

LANGPIH- THE CRY OF THE RIMULIANG

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Abstracts

Wars and conflicts whether bloody or otherwise are triggered by someone's wishes to impose his identity. Consciously, then, he marks out boundaries to define his own space in which he lives. Thus, with the boundary disputes within our own state, Langpih is the focus of this study. Langpih, a neglected village in a developing world, where the central and state government have been indifferent to the problems of the hapless Rimuliang.

Key Words

Borders, Community, Dispute, Dorbar, Encroach, Hima, Indigenous, Kingship, Legislator, Obstructed, Political, Sardarship.

In this era of globalization many countries take advantage of globalization and open the flow of capital from one country to another. But stringent laws of immigration are imposed in controlling Border movement. The borders were barricaded by various rules and regulations. Reasons which may arise from our concern for sovereignty, security or difference between "we and they". An ideology of belonging to a particular territory within the same nation, borders, are an important means through which a record or a history of an individual identity is produced. All these works together emphasizing the idea of a homeland that incorporate in a territory and a boundary.

Yet one cannot take the position that borders assume the same nature in every country in every situation. With this end in view this paper aims, in bringing into light about Langpih, a village located near the border of West Khasi Hills district, Meghalaya and Kamrup district Assam. It is under the administrative structure of Meghalaya and under Kyrfum gram panchayat, Mawshynrut block, West Khasi Hills district. A quiet village Langpih caught our attention first by the news paper, Shillong Times on 09/07/2012 highlighting the fast unto death that was undertaken by a 28 year old Pynskhemlang Nongshlong and other youth of the village has entered to 8 consecutive days because no solution was adopted to resolve the long pending border dispute between Meghalaya and Assam.

The people living in Langpih are called "Muliang" and the land was called "Ri Muliang" (land of Muliang). It falls under the "Hima" (state) "Nongmynsaw". It was one among the Himas (states) of the Thirty "syiems". (Kings). Since the king of this Hima (state) failed to attend a Conference of the Syiems (kings) and other Chiefs under the aegis of the Khasi Natural Durbar, that was held in Shillong who adopted a resolution to recognize the Khasi states on the merit of the old treaties executed with the East India Company. The British therefore cease his title of kingship and the crown. The British annexed the village to Assam Kamrup district, but then after Independence, it was handed over to the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district, a district in today's Meghalaya State. Further the Meghalaya Government claims that the 1951 Assam map demarcations showed Lampih village as a part of the district in what would later become Meghalaya State. But later a conflict started in 1972 demarcation of boundaries by Assam, which the Meghalaya government did not accept. Many of the areas namely Psiar and KhatKasla in the borders of Meghalaya, Jaintia Hills and Assam Karbi Anglong district were in Meghalaya as per provisions of the Sixth Schedule. The inclusion of these areas in the then Mikir Hills district of Assam intensified the boundary dispute between the two states.

"Ri Muliang" is a subject of long running dispute between Meghalaya and Assam state government. Hopingstone Lyngdoh the then legislator of the village claims that Assam encroached in the village in 1979 and since then exploited the land by pushing Assamese settlers in this area.

The local residence mentioned that there were only two Nepali households in Ri Muliang during the early period living on lease of land for grazing under the Kingdom of Rambrai and these grazers were brought by the East India Company from Nepal for dairy farming in the Khasi Hills.

Initially the existence of the rival state is not being challenged but the rural state occupation on the indigenous inhabitants became confused with identity as who actually governs their land and how were they recognized in the national community. These occupying area are forcibly controlled by police personnel of Assam.

Interestingly the migrants utilized the available schemes of the Assam Government for its development. In 2008 the Assam government began building a health centre, lower primary school, and police outpost in the village. On the contrary they detained the Meghalaya journalist who came to cover the event. With a view to encroach the Meghalaya areas, the Assam government constructed the road from Mawshikar to Tyrshai, Ukham through the Rimuliang village. These roads pass through the centre of the settlement along with the migrants settling on the road side thus dividing the sentiments of the community and the village into two parts. Thus, the Assam government developed the basic infrastructure in the village for its own selfish interest.

Conflicts In Langpih

On November, 2008 a tug of war between Assam and Meghalaya over the deputed Rimuliang had intensified when the latter announcing the setting up of police outpost in the area bordering the boundaries. The village according to the Meghalaya government records- continues to shed blood and human lives are being lost as it pays the price of one upmanship between two states both of which ironically lay claim over it. In May 14, 2010 clashes broke out between the migrants and the tribal Khasi and Garo community on which the migrant communities claim over the traditional weekly "hat" (market) in the area. National media reported that the Khasi villagers died of gunshot wounds. The slain victims were Columbus Hujon, Charles Lyngkhoi, Dennis Nongsiej and Khros Rani. Reports of the total number of Injured varied between 12 and 26. The killing of the local resident by the police led to communal difference and hatred between the two communities in the village. Even the death are not spared from the ignominy of becoming a tool for exploitation of human emotions in this war zone. Besides, this death toll has become an object of political controversy when the Assam authorities start moving the cops of the indigenous Khasi around and across the border to manipulate that the migrants were killed on firing. Thus, being in the borders, the Rimuling people are in a complex situation because Assam as an aggressor always indulges in various excesses at any point of time. Inspire of being obstructed by the Assam police officials a monument was constructed in memory of the death of the villagers.

The then Home Minister Hopingstone Lyngdoh stated that the Meghalaya government would also go ahead with the plan to set up a police outpost at the village. The temporary outpost from Lejadubi I would be shifted to Rimuliang. Thus till 2010 this area did not have a police outpost of its own. Today, despite having one, it still does not have even one platoon of police force.

Repercussions of the incidents continued to be felt in 2012 when the young men of the land. Pynskhemlang Nongshlong of the neighboring Rambrai village planned to lead a hunger strike in memory of the slain men. Nongshlong and thirteen of his fellow activists took to a stage constructed by local people specially for the fast. Two hours after their fast began, Assistant District Commissioner of Kamrup District and 150 Police force of Assam arrived at the site. However, the local inhabitants formed a human chain to deny access of the police. Following the order of the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup District of Assam, vehicles filled with villagers belonging to Rabha tribe and the Nepali community from Assam came to the village escorted by the Assam police and destroyed the Durbar Hall of Hima raid Mynsaw.

The elders of the village claims that the new hall was necessitated as the old hall that was donated by Mr. Hopingstone Lyndoh was forcefully taken by Assam and turned it into the Quarters for the Assam Police Personnel. Ridiculously these police personnel of Assam still occupy the bungalow. Mr. Swingly Samakha, the "Sardar" (chief) of Hima Raid of Mynsw had said that there is no question of intimating the Assam Government about the construction of the hall as it was not built out of any government scheme, but out of the benevolence of the villagers.

Of course, the then chief minister of Meghalaya Dr. Mukul Sangma reported this matter to the Union Minister about the latest incident where the Dorbar hall was demolished by the Kamrup Administration.

A conglomerate of social organization and civil society and public representatives have said that the failure of the state government to settle this long term border dispute in the village was a reflection that the government is not concerned about the remotest indigenous.

Besides, they have also lost confidence on the government. In 2012 the Peoples' movement chairman, the then UDP legislator Mr. Ardent M. Basaiawmoit said that the people living along the border areas continued to suffer extremely because of the aggressive policy of Assam in this land.

Around the same time the Meghalaya peoples' human rights council sent a delegation to the 20th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. The MPHRC, General Secretary-Dino Dympep, met with the UN Special reporter James Anaya regarding the 2010 killings following which Anaya sent a communiqué to the government of India, which the government of India failed to respond.

In the intervening period, the opposition Congress had criticized the Meghalaya Progressive Alliance government's attitude of challenging and confronting attitude with the Assam government over the boundary dispute in Lampih. Though

appreciated, yet did not resolve when itself was in power for many decades. DD Lapang stated that a delegation of Congress Meghalaya unit would soon approach the centre for intervention in setting a neutral body to solve the problem. My question here is “why is he not supporting the present government in order to bring about the solution to this long pending issue? Is it because Rimuliang does not fall under his constituency?”

The inactive action of the present local representative is also a stumbling block towards solving this border dispute.

The Rimuliang people still wanted to know the stand of the centre and Assam government on the situation at Langpih village.

Aspirations of the Muliang

The people aspire to settle the demarcations of the boundaries at the earliest so that it will enable them to move within their land freely.

The people also wanted to replace sardarship with sardarship as the chief of Rimuliang.

Issues and possible solutions

All over the world, the life of the people living in border lands is different from the inland people. The main reason is that the hostility between the two states sharing the border kept the borders generally volatile. Though there are no long term wars, but negligence by their own state authorities and interference from the other states have been hazardous.

The extensive coverage of the borders within the Rimuliang gets reflected from the fact that there is no concept of peace time for the people living in this land. For many people here, it has been a continuous study of violence since 1987. Living with fear has become a routine and inseparable part of daily life. Uncertainty, unsettled life and abnormal conditions of living therefore are normal for the people living in Rimuliang.

Unpredictable life style affects the quality of life of the border residence. The nature of being attacked by the mob from the Assam side generated a psyche of fear. The sardar of the area reported that the local residents were facing problems and insecurity as the Assam government obstructed the construction of public houses and shed at the Rimuliang area and market place from time to time. Thereby, obstructing the basic interest and necessities of the people living in this land. As a result, they failed to make full use of all the life opportunities with real life danger looming large, their priorities were linked with basic instincts of survival. Thus, the people could not think of improving their life opportunities.

Ruled by cross border tensions, fear of militancy, the United Liberation Front of Assam and the Hynniew Trep National Liberation Council and various forms of destabilisation often halted their farming activities.

Territorial disputes have significant meaning not only in the society of international border but also in the society within nations because differences and hatred are a hindrance to internal peace which prevents national unity.

Rimuliang has no water supply nor power supply, but pathetic road conditions and a government health centre which is 18kms away from the village. It has only one lower and upper primary school. There is no higher secondary school. Therefore, the ideology of getting quality higher education is out of question. Thus, the people are deprived of their fundamental and human rights. And one cannot think of economic development in this land.

Permanent solutions will have to be made for this dispute. There is complete lack of attention given here whether it is a government in the centre or government of Assam or the government of Meghalaya.

Territorial disputes within one nation need not be referred to the International Court of Justice or International Tribunal because it will only lead to further dispute. A joint commission of both the states or a national Tribunal is good enough to bring about an end to this border dispute.

Looking into the difficulties of the people and the sad plight of this situation, this dispute needs to be analyzed from the perspective of the people rather than from the perspective of the state.

In conclusion, I have one simple question-“Why is the Indian Government silent on this issue?

Is it because, it is not an International border?”

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P.S :- This paper is based on the information gathered from the local inhabitants of Langpoh during my field work.

