4 MUSICAL AND CHOREOGRAPHIC TRANSCRIPTION

Whilst film and sound recording equipment are essential for the study of music and dance, apparatus is not always immediately available, and the writing of musical transcriptions, even if inaccurate is an essential means of identifying items as well as a means of becoming familiar with them. Choreographic notation, however, is much more difficult, and must be left to the specialist. Nevertheless, in order to identify and differentiate dances, it is necessary to attempt graphic (diagramatic or impressionistic) and prose description, which at worst is a useful aide memoire to the researcher.

The four types of activity listed above consist mainly of collection, transcription and mechanical copying. A further valuable form of activity, involving search and selection without description is:

5 EXCERPTING OF MATERIAL OF CULTURAL INTEREST FROM DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

Whilst the use of archives for the writing of constitutional, political and economic history must be left to the specially equipped historian, the files of old newspapers, reports of enquiries and wills carry a very great deal of material illuminating different aspects of the social structure and culture of these island societies — material conditions of living are richly illustrated, and the social hierarchy seen from above as well as the mainstream of ideological difference in the middle strata. Similarly the “improving” activities, aims, attitudes and methods of the governments, religious and educational organisations and voluntary philanthropic bodies, in their efforts to disseminate Western cultural norms, or else to use these norms as a means of regulating social systems far different from those from which they were derived, are fully displayed. In contrast documentation of folk institutions, of the sub-culture of the Creoles or Indians, Peons or Chinese, of their ways of thinking and learning about the social structure, etc. are much scarcer, and are frequently dismissed as pagan, or vulgar, and in any case unworthy of consideration. Nevertheless, in the detailed reporting of evidence given at Criminal Sessions, or before commissions of enquiry, and occasionally in the writings of less prejudiced, less “culture-bound” observers, and the tales of transient travellers, patterns begin to emerge, and these, in view of their source, offer an excellent opportunity for checking the mass of information which relates to the past 120 years and has been passed down, often in a semi-legendary form to people living today.

6 HISTORIES

We come now to enquiry, selection and descriptive writing which is based on observation and second hand reports. By histories is meant descriptive accounts of a series of events happening in a particular place, over a certain period of past time. In our case, however, they will be written mainly from oral accounts given by those who have participated in them, and to a lesser extent from observation and from existing records. Whilst it may be possible to cross-check accounts from various people, the knowledge of the field worker of the general environment of the events is a critical factor assisting him only if he can control the attitudes or prejudices which he as a member of the society in question is bound to have.