

YOUNG RESEARCH SCHOLARS SEMINAR SERIES
Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research
Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi – 110 025

“MANIPUR AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR”

By
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Chair
Prof David R. Syiemlieh
Renowned historian,
Member, Union Public Service Commission &
Former Vice Chancellor, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh

Venue:
Seminar Hall
Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research

3 September 2013

Rapporteur’s Report

The talk held at the seminar hall of the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, on 3 September, was attended by large numbers of students and scholars including Prof David R. Syiemlieh. It began with a brief address by Prof Sanjoy Hazarika, the director of the centre, who welcomed Hemant Katoch, Prof David R. Syiemlieh, and other guests.

In his introductory remarks Prof Hazarika described the Young Research Scholars Seminar Series as one of the centre’s flagship programmes. Under this initiative several rounds of lectures and others have been organised. The series intends to provide an opportunity to young researchers to share innovative ideas and research with the Jamia community and others. Prof Hazarika also introduced both Hemant Katoch and Prof David R. Syiemlieh. The audience, which included students from JNU, DU and professionals jam-packed the centre’s seminar room.

In his introductory remarks, Prof David R. Syiemlieh asserted that very little attention has been paid to the study of Second World War fought in North East India. He asked why historians and other scholars ignored such important subjects although there are extensive research materials is available. He regretted that the story of this war did not figure in India’s target history.

That the flag of free India was first hosted on Manipur’s soil, at the town of Moirang by the Indian National Army. Manipur as a key battleground during the Second World War, a quiet corner of the Raj until then, it suddenly found itself on the frontier between the Japanese in Burma (now Myanmar) and the British in India. It turned into a massive battlefield in 1944 when the Japanese, together with Indian National Army (INA) units, launched Operation U Go, with its main objective of capturing Imphal. The

period from March to July of that year saw fierce fighting take place across Manipur – in the plains and hills – in what is called the Battle of Imphal. In April 2013, the battles of Imphal/Kohima were clubbed as “Britain’s Greatest Battle” by the National Army Museum in the United Kingdom. About 200,000 British Allied, Indian and Japanese soldiers took part in these epic and brutal battles.

The talk revisited Manipur’s experience of the war from 1942-45, including the key Battle of Imphal. It also explore how the war years affected Manipur and at how this phase of its history connected Manipur to the rest of India and the world. Finally, the speaker described what Manipur’s Second World War past and heritage could means for its future, especially in terms of war tourism, which he and his team had launched in the state. The hills in the other sites of the conflict remained, Mr. Katoch said, “in near-pristine conditions” which was a major plus point for the future development of niche international tourism. This would also attract researchers, Indian and international.

An energetic interaction session followed with questions ranging from rationale of the war to the interests of Manipuris in the conflict. During the discussions the speaker noted that awareness has increased among the people of Manipur about the importance of the war. And yet, the impact has so far remained almost entirely unexplored. In closing remarks, Prof David Syiemlieh described the talk as a “fascinating story” and an “engaging presentation”.

Mr. Hemant Katoch thanked the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research of Jamia Millia Islamia for offering him the position of Visiting Fellow and for inviting him to discuss “Manipur and the Second World War.”