

MATERIAL REMAINS AS SOURCES OF THE HISTORY OF MANIPUR

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Abstract

The archaeological remains such as monuments, cave, inscriptions, coins rock-shelters etc are found scattered in different parts of the hill and valley of Manipur. This evidence has thrown some light on the history and culture of Manipur. The remains are protected by the Government of Manipur under "The Manipur Ancient & Historical Monuments and Archaeological sites & remains Act 1976". However excavation and exploration have not yet been adequately done in Manipur. The archaeological remains provide very valuable information as sources of the history of Manipur. The paper is an attempt not only to find new information but also to evaluate the existing facts. The paper is an honest and sincere attempt for the reconstruction of the sources of the history of Manipur with the help of materials remains.

Key Words: Archaeology, cave, coin, excavation, history, inscription, source, monument.

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Introduction

The history of ancient Manipur prior to the age of Ningthouja dynasty can be known chiefly from a few Manuscripts, folk tales and legends. Due to the shortage of historical source materials, the history of ancient Manipur prior to the establishment of Ningthouja dynasty could not be reconstruct systematically in the chronological manner. Prior to the establishment of Ningthouja dynasty historical document and other reliable records on the history of Manipur are meagre. Nothing definite is known for this period. A few Palaeolithic and Neolithic settlement and bone & stone tools have been found. These remains are helpful for the study of the early people and their culture. From the time of Ningthouja dynasty the state had epigraphic records, scattered literary documents and monuments. However, the record of the earlier periods of the Ningthouja dynasty is also meagre. Numbers of manuscripts were lost during the Burmese invasion and many of them were burnt down during the reign of Maharaja Garibniwaz, 18th century A.D. The history of Manipur is more cleared from the medieval period particularly from the time of Maharaja Garibniwaz, 18th century A.D. The sources may broadly be classified into archaeological and literary sources.

Discussion

The compilation of the history of Manipur is incomplete without the information from the archaeological sources. Such as Epigraphic records, Numismatics, Monuments and other ancient relics. Inscriptions refer not only to the religion of the state but also furnished us with some detail of the state administration, royal declaration, donation of land etc. The inscriptions are mostly engraved on stones, iron plates and copper plates in archaic Manipuri scripts and Bengali scripts. Inscriptions are found to be most reliable and

trustworthy. Therefore, a critical examination of this inscription has to be made with some relevant observation for the reconstruction of the past history. Epigraphic records were found in different places of Manipur. Inscriptions are issued as royal orders, decisions regarding social, religious and administrative matters to officials and people in general.

Numismatic, the study of coins, brought to light the chronology of different kings, territory of the empire, economic condition, and socio-religious lives of the people. The rulers of Manipur issued numbers of coins known as 'Shen' from the early period. The coins are made of bell-metal, silver and gold, in Archaic Manipuri scripts, Devanagari scripts and Bengali scripts in different shape and size. There are three types of coins issued by different kings. They were bell-metal coins called 'Shen', Silver coins as 'Lupa Tanga', and Gold coins as 'Sana Tanga'. These coins were issued by the respective kings of Manipur as commemoratives of their important happenings. Coins were issued in different periods. These coins are regarded as one of the most important sources of the history of Manipur.

Archaeological findings have revealed that Manipur was inhabited by pre-historic man. Pre-historic settlements were found in the hill and valley areas, mentioned may be made of Khangkhui caves, Ukhrul District, Tharon caves, Tamenglong District, Nongpok-Keothelmanbi, Senapati District and Sajik-Tampa, Chandel District, Manipur. Discovery of Palaeolithic tools at Khangkhui caves such as stone artifacts, bone tools and faunal remains highlight that the people of that time knew hunting, and tools making technology. Evidences from the findings of the Tharon caves and Nongpok-Keithelmanbi represented Haobinhian culture. Beside these, there are many Neolithic Celts, Microliths and Chalcolithic culture remains discovered from various parts of Manipur. Many Neolithic Celts and Chalcolithic cultural remains were also discovered. Megaliths are mostly found in the hill areas. Sculpture of various designs, coins, and epigraphic records are found in different places of Manipur. There are many burial sites that revealed important information of the burial customs and their social and economic life.

Manipur has several megalithic monuments in the hills and valley, such as megalithic monuments at Mao, Ukhrul, Tharon, Ningel, Yairipok etc. Megaliths are mostly found in the hill areas. Sculptures of various designs have been discovered in Manipur. These sculptures exhibit many regional characters. The sculptures represent various gods and goddess of Hindu and traditional deities. In Manipur, there are many secondary burial sites. These burial sites revealed important information of the burial customs and their social and economic life. The most important secondary urn burial sites are Sekta, 18 Kms. from Imphal, Khamaran, 12 Kms. from Imphal and Khangabok is about 27 Kms. from Imphal belonged to 17th and 18th century A.D.

There are many other historical monuments found scattered in different parts of the valley. These monuments are consisting of ruined palaces, forts, temples, gateways, samadhis, etc. Majority of these monuments were found in the ancient capital Kangla, Imphal and also in another capital Canchipur, 8 kms., to the south of Imphal. The monuments are found scattered throughout the valley of different periods. Many of them exist in its complete form. They are still preserved by the Department of archaeology, government of Manipur. Temples, tombs and gateways of the historical period are found scattered throughout the land. The temple of Shri Shri Govindaji, temple of Brindabachandra, temple of LeimapokpaKeirungba, temple of Thangal general, tomb of Maharaja Khaba, tomb of Maharaja Gambhir Singh, tomb of Luwang Ningthou etc., are some of the important temples built during the historical period. These architectural

remains provide valuable information about the development of art and architecture in Manipur. Study of this remained are useful not only for their artistic value but also they threw on the social, religious and economic conditions of the people of the period. A detail critical study in this topic has not been adequately undertaken. On the historical archaeology of Manipur, very little work has been done. Regarding the temple architecture of Manipur no scholar has carried out any research work applying modern scientific method.

There are many other historical monuments built in the neighbouring state of Manipur and Bangladesh under the patronage of the ruler of Manipur. They built palace, temple of Hindu deities and traditional deities. Some of them are still found at Sylhet district, Bangladesh. Most of the rulers of Manipur were marvelous builders. They erected magnificent monuments, some of which have survived till today. In the beginning people used bamboo, thatch, reeds, etc. and other indigenous products for the construction of house, temple, palace, fort, tomb etc. However, in later period, these perishable materials were replaced by durable materials like stone and brick etc. Monuments that were built in the early period were the victims of natural forces and some were demolished by foreign invaders either on account of their iconoclastic zeal or for securing building materials.

Historical events and some valuable information both secular and religious are also obtained from literary sources. Amongst the literary sources royal chronicle is treated as the most important sources. Chronicles recorded day to day events of the kings and kingdom including socio-economic and political condition. The chronicles are not free from defects. The political condition, religion, culture, facts and fictions were mixed together in this chronicle. Amongst the chronicles, Cheitharol Kumbaba, is regarded as the most important sources for the treatment of this work; but it needs very careful handling. The chronicle also give us a very valuable information about the political, religious, social, art and culture including the diplomatic relation with the neighbouring countries i.e., Myanmar, Assam, Tripura etc. This chronicles were compiled in Meitei dialect under the orders of the king. But the records are not detailed. Therefore, Information from the royal chronicle Cheitharol Kumbaba has to be confirmed by means of scientific methods.

Early manuscripts and other literary sources were also important for the study of the indigenous architecture, religion and the migration and settlement of the people. The literary sources that deal with the migration of people were Bamon khunthoklon, migration of Brahmins; poireiton Khunthokpa, migration of Poireiton; Mayang Tekhaolon etc. may be mentioned. Beside this, many other archival sources may be treated as important historical records of Manipur of the 18th and 19th centuries. There are some other unpublished manuscripts which are also equally important and found useful materials for the reconstruction of the history of Manipur.

Beside the indigenous sources, literary materials of the neighbouring state were also very helpful for the construction of the history of Manipur culture. The chronicles of Assam give a very valuable information. This account also furnished us with valuable information on the diplomatic relation with Assam and Manipur. Ahom Buranji, Tungkhungia Buranji, which has been translated into English, edited and published. This source supplies information on different aspect of contemporary history of Manipur and diplomatic relation with neighbouring states.

A number of British writers had also made valuable contribution in the history of Manipur. The most pioneering works in this respect were those of T.C. Hodson's, 'The Meithei's', Dr. Brown's, 'Statistical Account of Manipur', captain R.B. Pemberton's 'Report on the eastern frontier of British India' and Sir James Johnstone's, 'My

experiences in Manipur and Naga Hill'. These works are also considered a store house of information relating to social, religious life, art & architecture and political conditions of the people of Manipur. Besides, there are many other materials as valuable sources such as periodical journals, bulletins, contributed by many scholars to the history of Manipur. Important information cited by organising committee and eldest family members of the clan may be treated as valuable information in respect of religion, economic condition of the people, various festivals and rituals and its contribution in the society.

Conclusion

Manipur is well known for its historical sites, monuments, caves, inscriptions, coins, rock shelters etc. These remains are considered as the most important sources of the history of Manipur. This evidence has thrown some light on the history and culture of Manipur since pre-historic periods. Epigraphic records, early manuscripts and other literary sources are also provided very valuable information about the history of Manipur. The findings of the investigation may be benefited to elsewhere discipline especially for development trend of engineering tools and technique, conservation, protection, tourism development and architectural planning which are again closely link with the social milieu. Perhaps, it may also fulfill the long gap between the researchers and planners in the state of Manipur. Besides, the potentials of the findings will be of immense value in providing base line information to the future research workers who are working in this interesting field of historical perspective of Archaeology.

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