



# Traditional Institutions and Forest Management among the Scheduled Caste Loi communities of Manipur: A study of Koutruk village

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**Abstract - Natural resources like land, forest, hills, river, sea, lake, water, plants, and animals are the gift of God. It provides tangible and intangible benefits to human beings. It is control and managed either by the states of traditional institutions. In Manipur the larger natural resources of forest are still controlled by the traditional institutions even after the implementation of three tier institution of India. The area where it practices is in all the hills districts and foothills of the Scheduled Caste Loi inhabited areas of Manipur. Koutruk is one of the Scheduled Caste Loi villages where traditional institution has been controlling the community forest of about Pari 55 (136 Acres) of community forest and Pari 6 (14.88) community agricultural lands for centuries. The paper will explore how the traditional intuition has been managing the community resources even after the implementation of three tier government in Manipur.**

**Keywords - Koutruk, phamdou, lai haraoba committee, lamthokpham ching and mayai kanglam.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

There has been existing non- state Institutions generation after generations even after the encounter between self- governing and the state governed people but at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century they were no longer a majority of the world population, but spread across globe. One of the largest remaining non-state governing people is Zomia (Scott, C. 2009: 1-22). In all the north-eastern states of India excluding Sikkim, the traditional institutions are controlling the larger geographical areas even after the implementation of three tier governments under the Indian Political system. The eight north-eastern states of India, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura constitutes 7.9 per cent of country's total geographical areas and 3.8 per cent of the total population of the country (Poffenberger.et.al, 2007: cited in Khwairakpam et al, 2013: 5 ).

In A. P., 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 (Poffenberger, et al., 2007:3-13).

## II. DESCRIPTION OF MANIPUR

Manipur is one of the north-eastern states of India. It is located at the extreme north eastern corner of India. It was an independent kingdom for about two millennium ruled by 76 recorded kind as per the Royal Chronicle, Cheitharol Kumbaba (Khelchandra, 2009: 64-67). It was merged to Indian Union on 15 October, 1949. Geographically it is divided into hills and plain. The hills are predominantly inhabited by the Scheduled Tribes, valley by the Meiteis and the foot-hills by the Scheduled Caste (SC) Lois and the non-SC Lois.

### *Forest management in Manipur:*

In Manipur the status of ownership of forests is not clearly defined, except for the reserved forests. It constitutes only 9 percent of the total forest areas. The hill people claim the ownership of the land and forests other than reserved forests (Poffenberger, 2007: 39). In the tribal inhabited hills areas the entire land is divided into three categories: a) the village homesteads land, b) the shifting cultivation area, terrace and permanent wet paddy fields, horticulture fields and c) the village community forests. The Annals tribe controls the community natural resources through the village councils of khullakpa, Luplakpa, Mantri, Senapati and Meitei Lambu. The Hmars tribes control the community resources by the tradition political institution of Lal (chief), the Siemeng Upas (counsellors), the priest, youth commander and the Crier or Messengers. The Tangkhul the largest tribe divides land into four types,

the village homestead, the individual (private owned reserved forest, the clan lands and the village reserved. The clan land and village reserve is owned by the community in the name of concerned village chief (Devi, 2006: 1-48). In the SC Loi inhabited areas, the community natural resources of forest, agricultural land, river, burial land, are control by the traditional institutions. In Tairenpokpi village the community agricultural land of *Pari Mapan Marak* (24.8 acres) was controlled and managed by Ahals (Khwaitrakpam et.al, 2013: 275-279). In Sekmai Village it was controlled and managed by indigenous Parliament (SSCDC) (Khwaitrakpam, 2012: 1-9).

#### *Study profile:*

The Khutruk is one of the smallest villages among the Scheduled Caste villages in Manipur. It is inhabited by fourteen *Sagei*, (lineage): *Ningthoujam*, *Leishangthem*, *Thounaojam* are the main *Sageis*. Presently there are 120 households of the village. It is located at a distance of 19 km from the capital city of Imphal.

#### *Research issue:*

The Phamdou (traditional institution) have been controlling the larger community natural resources of forest about 136 acres, agricultural land around 15 acres and burial land for centuries even after the implementation of three tier governments of India. It has been replaced by Lai Haraoba Committee after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.

#### *Objectives:*

The paper explores the historical background of the functioning of Phamdou during the kingdom of Manipur. It also studies the functioning of Lai Haraoba Committee with special reference to community forest management.

### III. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methods was adopted for the study from the outsider perspective. Oral History, in-depth-interview and telephone interview were the multiple tools of data collection.

#### *Forest management during the Phamdou period:*

During the Phamdou period there were two Leikais (hamlets) *Koutruk Khunjao* and *Koutruk Khunou*. The entire community forest, agricultural land, river, stream and canal were controlled by Phamdou. The Phamdou is the oldest traditional administration institution of Koutruk village. It is represented by seven elected members: Khullakpa, Luplakpa, Khunjahanba, Yupalba, Loumirakpa, Pakhanglakpa and Naharakpa. They were elected by the villagers and appointed by the King. Khullakpa is the head of Phamdou and presides in all the meeting of the Phamdou. He takes the final decisions of the executive body and village meeting except Shinglup. They decide all the cases ranging from verbal abuses to youths, women, domestic violence,

divorce, thief, land disputes, encroachment, assault and adultery except murder. They distribute community land to the newly married man, record homestead land, private agricultural land. They collect the revenue from private and community agricultural land and the homestead land in executing the Phamdou. The community forest about Pari 55 (136 acres) was divided into two parts reserved and unreserved forest. The unreserved forest covers around 76 per cent and the reserved forest covers around 60 per cent. The community reserved forest was the main source of income in celebrating the Lai Haraoba-festival, the most important and expensive festivals of the village. It was also the place for hunting during the Lai Haraoba festival and livelihood for the villagers. Sometimes they also generate money from the reserved forest during financial shortage occur by natural calamities and manmade disaster. There was no prohibition and restriction of the villages for collection of timber wood, log, firewood's, charcoal, feeling trees and bamboo shoot from the unreserved forest. But unlike the unreserved forest there was strict prohibition in the reserved forest. However, burning wildfire and uprooting trees were strictly restricted from both the reserved and unreserved forest. The Phamdou enjoyed complete autonomy in the administration of the village during the kingdom of Manipur. But after the merger to Indian Union and the implementation of three tier governments there is now undergoing changes (Khwaitrakpam. 2012: 68-72).

#### *Forest management during the Lai Haraoba Committee period:*

The Lai Haraoba Committee (LHC) was formed in the year 1949. The objective of the LHC was; 1) to preserve and protect the community forest and 2) to assist the Phamdou during Lai Haraoba festival. The community forest was declared as reserved forest by the LHC. It was demarcated by erecting stone and pillars in all the four corners. The LHC has been controlling and managed the community natural resources of forest and agricultural land since the beginning. The entire community forest of about Pari 55 was renamed as Lamthokpham Ching and Mayai Kanglam Ching. The Mayai Kanglam Ching covers around 60 per cent and the Lamthokpham Ching covers around 40 per cent. It was thick and non thick forest. The Mayai Kanglam Ching was subdivided into ariba uyok (old reserved forest) and anaoba uyok (new reserved forest). The Ariba Uyok has been protecting for about 60 years. And the remaining community reserved forest was allowed to collect the firewood by paying some fixed amount to the LHC after the approval of the villagers. Christian families of three households were excluded from it. The LHC is represented by sixteen elected members for two years from all the Sageis. The representatives are depends on the size of the Sageis. It is shown under the table

Ningthoujam	4
Leishangthem	4
Thangjam	2
Thounoujam	2
Nungleppam, Khaidem, Chanamba, Sorokhaibam	2
Khuraijam, Warrpam, Tongbram, Kangabam, Khunamayum	2

Family with a male youth from 17 years up-to capable stage are customarily mandatory to be the LHC in their turn. However family without father and a male youth of less than 17 years are exempted from the LHC. The LHC is broadly divided into two executive body and executive members. The executive body comprises President, Vice-President, General Secretary and six Publicity Secretaries and the remaining seven members are the executive members. The senior most member of the LHC is mandatorily to be the President of LHC irrespective of all their economic and educational status. The General Secretary was appointed from among the representative by the LCC. His main duty is to record and maintain file relating to LHC. The Finance Secretary is usually appointed the richest member from among them. The six publicity Secretaries was elected from all the three Leikais equally. All the remaining seven members are the executive members of the LHC. They are divided into eight groups, two each in all the groups. Each group is assign to protect the community forest for a day out of seven days from 6 am to 4 pm. There is no change in timing across the seasons. They are responsible to guard and protect the village such as felling trees, spreading wildfire, collection of timber wood, log, firewood's, charcoal, felling trees and bamboo. If anybody found guilty with empirical evidence then they collect the fine of INR 1000. In case if any of the villagers or the others group identified the culprit with empirical evidence in their turn then they have to pay careless fine of INR 300 to the identifier as reward. Absentees pay fine of INR 300 irrespective of all the executive body and executive members.

#### IV. ANALYSIS

The Phamdou of seven elected members was controlled and managed the community resources with centralised power. The natural resource management during the Phamneiba period was traditional in natural. The villager was free to collect the forest product from the unreserved forest throughout the season except spreading wild fire and uprooting trees. But during the LHC period the entire forest of Pari 55 was declared as reserved forest. The LHC has been the responsible traditional institution in managing and protecting the community forest since the establishment. All the villagers are mandated to take part in protection and

management of community resources irrespective of rich and poor except the absence of male members of above 16 years. The villages are prohibited from collecting the forest product throughout the season except the time of firewood collection from specific areas. There is a voice from extremely poor family for exemption of prohibition for collection of firewood from the community forest. Despite of all these the LHC has been protecting and managing the community forest. The find system of LHC of Koutruk is unique from any of the traditional institutions of Manipur.

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