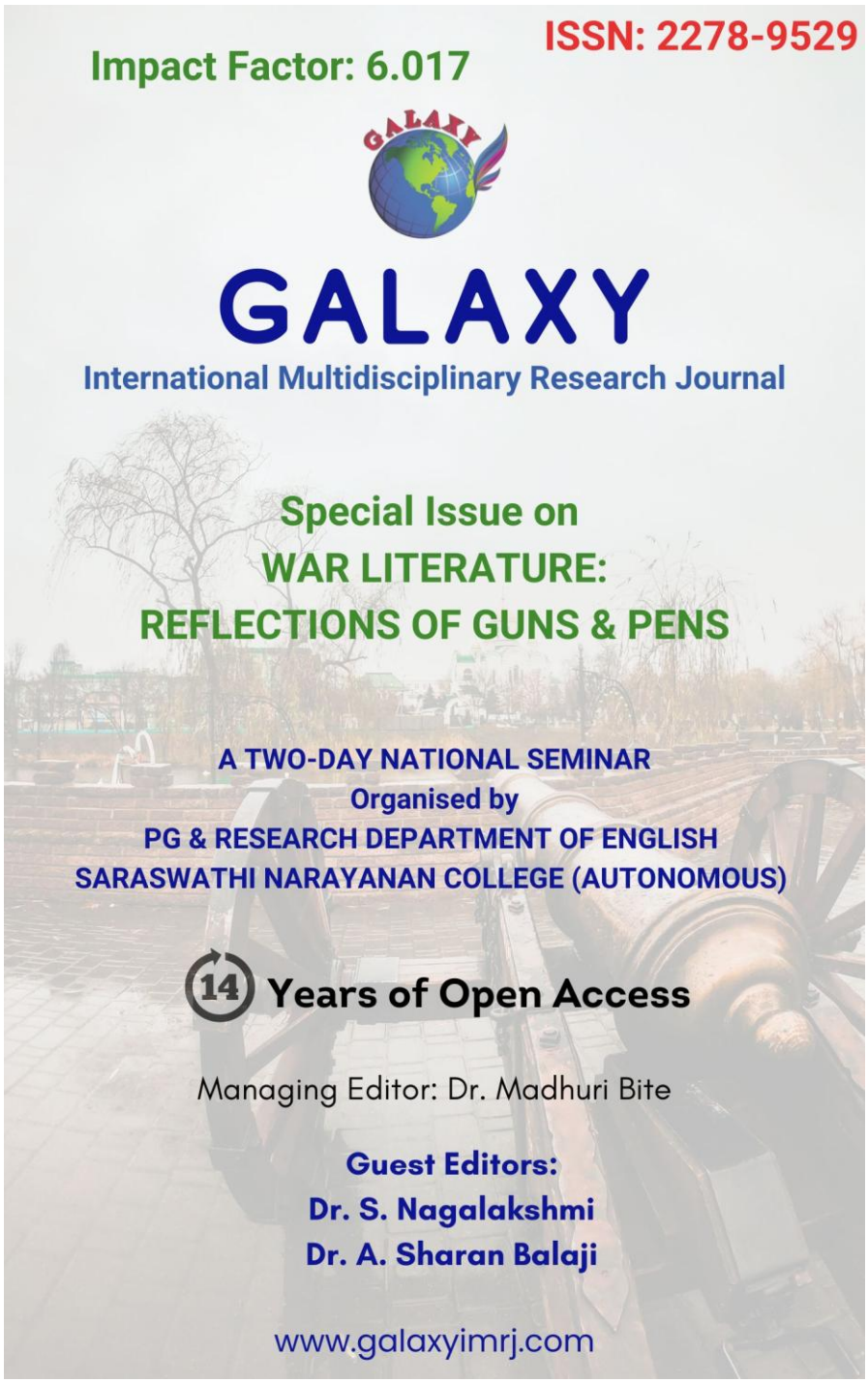


About Us: http://www.galaxyimrj.com/about-us/
Archive: http://www.galaxyimrj.com/archive/
Contact Us: http://www.galaxyimrj.com/contact-us/
Editorial Board: http://www.galaxyimrj.com/editorial-board/
Submission: http://www.galaxyimrj.com/submission/
FAQ: http://www.galaxyimrj.com/faq/

A Tale of a Rebellion Hero: Tirot Sing

D. Muneeswaran
Assistant Professor of English,
PG & Research Department of English,
Saraswathi Narayanan College (Autonomous), Madurai.

Abstract:

The Khasis represent an ancient community whose members inhabit primarily in the Indian state of Meghalaya located within northeast India. The tribe's ancient history stretches across many years even though they maintained minimal records during that time. They have shared parts of their history through their language mix and oral traditions. The connection of their language to Southeast Asian languages leads scholars to suggest an origin in that part of the world during ancient times. Prior to historical times the Khasis lived as independent communities under their leaders while engaging in agricultural activities. Interfamily connections in this community follow maternal lines rather than paternal ones. The tribe encountered various other groups during their history while they fought battles to uphold their territory and customs. A milestone in their history occurred when Khasi chief Tirot Sing organized resistance against British colonization. The Khasi failed to defeat the British but their courageous defence with Tirot Sing emerged as a powerful emblem of their determination to preserve their customs. Through the Tirot Sing story we learn about the Khasi people's essential need to remain true to themselves in the face of attempts to transform them by powerful individuals. Using the historical data's, this paper tries to bring out ancestral understandings of Khasi heritage under Tirot Sing's influence and the methods utilized to remember him throughout history. In focus, how Tirot Sing's brave, leadership, various qualities of his statesmanship and how he became a legend in the lifetime is the main focus of this paper.

Keywords: Khasi identity, British Colonialism, Northeast India, Tirot Sing, leadership skills.

INTRODUCTION

"Better the death of a free commoner than the life of a chief who is a slave"

-Tirot Sing

U Tirot Sing stays permanently in Khasi history since he showed extraordinary opposition to British colonial advances all over Northeast India. When U Tirot Sing was still young, following his birth in 1802 in Nongkhlaw, which currently falls under Meghalaya state, he was appointed Syiem (chief). He was a young handsome man with a muscular physic. Though he had a problem with his wrist yet he battled as a great warrior. He proved to be a multi-talented personality who learnt archery, swimming, hunting and used his various skills. His energetic age and talents made him keenly to involve in statesmanship. He was also friendly with neighbouring people and states and was known multiple languages. He also gathered and mingled with all age of people especially he focused more on with dauntless fighters and top-ranking commanders. In crux, his brave, intellectual, skills, collective force outstands his character as a distinct personality.

Tirot Sing, lived in the Khasi Hills, where he was given as one of the youngest administrators in the state of Nongkhlaw. It was a place where people lived across a difficult mountain scape dotted with deep forests, in fact the Khasi Hills served as both physical area and cultural center. Tirot Sing could not accept when opponents and intruders occupied his state. In order to make his state free, he brought many changes in his administration and as a result emerged a strong rebellion hero Tirot Sing.

1. British Expansion

Early in the 19th century, India was under constant British colonial expansion over its land. Observing the Khasi Hills, the British East India Company carried out an economic development into northeastern India, because this area included several tribal groupings and separate chiefdoms. British imperial aspirations found a particular difficulty here. Strongly committed to preserving their freedom and anchored in their old cultural customs, the Khasi people rejected any outside interference. U Tirot Sing understood that Khasi independence ran possible dangers and that British influence was growing. Tensions between British ambitions to build a road across Khasi Hills linking their territories of Assam and Sylhet erupted.

Originally perceived as providing fresh opportunities for the local population, the road finally revealed its actual role as a British tool for colonizing and extracting from Khasi land. The growing British presence along with their clear goals helped U Tirot Sing realize the perilous nature of this development when Khasi sovereignty was clearly under threat. U Tirot Sing started his struggle against the British Empire knowing of British plans to subjugate his people. To this context, words of Mr. Alexander Mackenzie, the junior secretary of the then Government of Bengal stated as, “Up that time (1825), these mountaineers had been known principally through their encroachments and raids on the plains of Assam, and their collusions with the British troops on the side of Sylhet”. (19) It is here U Tirot Sing got a great spirit and got convicted to carry a clear goal to defend the freedom of his people.

2. U Tirot Sing’s Leadership

After doing an in-depth analysis of what Tirot perceived to be a complete and total survival catastrophe, he took the choice to fight against the British. The Khasi warriors understood their strong opposition against British military readiness. He realized that the

defensive characteristics of the Khasi Hills terrain along with its strategic position added advantages to their cause. British defensive power used natural factors such as dense forests and challenging terrain surrounding complex river routes and mountain pathways to shield the Khasi people.

From start to finish of his life U Tirot Sing demonstrated exceptional qualities as a leader. Under his outstanding leadership he developed superior abilities to deliver tactical insights and lead public discussions and develop strategic plans. Through strategic thinking abilities of his mind, he joined with critical thinking capacity and displayed exceptional talent. Watching his people unite against domestic threats revealed to him why multinational forces protect a shared enemy. Khan gathered Khasi chiefs and elders to create his leadership of the resistance movement and gained guidance on his plans during this traditional meeting.

At this assembly Sharpisma delivered his speech regarding British governmental actions which restricted Khasi self-rule to express his concerns before the Khasi chiefs and elders gathered there. The speaker unified Khasi people against British land encroachments by employing strategies aimed at Khasi cultural heritage with their ancestral land and held certain responsibilities. The speech of Sharpisma moved every warrior and chief deeply, as this led the warriors and chiefs to sign up for the resistance movement to support their cause. The Khasi traditions describe U Tirot Sing making an oath to protect their cultural heritage from the beginning until the end of his life. Before his pledge the speaker reveals that they are the descendants of the hills, which established this proclamation as essential. The diverse beliefs of Khasi people came together through their united support for their mutual cause because they responded so powerfully to his message. Through his actions U Tirot Sing created the critical point where local population protests transformed into a mass movement against British control.

3. Guerrilla Warfare in the Khasi Hills

U Tirot Sing led his Khasi forces during the 1829 starting of the Anglo-Khasi War through active battles against the English forces. Because British forces offered them a superior military advantage so, U Tirot Sing and his followers gained expertise in fighting as guerrilla fighters. U Tirot Sing's team exploited their detailed understanding of their region for military benefits during that time. The Khasi warriors stepped back from facing British soldiers directly through an official battle by developing ambush tactics and performing swift raids. These tactics served as two methods that their forces enacted. Hidden locations were selected by these criminals as their base for attack operations. The difficult forest landscapes did not hamper Khasi warriors from using quick and efficient hit-and-run assault strategies followed by rapid retreats into protected territories. The particular spots worked well for Khasi warriors to establish their tactical positions.

The Khasi warriors executed regular offensive operations against British military forces that disrupted British supply chains and assaulted isolated fortifications and obstructed colonial military operations to stop British capture of the territory. The British military would not be able to occupy the area because of these preventive measures. Although they lacked sophisticated weaponry Khasi warriors demonstrated outstanding abilities in tracking. Their natural abilities that gave them advantage during hunting activities while providing them intricate knowledge about their challenging environment. Khasi warriors carried offensive weapons such as swords together with ancient weapons while they also used dangerous arrow-based bows and assorted deadly armaments. Their extraordinary power came from equal parts of deep internal love for their homeland and an uncivilized mindset to protect it. These particular motivations pushed the warriors to become extraordinary.

A Khasi warrior is remembered to have stated that the hills held onto the British possession firearms yet remained on their side. The Khasi warriors showcased their absolute defiance to British colonial power by using their native land as an effective fighting instrument against them. The use of this tactic enabled them to prove their relentless dedication to their movement. This could be rightly justified as, in the book titled, "British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance" by K.M.Munshi, President Bharat Vidya Bhavan as,

> Tirot Sing and his associates, with a military force estimated to be 10,000 strong, evaded the British, but occasionally swooped down upon the plants, causing alarm all over Assam. Once the panic was so great, even in Gauhati, the headquarters of the British, that large numbers of people including high official kept boats ready to evacuate at a moment's notice. (453)

4. The Black period of the Khasi's

The people in Khasi resistance suffered harsh consequences when the British captured them which led to imprisonment and death as martyrs. The people suffered arrest, followed by imprisonment before being killed as martyrs because of their resistance efforts. The combined military pressure exerted by the British forces resulted in the defeat of the Khasi warriors though they had displayed exceptional bravery with strategic intelligence during the conflict. The conflict played out this way from beginning to end. Their failure was caused by the British superior military strength.

U Tirot Sing became a British captive during the fourth year of intense conflict when 1833 brought the struggle to its end. British soldiers captured him in 1833 thus marking the end of the Khasi resistance organization. Khasi resistance kept burning across the entire region after British authorities who captured their leader. The Khasi nation suffered a black period when British soldiers arrested U Tirot Sing. He demonstrated brave leadership to

create inspirational examples that future Khasi would follow. The British authorities decided to deport him to Dhaka which later became known as Bangladesh and isolated him from his homeland and his ethnic population. He was detained in the prison as a result of this situation.

U Tirot Sing spent his last years in jail under arrest and thus experienced both separation from society and forceful survival through difficult jail conditions. Being prisoned did not stop his complete dedication because he pushed through his physical constraints successfully. The stance he took about his beliefs remained firm as he devoted himself totally to his people. U Tirot Sing dedicated all his efforts to independence until he exhibited such courageous action that resulted in his death on July 17, 1835. Through his sacrifices he gained the title of martyr. The Khasi people paid tribute to U Tirot Sing by mourning his death because of his influential life. U Tirot Sing's life produced a model of defiance that passed knowledge to subsequent generations so the Khasi community engaged in intense mourning after his passing.

5. A Legacy of Courage

U Tirot Sing dedicated his life through act of self-sacrifice which achieved a distinct purpose. U Tirot Sing gained the deepest respect from the Khasi people due to his incredible bravery along with his patriotic behavior. Through his patriotic acts and bravery U Tirot Sing earned the title of their national hero as he became the symbol of opposition against oppression. His life story passed through successive generations as part of the social memory which the Khasi people shared. Traditional Khasi practices including narrative transmissions and public expressions and traditional musical performances achieved this goal. People remembered him for his commitment to defend the Khasi identity and his work for faith defense and land protection. The people recall him even today.

Khasi's historical records took shape while their cultural heritage became stronger despite his actions being suppressed by the British administration. He was an invaluable contributor. People throughout many generations recognized U Tirot Sing's invaluable role in historical development that surpassed all previous historical records. His fighting spirit became the source which enabled his followers to develop into the resisting Khasi community that one can see today. The initiative has existed to teach society to protect cultural heritage and maintain their rights. Every year Meghalaya honors the anniversary death of U Tirot Sing with a state-wide holiday dedicated to remember his achievements. This holiday exists to display the current time significance of his life alongside his achievements. The experience provides everyone of us with a comprehensive view about how resistance facing tremendous challenges shapes both personal character and future prospects of individuals. In Khasi tradition the fighting spirit of actual warriors lives forever as it remains within those who decide to continue following it. According to Khasi tradition the authentic warrior spirit remains present indefinitely. The enduring motivation that U Tirot Sing provides to the Khasi community today exemplifies why this Khasi proverb represents the lasting influence U Tirot Sing has had on his people.

6. **U Tirot Sing's Influence**

The historical resistance conducted by U Tirot Sing had a substantial impact on both Khasi people and all Indian communities forming after the British colonial early years. These impacts remained present after his rebellion. His resistance to an empire with extensive authority made later independence movements across Northeast India and India as a whole embark on colonial resistance campaigns. His oppositions actually inspired these movements to occur. U Tirot Sing faced challenges when determining how permanently he shaped the anti-colonial political movement. The leadership, courage and perseverance along with

freedom determination of U Tirot Sing continues to live as songs and theatrical performances and oral stories transmitted generation to generation.

Conclusion

Through U Tirot Sing's story we challenge traditional understandings about Indian resistance against British rule as Indians utilized several distinct methods to fight British authority. His leadership proved the Khasi people's strong opposition to British colonization during their fight. Although British forces suppressed his insurrection, he forever engraved his legacy into Khasi historical records as a defender of Khasi identity. After numerous years the historical legacy of U Tirot Sing has developed into an enduring symbol which demonstrates how we should defend our independence and our territorial possessions together with our cultural heritage.

Different forms of resistance fight against political control through major civil movements alongside small militant efforts reinforced overall colonial disobedience. Readers can witness numerous combat techniques through the story of U Tirot Sing. The true nature of Indian independence becomes visible when we acknowledge U Tirot Sing as a martyr who sacrificed himself. Historical records along with Khasi mythology preserve the revolt of U Tirot Sing and his counter revolutionary deeds. The ability for population defence against foreign intruders emerges as important historical information valuable to succeeding epochs. Through his actions U Tirot Sing demonstrated how protecting freedom is essential because he acted quickly and fearlessly in displaying unwavering loyalty to justice during all situations.

Works Cited:

British East India Company Records (1830–1833). *Colonial Administration Documents*, National Archives of India.

Bhattacharjee, Debasis. *Colonial Encounters in Northeast India*. Oxford University Press, 2008.

Goswami, Pradeep. "The Anglo-Khasi War and Indigenous Resistance: Reassessing U Tirot Sing's Legacy". *Journal of South Asian History*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2003, pp. 245–268.

Meghalaya Historical Society. *Khasi Oral Traditions and the Memory of Resistance*. Northeast Publishing House, 1998.

Saikia, J. N. *Northeast India: A Journey Through History*. Mittal Publications, 1996.

Tariang, Jerliee. *Tirot Sing: Greatest Freedom Fighter of North-Eastern Region*. 1990.