

# Land Management System among the Scheduled Caste Lois Villages in Manipur: A study of Kwatha Village, Chandel District.

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*Abstract - Land is one of the most important natural resources for living beings. It has been providing tangible and intangible benefits for human beings since time immemorial. Land management is the process of managing land for a variety of purposes such as organic, agriculture, reforestation, eco forest projects, development, etc. It is controlled either by the State or non-state institutions. In Manipur, the larger areas of land, particularly forests, are controlled by the traditional institutions. The areas where this system is in vogue are all the hills districts of Chandel, Churachandpur, Senapati, Tamenglong and Ukhrul. Land management is also practised among all the foothills people of the eight Scheduled Caste (SC) Lois villages. The seven SC Lois villages are located in the foothills of Manipur excluding Kwatha hills villages. The paper studies the functioning of Phamdou with special reference to community forest management.*

*Keywords - Scheduled Caste, Loi, Kwatha, Phamneiba, Lannai Lam, Mangpham and Khungi Lam.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Natural resources of land provide tangible and intangible benefits to human beings. A large part of the land in Manipur is controlled either by the state or the traditional institutions. The traditional institutions have been existing for generation after generation even after the encounter between the self-governing and the non-state governing people. They were no longer a majority population of the world at the end of 18th century. The Zomia are one of the largest remaining non-state governing people with a population in between eighty to one hundred millions (Scott, 2009: 1-22). In India, unlike the others states, the traditional institutions controlled and managed the larger natural resources, particularly forests, in all the seven north-eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, excluding Sikkim. It

constitutes a geographical area of 7.9 per cent of the country (Poffenberger et al, 2007, cited in Khwairakpam, et al., 2013: 5). It was broadly divided into three tier land ownership system, viz, Community land, Individual land and Clan land (Shimray, 2006; 10-11).

In Arunachal Pradesh, out of the 82% of the forested area, 62% is controlled by the community.

In Assam, out of the 30% of the total forested area, 68% is controlled by the community.

In Manipur, out of the 78% of the total forested area, 68% is controlled by the community.

In Meghalaya, out of the 70% of the total forested area, 90% is controlled by the community.

In Mizoram, out of the 87% of the total forested area, 33% is controlled by the community.

In Nagaland out of the 85% of the total forested area, 91% is controlled by the community.

In Tripura out of the 55% of the total forested area, 41% is controlled by the community (Poffenberger, et al, 2007:3-13 cited in Khwairakpam, 2013:72).

In Nagaland, the Land ownership of the Nagas was classified into: Community and individual land. The Community land is again subdivided into: Community village land, Clan land and lineage land. Individual land is subdivided into: Ang/village chief owned land and ordinary citizens/individual land. Among the major tribes of Angami Chakro (lower) village, 75 per cent of the total geographical area is community land and it is controlled and managed by the traditional institution ( Longkumar & Jamir, 2012; 32-27).

## II. DESCRIPTION OF MANIPUR

Manipur is one of the north-eastern states of India. It was an independent Asiatic kingdom for about two thousand years. It was ruled by 76 kings from 33 AD to 1954 AD as recorded by the royal chronicle called Cheitharol Kumbaba ( Khelchandra, 2009; 64-67). The people of Manipur were classified into different groups like the Meiteis, the Nagas, the Kukis, the SC, the Meitei Pangal and the Migrants.

### *Land management in Manipur:*

The total geographical area of Manipur is broadly divided into two parts - hills and the valley. It covers an area of 22,327 sq. Kilometres. The hill covers about 90 per cent of the entire land. The hills are predominantly inhabited by the people belonging to Scheduled Tribes and the valley by the Meiteis. The SCs are scattered in the foothills of Manipur, excluding Kwatha village. The status of ownership of the forests is not clearly defined in Manipur, except for the reserved forest. It constitutes only 9 per cent of the total forest area. The hills people claim ownership of the land, other than reserved forest ( Poffenberger, 2007: 39). The land as a whole in their areas is divided into three categories, the village homestead, the shifting cultivation area and the village community forest. The traditional institution of Khuo controls the community forest in Koirang village. The community reserved forest is well protected and valuable trees are grown there. This forest product can be sold by the Khuo. The sale proceeds are generally utilised for common activities and festivals of the village. The Maram tribes divided the land into two types - community land and individual land. The community land is controlled by the traditional institution and is considered as the common property and the individual land is a private property (Devi, 2006; 1-24). In the SC inhabited Lois villages, the traditional institutions of Phamdou and Phamneiba controlled and managed the community resources like forest, agricultural land, rivers, streams, ponds, etc. In Andro village, the larger community forest of above 46,000 acres was controlled by Lambuba of inter and intra village. It was demarcated into seven parts: Nongmaiching reserved forest, Nongmaiching unreserved forest, Langlou Ching, Uyampak Samprou, Khondung Ching, Turenthen and Maringthen (Khwairakpam, 2013). In Koutruk village the traditional institution of Lai Haraoba Committee managed the community forest of about 55 Pari (136 acres) and agricultural land of 15 acres (Khwairakpam, 2013; 72-74). It was represented by 16 members of the 14 Sageis (lineage). In Sekmai village, the traditional institution, indigenous parliament (SSCDC) controlled the community forest and rivers (Khwairakpam, 2012; 1-9).

### *Research setting:*

The empirical study was carried out in Kwatha village. It is located at the extreme corner of the eastern parts of Manipur bordering Myanmar. It is 105 km from the capital city of Imphal. It falls within the Tengnoupal Sub-division of Chandal district.

### *Research issue:*

The traditional institution Phamdou has been in existence even after significance changes in the aftermath of the merger of Manipur to the Union of India. Once of the significant changes has been the implementation of the three tier governance institutions. It plays an important role in village administration and management of community land.

### *Objectives:*

To study the profile of the village and functioning of Phamdou, with special reference to community land management.

## III. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methods was adopted for the study from the etic perspective. In-depth interview, oral history and telephone interview were the multiple tools of data collection. The researcher collected the data during the field work in between September and October, 2011 and telephone interview between 4th to 7th March, 2013.

### *Kotha village:*

The people of Kwatha believed that they are the descendants of the powerful people of Manipur. They came and settled during the time of King Kiyamba (1467-1508). There are two theories of their origins, i.e., one theory believed that they came as planters of betel nut and another believed that they came to protect the eastern boundary of Manipur. The Kshetrimayum Sagei is originated from Singjamei Kshetri Leikai of Imphal Municipal area. The Laishram Sagei originated from Khuman Lampak, Imphal East District. The Ningthouja originated from Konung (Kang) heart of Imphal city. The Sorokhaibam Sagei originated from Kakwa, Imphal East District. The Takhellambam Sagei owes its origin to Mantripukhri, Imphal west district. The Angom Sagei originated from Wangkhei, Imphal east district. The village was named as Kwatha after plantating Kwa (betel-nut) to mark a boundary line between the then Meitei king Kyangba and the Pong king Choupha Khikhomba (Devi, 1995; 1-6). As the village is located at a considerable distance from the capital city of Kangla, there was a gap of communication. Later on, the King of Manipur, Garib Niwas (1709-1748), declared them as outcastes and Lois as they did not accept Hinduism during the beginning of 18th century.

Subsequently, after the merger of Manipur to the Indian Union, they also declared as SC under Article 341 (I) of the Indian Constitution. It is the only SC Loi village located in the hilly areas in Manipur. Presently, there is a government junior high school, PHSC Sub-centre, water supply and community hall. There are two passenger services, Tata Sumo and DI Tata which ply from Kwatha to Moreh. It is inhabited by 70 households of the six Sageis (lineage): Angom, Kshetrimayum, Laishram, Ningthouja, Ningthoujam and Takhellambam.

#### *Land management of Kwatha village:*

Kwatha village has had a symbolic relation with the forests since their settlement. They have been forest dwellers for centuries and dependent for their livelihood on forests. The Phamneiba (traditional institution) has been playing a vital role in management of community land since the very beginning. It is represented by 12 elected members: Khullakpa, Luplakpa, Pakhanglakpa, Ningollakpa, Chingsanglakpa, Yupalba, Ngarunghanba, Sarunghanba, Sarunghanba, Loumidang, Khangsenlakpa, and Phandong Ningthous. The land as a whole of the Kwatha village was broadly divided into three categories: 1) Lanai Lam (individual owned land), 2) Mangpham (community crematorium) and 3) Khungi Lam (community land).

#### *Lanai Lam:*

It is broadly divided into two types - the homestead /settlement land and cultivable Jhumland. The homestead/settlement land permanently belongs to the owners. It has been owned by the respective household's generations after generation, i.e., grandfather to father and father to son. Sometimes, it also inherited by a daughter if she marries either a Kwatha villager or one of the Meitei. They have the right to rent and sell the land to the villagers and outsiders who belongs to Meitei, with the approval of Phamdou. Every household generally occupies an area of pari 10 dagi pari 15 chaoba lam (24.8 acres to 39.68 acres) of forest for jhum cultivation. Every year, they clear a forest area in between pari ama (2.48 acres) to pari ama marak (3.72 acres) for jhum cultivation. This activity is shifted from place to place in between 6 to 10 years. Newly migrated Meitei families also allotted land from any of the private cultivable forest lands by the Phamdou.

#### *Mangpham:*

There are three Mangpham of Kwatha villages: 1) Manglen, 2) Lainingba Mang and 3) Lainingdaba Mang.

Manglen: It is the oldest community crematorium of the village. It covers an area of around pari ani (4.96 acres). It is located just 250 metres away from the village. It

was controlled by the Phamneiba and Piba of seven Sageis. Presently it is occupied by security forces.

Lainingba Mang: It is the crematorium exclusively for Christians. It was reserved for around 50 per cent of the Christian families. It covers an area of around pari ahum (7.44 acres). It is located at the southern parts of the village. It was controlled by the Phamneiba, village authority, church leaders and Sagei Piba.

Lainingdaba Mang: It is the new crematorium exclusively for traditional religion Sanamahi. It was shifted from Manglen as it was occupied by security forces. It is exclusively reserved for followers of the traditional religion Sanamahi faith of around 50 per cent households. It covers a large area of pari tara (24.8 acres). It is also controlled by Phamneiba, village authority and Sagei Piba.

#### *Khungi Lam:*

It is a community land of Kwatha village. It covers an area of about 95 per cent of the entire village land. It is divided into three types: unreserved forest, newly reserved forest and permanent reserved forests. In the unreserved forest, villagers are allowed to collect forest products of non-timber, fruits, nuts, herbs, leaves vegetables. They can also collect the timber by paying tax to the Phamneiba but collection of bamboo shoot is allowed in between August to September every year. The newly reserved forest is known as Uyokon. It covers around Pari 400 (992 acres). It has been protected by the community for the last three decades. The purpose of protecting is to generate income during the community festival Lai Haraoba and overcome drastic financial shortage. The permanent reserved forest is sub-divided into three areas: Khabam Ching, Patyai and Ngaprumlok Ching. The Khabam Ching covers around Pari 150 (372 acres), the Patyai Ching covers around Pari 500 (1240 acres) and the Ngaprumlok Ching covers around Pari 80 (198.4 acres). It has been protected ever since people started inhabiting the village.

## V. CONCLUSION

In Manipur, the larger natural resources particularly forest are generally controlled by the traditional institutions of the ST of Nagas and Kukis and the SC Lois. It is broadly divided into three types: community land, clan land and the private land. The Kotha village have a symbolic relation with the natural resources particularly forest for centuries. It has been the source of livelihood for the inhabitants. The Phamneiba has been playing a vital role in management and protection of community natural resources. The land as a whole was divided into three categories: The Lanai Lam, The Mangpham and the Khungi Lam. The Lanai Lam is

owned by the individual, but he does not have the right to sell land without the approval of the Phamneiba. The Mangpham of Manglen is occupied by security forces, Lainingba Lam and Lainingdaba Lam are controlled by the Phamneiba, village authority and Sagei Pibas. The Khungi Lam covers about 95 per cent of the village land. It is controlled by the Phamneiba. In the unreserved forest, people are permitted to collect the forest products, but they have to pay taxes for timber wood. The newly reserved forest has been protected to generate income for the village. The permanent reserved forests of Khabam Ching, Patyai Ching and the Ngaprumlok Ching have been accorded a protected status from the very beginning.

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