ROLE OF TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN PROTECTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES AMONG THE SCHEDULED CASTE LOI VILLAGES IN MANIPUR: A STUDY OF ANDRO VILLAGE

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ABSTRACT

Forests, rivers and lands are of great importance to mankind since these provide both tangible and intangible benefits. These are controlled either by the state or traditional institutions. In Manipur, traditional institutions of the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste control and manage the larger natural resources in all the Hills and the foothills, even after the implementation of the three tier institutions system in India.

Study Area: Andro Chakpa Loi village is located in the eastern part of Manipur. It is 27 kms away from the capital city of Imphl.

Purpose of Selection: Andro is one of the few Loi villages which has been controlling and managing their natural resources of forest, river, ponds, and agricultural land and
community lands by the Phamdou (traditional institution) even after the implementation of the three tier institutions under the Indian political System. The Phamdou is represented by six representatives since the establishment.

**Objectives:** The paper explores the functioning of the Phamdou and their pattern of natural resources management.

**Methodology:** A qualitative method was adopted for the study, from the etic perspective. In-depth interviews, observation and telephone interview were the multiple methods of data collection.

**Keywords:** Andro, Chakpa, Khullakpa, Natural resource management and Phamdou.

**INTRODUCTION**

The north-eastern region of India comprises eight states, viz., Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. The total geographical area is 2.62.179 square kilometres, with a total population of 39 million, as per 2001 census. The north-eastern states are sparsely populated, as compared to other states of India. Assam and Tripura are the most densely populated, with over 300 persons per square kilometre, while Arunachal Pradesh is the least densely populated, with 13 persons per square kilometre (Strategy Report, 2007). It covers about 8 per cent of the total geographical area of the country. The physiographic of the region is divided into three divisions, namely, Meghalaya plateau, the north-eastern hills and Basin and the Brahmaputra vallas.et.al, 2012; p 506). According to an official estimate based on satellite imagery, the north-eastern region has 163.799 square kilometres of forests - about 25 per cent of the total forest cover in India (FSI, 2000; cited in Poffenberger, 2007; p 7). The territory under forest
constitutes approximately 64 per cent of the total areas of the north-eastern region. A large part of the forests in these area falls under the category of open forests, with a crown density of 10-40 per cent. Unlike the other states of India, the larger natural resources of forests are mostly controlled and managed by the community in the north-eastern states.

The forests of the north-eastern are the main sources of livelihood for a large part of the population. The forests provide at least three types of benefits: 1) improvement in the base conditions for development in the north-east, 2) income to the north-eastern states and 3) Biodiversity conversation. Indigenous community institutions as village councils, chieftainship and councils of elders have generally done a good job of protecting their forest resources, based on small, homogenous village societies that support collection needs and interest (Poffenberger, 2007; p 1-6). The indigenous institutions in north eastern states except Sikkim continue to play an important role in the area of forest protection and management since the past centuries.

- In Arunachal Pradesh, out of the 82% of the total forested area, 62% is controlled by the community.
- In Assam, out of the 30% of the total forested area, 33% 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 (Paffenberger, 2007, cited in Khwairakpam, 2012; p 3).

In Meghalaya and Nagaland, over 90 per cent of the forests are under the direct control of the traditional village institutions, communities and private individuals. In Mizoram, forestland have been classified as safety and supply reserves and placed under the authority of the village Council (Puffenberger, 2007; p13). In Khasi Hill District of Meghalaya, the Autonomous District Council exercises its authority over 95 percent of the forest area, while the state government has control over the remaining area (Gowloog, 2009; pp 95-104.).

In Nagaland, tradition governance was the only accepted form of governance since time immemorial. The traditional old-age old Naga traditional self-governing system was first developed by the Naga National Council (NNC). The model is divided into four levels, as under:

• The village level Hoho in every Naga village.
• The range or area level Hoho in every defined area.
• The District level Hoho in every district of Nagaland.
• The state level Hoho as the apex body (Ao, 2002,pp 102-113).

In Tripura the traditional self-governing institution has been in existence in all the inhabited areas of the largest Tripuri tribes. The traditional institution has the power to solve the land dispute between individuals, breach of village customs and norms, quarrel between villages on any issues etc.(Burman, 1983. Pp 62-64).
DESCRIPTION OF MANIPUR

Manipur is one of the north eastern states of India. It is located at the extreme north-eastern side of India. It is bounded by Nagaland in the north, Myanmar in the east, Mizoram to the west and Mizoram to the south. It was an independent kingdom for about two millennia before its merger to the Indian Union. It was ruled by 76 recorded kings, as per recorded by royal chronicle called Cheitharol Kumbaba (Khelchandra Singh, 2009; pp 64-67). The people of Manipur can broadly be divided into different ethnic groups - the Meiteis of seven clans, the 33 recognised Scheduled tribes of Naga and the Kukichin, the Meitei Pangal (Meitei Pangal), the Scheduled Caste (SC) and the non SC Lois and the migrants after the merger of Manipur with the Union of India. There are nine districts in Manipur - five in the hills and four in the valley. The hills are predominantly inhabited by 33 recognised Scheduled Tribes (ST); the valley is predominantly inhabited by the Meiteis, Meitei Pangals and non SC Lois and the foothills by seven SC Lois villages, excluding SC villages of Chandel District.

TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION AND THE NATURAL RESOURCES

In Manipur, the status of ownership of forest is not clearly defined, except for the reserved forests which constitute only 9 per cent of the total forest area. The hills people claim ownership of the land and forests other than reserved forests. In Makhan village of Senapati District, the indigenous liangmei Naga tribe occupies an area of about 750 Hectares. The traditional institution manages the land by dividing this into five types: 1) settlement areas, including homestead trees and horticulture gardens, 2) Agricultural land under sedentary farming system, 3) shifting cultivation areas, 4) protected areas for watershed, water sources and village reserves, and 5) economy forest area which overlaps
with utilisation of forest for timber, firewood and non-timber forest production (Poffenberger, 2007; cited in Khwairak pam, 2012; p 3). The land as a whole in the tribal occupied hills areas is divided into three categories: a) the village homesteads, b) the shifting cultivation area, terrace and permanent wet paddy fields, horticulture fields and c) the village community forests. The Anal tribe controls the community natural resources through the village Councils of khullakpa, Luplakpa, Mantri, Senapati and Meitei Lambu. The Hmars, one of the largest tribes of Manipur, control the community resources through the tradition political institution of Lal (chief), the Siemeng Upas (councillors), the priest, youth commander and the Criers or Messengers. The Koireng tribes control the community natural resources by traditional political institution called Khuo of eleven members, Khullakpa, Luplakpa, Thakval, Yupal, Potshang, Meitei Lampu, Lapu and Lapi. The Maram tribe divides the land into two types: owned by individuals and owned by the community. The village chief controls the community land. He even has the power over individual land, when it is not in use. The Mao tribe, which is the second largest tribe of Naga inhabitants in Senapati District, divides into categories of land as Individual lands, Clan lands and Village community lands. The entire village land is owned in the name of the village chief and controlled by the traditional political institution (Devi, 2006 pp 1-48).

The traditional institutions among the tribes are broadly divided into three categories. These are:

- **Authoritarian type**: The authoritarian type of political institution is in vogue among the Thadou-Kukis and Mizos. The chief is the highest authority in the village affairs. The villagers are expected to obey and pay respects the chief as long as a man is keen to live in that particular village. It is also practised among the Tangkhul Nagas in a more relaxed form than that of Thadou Kukis and Mizos.
- **Republican type:** The republican type of traditional institution is practiced among the Nagas. The Mao Nagas elect their representatives to the council from the village elders, who, in turn, elect their king or chief. The Anal chief is nominated by the villagers and duly elected with the approval of the outgoing chief. The chieftainship is not hereditary. This system was also practiced among the Aimols, Chothes, Koms, Lamsangs, Moyons, Monsangs, etc.

- **Relaxed-authoritarian and semi-republican type:** These types of traditional institution are neither authoritarian nor purely republican. The Zeliangrong Nagas have adopted these types of traditional institutions. The system of headship of the village is neither elective, nor is it strictly hereditary. The succeeding headman is selected from the clan of the chief. Likewise, in the Village Council, the members of the governing body are neither elective nor are these positions strictly hereditary. For instance, among the Rongmeis, the headman-ship is taken again by the able-man from the same clan. Likewise, Nammu who is in charge of the agricultural rites and rituals, will be again succeeded by a suitable person from the former Nammu clan. It is also practiced among the Maram, Thangal etc (Buangam, 1991; pp. 74-77).

**TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION AND THE NATURAL RESOURCES AMONG THE SC LOI**

All the SC Loi inhabited areas of the eight villages: Andro, Khurkhul, Kotha, Koutruk, Leimaram, Phayeng Sekmai and Tairenpokpi control and manage the natural resources through their traditional self-management institutions for centuries. They are not converted either to Hinduism or Christianity (Khwairakpam, 2012; p3 and Khwairakpam, 2012; p 269). The traditional institutions continue to exist even after the implementation of three tier institutions under the Indian political system. The tradition institution practices among the SC Lois are democratic in nature. The SC Lois is classified into two groups:
Chakpa and Sekmai. The traditional institutions of the Chakpa are called Phamdou and the Sekmai is called Phamneiba. In the Chakpa Koutruk village, the traditional institution of Phamdou has played a vital role in the administration and management of the natural resources. The traditional institution is represented by seven members: Khullakpa, Lupllakpa, Khunjahanba, Yupalba, Loumirakpa, Pakhanglakpa and Naharakpa. During the kingdom of Manipur, they enjoyed autonomy in term of administration and management of the resources. At present, they continue to enjoy a prominent position in the socio-religious ceremonies and social gathering, and control and manage the community forests, agricultural land (Khwairakpam, 2012; pp 68-72). In Sekmai Loi village, the traditional institutions of Phamneiba used to control and managed the natural resources of forest and Sekmai Turen (river) for centuries. But from 4th May 1977 a new form of traditional government, the Sekmai Scheduled Caste Development Committee (SSCDC), emerged. Since then, the SSCDC has been controlling and managing the forests and Sekmai Turen. They have constructed their indigenous parliament building and developed the inter and intra villages roads from the income of the natural resources (Khwairakpam, 2012; pp 2-9).

- **Study Profile:** The Andro village is the largest and most populous village among the Scheduled caste villages. The Andro SC Lois belongs to the Chakpa ethnic group. The total population of Andro is 8316, as per as per 2001 Census. It is located near the Nongmaiching hills. The village is 27 km away from the capital city of Imphal. The total area of Andro village is 2,9994,43 acres. The soil of the village is almost similar to that of other parts of Manipur, i.e., alluvial, claying and loamy thick soil (Dorendro Singh, 2007; p 15). There are sixteen Sagei (lineage/sub-clan) of the seven clans. Ningthoujam, Phanjaobam Sagolsem and Shamchetshabam belong to the Ningthouja Clan. Asheibam, Sarubam and Sarungbam belong to the Angom Clan. Heikrujam, Leishangbam and Yumkhaibam belong to the Khuman Clan. Hijam and Salam belong to Luwang Clan. Puthem and Thokchom belong to Moirang Clan and Chingakham belong to the Kha-
Nganba Clan (Basanta, 2008; pp 74-75). The village from the very beginning has been divided into 14 Leikais (hamlets). These are: Maringthen, Kharam Leikai, Khunou Leikai, Makha Leikai, Khunyai Leikai, Awang Leikai, Mamang Leikai, Khuman Nungyungbi, Chingdon Leikai, Majengpat Leikai, Sanapat Leikai, Lamphabung Leikai, Tolonthel/Andro Khunou, and Khuman Leikai. The Khoibu and Loubouchung Leikais are the new Leikais.

- **Research issue:** Andro is one of the oldest villages in Manipur. The people of Andro are believed to be among the earliest settlers of Manipur. They have inhabited the present villages even before the emergence of the State and recorded history. There have been significance changes in the administration during the kingdom of Manipur, during the British rule, establishment of Manipur State Legislative assemblies, merger to Indian Union and implementation. Despite all these, the traditional institution of Phamdou has been in existence with some modification and changes in the administration. The natural resources of forests, ponds, and lakes were directly controlled by the Phamneiba till 1987. But from 1988 onwards, a new tradition institution was established which includes Phamneiba and the elected members of each sixteen Leikais.

- **Rationale of the study:** The present study would be significance for exploring the role of the Phamdou represented by six members, and their patterns of functioning during the pre-merger period and the post-merger period. It will also explore the functioning of the new traditional institution, the Lambuba, with special reference to community forests.
OBJECTIVES

- To explore the functioning of Phamdou and its role in the protection of natural resources during the pre merger of Manipur to the Indian Union and the emergence of Lambuba.
- To study the factors leading to the emergence of Lambuba and the changes in the administration of Phamdou.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is the outcome of the author’s interaction with the villagers during the president ship of All Manipur Scheduled Caste Students Union (AMSCSC) from July 2007 to May, 2009. A qualitative method was adopted for the study from the etic perspective. In-depth interview, observation and telephone interview were the multiple methods of data collection.

- **Phamdou of Andro village**: Phamdou is a traditional institution of Andro village. It is the oldest traditional institution which has been in existence even before the system of recording history began. The first recorded history began, when Nongda Lairen Pakhanba became the king of Manipur in the year 33 AD. Khullakpa was the head of the Loishang and the traditional government. He was also the head of the Loishang (village court). He headed all the three organs of traditional governance legislative, executive and judiciary. He chaired all the meeting of the traditional Assembly. He appointed all the others consensus members of the Phamneiba Lupllakpa, Khunjamba, Yupalba, Khabamlakpa, Pakhanglakpa and Naharakpa. He also appointed Maichao (priest) and Maibi (priestess) after the approval in the general body meeting of the village. He
administered the oath to all the others members of the Loishang. The Khullakpa continued to be in office as long as he enjoyed the confidence of the people. The Phamdou allocated land from the community land to the newly married men of the village.

The representatives of the Phamdou are as follows:

- **Khullakpa**: Khullakpa is the combination of two words *khul* and *lakpa*, *Khul* meaning, village, area and region and *lakpa* means the controller and administrator. There was no fixed term of office for the Khullakpa. He continued in service during the pleasure of the king and the confidence of the people. He had to vacate the office if he became a widower during his tenure. Unlike the others members of Loishang, the Khungi Lai (senior-most male of Sekmai) took the oath of Khullakpa.

- **Lupllakpa**: Lupllakpa is a combination of two words lup and lakpa. Lup means organisation and division and lakpa means controller. He chaired in all the general body meeting, village meeting and community meeting in the absence of Khullakpa. He assisted the Khullakpa in the administration of Phamdou.

- **Khunjamba**: Khunjhamba is a combination of two words Khun, village or region and hanba means the eldest among the members. He acted as a head of the village. His duty was to communicate through him in the court building of the Loishang. He had to disseminate information about all the matters decided by the Phamdou.

- **Yupalba**: Yupalba is the minister of yu (distilled local wine), waiyu (special wine for community festivals and rituals) and atingba (rice beer). His main duty is to test the quality of yu, waiyu and atingba. He is also responsible for provide food for guests and community festivals and rituals.
• **Khabamlakpa**: Khabamlakpa is the minister of Loishang (court). He deals with the cases of the village relating to judicial matters. He has the power to try all the minor cases, except those involving adultery and murder.

• **Pakhanglakpa**: Pakhang means unmarried man and lakpa means controller. His main function is to look after the unmarried men. He is the head of Morung (dormitory). He trains the youth in the art of hunting, making boats, family life, customary laws, and way of life and Chakpa dialect.

• **Naharakpa**: Naharakpa is the last minister of the Phamdou. His duty is similar to that of Pakhangba. He is the controller of the young lads, who are younger than the Pakhang.

**ROLE OF PHAMDOU IN PROTECTION OF NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DURING PRE MERGER PERIOD**

The boundary of Andro village has been controlled and protected by the Phamdou since the time of first king, Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33 AD). The Khoiri Kompak (written unpublished manuscript) recorded the boundary of Andro village during the time of the King Punshiba (1404-1432). The Khoiri Kompak recorded the boundary. In the north, it is demarcated at the Ngairon Chingen, in the east it is demarcated at the Thoubal Turen, in the west it is demarcated at Iril Turen and in the south; it is demarcated at the Waithou Ching. The Pana Loishang (traditional administrative office) used to play a vital role in the administration and protection of community natural resources. The Pana Loishang is represented by all the members of Phamdou, Khullakpa, Lupllakpa, Khunjamba, Yupalba, Khabamlakpa, Pakhanglakpa and Naharakpa. The Pana Loishang is divided into: Ahallup Pana and Naharup Pana.
Ahallup Pana is represented by six Sagei: Chingakham, Heikrujam, Leishungbam, Puthem, Salam and Thokchom. All the married residents within the Ahallup lineage who completed six months are mandatorily required to be members of the Ahallup Pana. The head of the Ahallup Pana is called Khabamlakpa and Khabam Hidang is the deputy head of the Ahallup Pana. Khullakpa has necessarily to be the Chairman of the Ahallup Pana.

Naharup Pana is represented by nine Sageis: Asheibam, Hijam, Ningthoujam, Phanjaobam, Sagolsem, Samchetsabam, Yumkhaibam. It is mandatory for all the married members within the Naharup lineage, who have completed six months of marriage, to be the members. The head of the Naharup Pana is called Khabamlakpa and Khabam Hidang is the deputy head of the Naharup Pana. It is mandatory for the Lupllakpa to be the chairman of Naharup Pana. The Pana Loishang enjoys autonomy in the administration and protection of forests. They maintain records all the homestead land, agricultural land, community land, inter village and intra village road. They protect all the community natural resources like forests, ponds, rivers, and streams. They decide all the cases like verbal abuse, domestic violence, theft, divorce, encroachment on private and community land, family disputes, adultery except murder. The form of punishment varies according to the nature of the crime. But the common punishment was wakongba (imposing of fines in the form of having to give distilled wine, rice beer and Cock, Hen and Pig). The Pana Loishang collects the agricultural land taxes and distilled wine taxes for the administration under the traditional institution. The nature of the administration is that of a village republic.

ROLE OF PHAMNEIBA AFTER THE MERGER OF MANIPUR TO THE INDIAN UNION AND THE EMERGENCE OF LAMBUBA

Manipur was merged to Indian Union on 15 October, 1949. After this merger, the three tier institutions (i.e., Central and State and the Local Governments) was implement in different
phases Part C status to Union Territory and finally to statehood on 21 January, 1972. The first local institution of Gram Panchayat was implemented in the Andro village like the other valley villages of Manipur in the year 1964. The Pradhans and Up-Pradhans were nominated among the 13 members from the village. These nominated members remained in office from 1964 to 1974. It was upgraded to Town Committee on 2nd March 1982 and Nagar Panchyat in the year 1995. The Local government constructed various inter, intra village road, schools, hospitals, animal husbandry, provided drinking water facilities, mid day meal, schemes, loans, etc. The Local government has become the formal institution of the village. Subsequently, the members of the Local Government made several attempts to control the community resources, particularly forests, but it was not successful due to opposition from the traditional institutions with the village support. In response to these, a new system of traditional institution Lambuba of the inter-village and the intra-village was established in the year 1988. The objective of the traditional government is to protect the community natural resources particularly forest and to generate sustainable income for all round development of the village. The inter village Lambuba is represented by all the members of seven Phamdous and the other 32 elected members from sixteen Leikais. The sixteen Leikai are: Maringthen Leikai (L), Kharam L., Kharam L., Khunou L. Makha L., Khunyai L., Awang L, Mamang L, Khuman Nungyungbi L. Chindon L, Majengpat L., Sanapat L., Tolonthen/Andro Khunou L., Khuman L, and new Leikai of Khoibu L. and Loubouchung. It is mandatory for the Phamdous to be members of the Lambuba during their tenure. It is also necessary for the Khullakpa to be the head of the inter-village Lambuba. The others 32 members are elected from the sixteen villages from among the Pana Loishang for five years. The intra-village Lambuba is represented by seven to eleven members for five years. The community forests of about 46,000 acres are demarcated into seven parts: 1) Nongmaiching reserved forest, 2) Nongmaiching Unreserved forest, 3) Langlou Ching, 4) Uyampak Samprou, 5) Khondung Ching, 6) Turanthen and 7) Maringthen. The Noimaiching reserved forest of above 10,000 is directly controlled by the inter village Lambuba. The
others six parts of the larger area of about 36,000 acres is controlled by the intra-village Lambuba. It is again demarcated into two reserved and unreserved forest of 60 per cent 40 per cent respectively. In the unreserved forests, villagers are allowed to collect firewood but restricted to uproot trees and cause wild fire. The reserved forest is again sub-divided into many areas. The villagers are allowed to collect firewood, timber and to fell trees by paying some amount which was fixed by the Lambuba. 70 per cent of the collected amount is utilised by the inter village Lambuba and 30 per cent are utilised by the respective villages.

CONCLUSION

In Manipur the natural resource has been providing the tangible and intangible benefits since the time immemorial. It has been either controlled or managed by the King and his council of ministers or traditional indigenous institution of the tribes and Lois of Chakpa and Sekmai during the kingdom of Manipur. After the implementation of Manipur State Constitute Act of 1947, end of monarch and the implementation of three tier institution there has been a drastic change in the management of natural resources particularly valley and the foothills. Despite of all these traditional institutions of the Chakpa and Sekmai Scheduled Caste Loi are still controlling the natural resources of forests, agricultural lands, and rivers. The Andro villages has been controlling and managing the larger forest area of about 46,000 acres despite of the implementation of the three tier institution under the Indian Political System and the globalisation. The reserved forest is well protected than any of the government control reserved forest. The villagers of about 30 per cent are depending their livelihood from the community unreserved forests. The development policies and programmes are more visible then any of the government institutions. Holistically the traditional institutions of the village level Lambuba and the intra-village Lambuba has been functioning more successfully than the government institution.
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