 70th Anniversary Commemoration of the Battle of Imphal. After Hemant's research was completed it was compiled into a book appropriately titled '**The Battlefields of Imphal**' and released here in 2016. The history of World War II was not coherently taught in schools in Japan (Akiko Macdonald-Chairman of Burma Campaign Society). But the late Masao Hirakulo, the founder of the Burma Campaign Society, initiated Anglo-Japan reconciliation activities. Just as it has been recognized that the tenacity and value of ordinary Japanese soldiers is far beyond what one can imagine, the twin battles of Imphal and Kohima (1944) were considered the turning point of the Burma Campaign. The Battle of Imphal was very much an Indian affair-Indian troops fought on both sides including the INA. The battle of Imphal is now seen as one of the greatest of the Second World War. The Battles of Imphal and Kohima are linked even though fought separately, and in 1944, Nagaland was a part of the composite province of Assam as were the other North East Indian states with the exception of Manipur and Tripura which were princely states.

In a similar manner in which Christianity and Western education catapulted the tribals of Manipur from an 'old world' to a 'new', so also the Second World War (1942-1945) gave the region the greatest burst of infrastructure activity in the shortest period ever seen. Air fields were built (6 in Imphal), roads were constructed or upgraded and the capacity of the sole railway supply route expanded. This infrastructure built or improved upon in the North East during the Second World War continues to hold the region in good stead to this day.

The first aerial bombing to be witnessed by the people of Manipur occurred in May 1942. The number of the soldiers swelled in Manipur and accommodation had to be found for them. All infrastructure works and economic activities created jobs and earning opportunities

for the people of Manipur. Japan and the Japanese war touched everyone, directly or indirectly. People of Manipur saw soldiers of different colors and builds, armored tanks, anti-aircraft battery, fighter aircraft for the first time, as also new foods especially packaged food dropped by air, drinks like coffee, condensed milk etc, different dresses, different languages different religions – an encounter of the first kind. The war from 1942-1945 brought for the first and last time people from around India and the world to Manipur in such large numbers.

This encounter can pave the way for a close co-operation in various fields and disciplines between the states of North East India and Japan. Both share commonalities such as the qualities of courage, hospitality, friendship, etiquette, similarities and sports, martial arts, music, dance, folklore, in diet (rice and fish being common staples) dress, hair coiffure, etc. People of both regions are also intensely religious and attach great importance to the Passage of Rites. Moreover Japanese history, a part of it from the Meiji Restoration onwards is taught in colleges and universities of north East India. This could pave the way for academic exchanges between historians and other academicians. The constant changes in a globalised world demand that we keep abreast with the latest developments in technology, and economic co-operation between North East India and Japan can receive a boost, not only in technology, but in other related fields to the benefit of both.

North-East India covers eight states, or Seven Sisters plus Sikkim. The region geographically consists of Brahmaputra river basin, hills and mountains, viewing for Himalayas to north, Myanmar (Burma) to east and Bengal to west and south.

In modern history, it is the place for repose of more than forty thousands of deceased souls at the battlefields of Imphal Operations during World War II.

Further tracing back to ancient time, primarily occupied by tribal societies of Mongoloid, it can reach the cultural root in Forest Belt of Shiny Leaves which has prevailed from eastern slope of Himalayas through Yunnan to Western Japan with common cultural elements like slash-and-burn cultivation, fermented foods and brewed rice wine with yeast. While, as peripheral region to Great Civilization of India, it has played the intermediary role to connect neighbouring civilizations of Tibet, South-East Asia and China with India.

In recent years, between two governments of India and Japan, several joint projects have been started, e.g. the promotion of the regional economic development, further search to collect the bones of late Japanese soldiers and the construction of war museum.

After the Symposium, mutual relationship & human network have been hopefully deepened to develop joint researches & field works. Dr. Salam Irene has suggested common subjects to be mutually tackled in future, viz. *Cooking, Organic Farming, and Education*, with *Nature Worship & Tribal Culture* under Japanese interest.

The Organizing Committee and Sub-committee members for the International Symposium have done tireless efforts to make the programme a grand success within a short period of time. The proceedings of the symposium will remain in the memories of the participants forever. The Organising Committee and Sub-committee members are listed below.

Organising Committee:

Convenor (North-east India):	Prof. Salam Irene, Retired Professor and Head, History Dept., Manipur University
Convenor (Japan):	Dr. Yoshihiro Kaburagi, Retired Lecturer of History, Osaka University of Commerce, Japan
Co-ordinator:	Dr. Tingneichong Gangte, Principal, Presidency College
Organising Secretary:	Nongthombam Premananda Singh, Assistant Professor, Presidency College, Motbung, Manipur, India
Programme Director:	Dr. Khulem Ujala Devi, Asst. Professor, Presidency College, Motbung, Manipur, India
Member:	Haobam Bidyarani Devi, Researcher, M.U.
Member:	Thangjam Chinky Devi, Researcher, M.U.
Member:	Susma Sharma Gurumayum, SDC, Kangpokpi, Researcher, M.U.

Sub-committees:

A. Decoration & Programme Sub-Committee

1. N. Kamalabati Devi, Assoc. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung, Manipur (Convenor)
2. Tankanath Sharma Khatiwara, Assoc. Professor, Presidency College, Motbung
3. Dr. H. Jibonkumar, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung, Manipur
4. Ronald K. Thangeo, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
5. Haopu Lhouvum, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
6. Lunthang Hangshing, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
7. Dr. Harikrishna Shiwakoti, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung, Manipur

B. Reception Sub-committee

1. Kh. Sunetra Devi Assoc. Prof., Presidency College, Motbung (Convenor)
2. N. Radhapyari Devi, Assoc. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
3. Dr. Th. Saroda Devi, Assoc. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
4. Ch. Memi Devi, Assoc. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
5. Dr. L. Shantani Devi, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
6. R. K. Tamphasana Devi, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
7. S. Ranibala Devi, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
8. W. Rita Devi, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
9. Kh. Saroja Devi, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
10. Dr. K Ibetombi Devi, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
11. Dr. S. Joylani Devi, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung

C. Lunch and Refreshment Sub-Committee

1. H. Amravati Devi, Assoc. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung (Convenor)
2. S. Bedyapati Devi, Assoc. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
3. H. Indira Devi, Assoc. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
4. W. Ibela Devi, Assoc. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
5. Ch. Memi Devi, Assoc. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
6. P. Rukamani Devi, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
7. Pushpa Devi Sharma, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung

D. Transport Sub- Committee

1. W. Haripada Singh, Assoc. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung (Convenor)
2. L. Keronchandra Singh, Assoc. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
3. Dr. N. Dorendra Singh, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
4. L. Rameshwar Singh, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
5. Paokhosei Haokip, Asst. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung

E. Programme Conductors:

1. Lianmawi, Assoc. Prof. Presidency College, Motbung
2. Susma Sharma Gurumayum, SDC, Kangpokpi