

VILLAGE COMMUNITY IN MANIPUR

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According to welbert E More, "Village is a type of community generally small but without exact or common accepted limits. The village is the typical form of rural settlement in most of the world. He further states that the village community may be defined as a group of people who live in permanent dwellings in a defined territory" (John, 1829 - vol. 28, 121).

It is generally believe that prestine Meitei state which was established in 33 AD under the iron hand of N.L. Pakhangba develops through long historical stages. That is why, it require to understand lower primary socio-political organization like village which is basic unit of the formation and development of Meitei state. More or less, Meitei village is not a political unit locked after or supervised by Khunbu-khullakpa, ningthou, etc. bit also acted as the centre for the social linkages of various people within the state.

The traditional Meitei villages were set up on different ways. A village is formed out of the unision of different lineages. No doubt, a principality is consisted number of villages. And Meitei kingdom was also comprised of different principalities like Mangang, Khuman, Luwang, Moirang, Angom, Chinglei and Kha-Nganba. Meitei village is established by the king on the ground of the expansion of habitalational areas, accumulation of wealth, strategical point of view. Besides these, under the stress of certain circumstances, villages were set up by the exiled people within the valley of Manipur. Historically proves that king Pakhangba, after his five days of his coronation, a meeting was held with his courtiers and nobles in which it resolved to set up villages (Singh, 1979, 28). According to the resolution of that meeting, the four nobles such as Khwa, Chingnga, Yucheng and Yuha founded villages. It is recorded to Nongshamei Puya, the royal chronicle about the establishment of new habitalational area of village to the low lying area by king Khagemba by allowing the Cachari Muslim war captives. Such trend of extension of settlement area is also a device to reclaim more fresh land and makes to strengthen the kings power as well as state apparatus. The king's plan of the setting up Pangal (Muslim) village to the southern valley brought to tighten the kingdom's security and make an advancement in the sphere of agriculture.

Traditional Meitei village was categorized into general villages, loi village and kei village. The population consisted of slaves, peasants, labourers and courtiers. The Meitei village had certain characteristics like, common language, geographic and ethnic similarity. Since the Hinduism was adopted as a state religion, not only the hindu temples and mandaps but also homestead of a Brahmin priests, in addition to the temple of traditional forest gods are found in every hinduised Meitei villages, but these are absnt to those of the loi villages.

By and large, the Meitei village is a closed community in that all members are blood relatives. Usually, both lineage and kinship certainty act to form interpersonal relationship on strong communal line. In village, the lineage system makes to strengthen the blood relation, whereas the kinship plays the role to develop a communal link between the two different lineage of the Meitei. The villagers have neither common ancestor nor common worship of their forefathers. Even though the two families are neighbours, they may belong to different clan.

The Meitei villages are found to settle along the rivers, foothills, roads, pathways, around the lakes and mine area. Generally, every village is demarcated by grazing fields, playgrounds, land past-route, river etc. when and where was set up the first village community in this present Manipur valley? It is perplex to cite the place and to fix the date of the establishment first village; although the village communities are found to establish, when the Neolithic settlement began to expand on this present valley. Welbert E. More states that "village communities did not exist before the Neolithic period which saw the invasion of agriculture and domestication of animals" (John, 1829, 121). The Neolithic people of Manipur started to establish their villages to the small hillock and hill range stand on this valley

and periphery foot hill like Nongpok Keithelmanbi. The important Neolithic villages sites are Napachik a small hillock located between the Ithai and Wangu of Bishnupur District and Phunan stands on the Phunan hill of Imphal District (Singh, 1983, 7). Archaeologically proves that the neolithic, villages were acquainted of agriculture. In Manipur, the neolithic villagers performed jhum cultivation. They claimed their agricultural area through mainly burning jungles. Still cattle rearing, hunting and fishing were their predominant occupation. Although the Neolithic village settlement is registered as rather sedentary settlement, the villagers shifted their agricultural area after every few years to be closed to new fields while previously cultivated fields were left fallow.

However, in metal age which is coincided with historical period, a number of village communities were found to expand to this valley. The excavated village sites are Mongjam, Nongpok Keithelmanbi, Panjao Pullum Ching and Moirang (Singh, 1983, 8-9). Before the establishment of Meitei state, various ethnic groups like, the Wangs, Koubas, Angams, Iwangs Khoanps, Chakpas, Kang, Chenglei, Urok Ushai, Haokha, Lokha, Arong etc (Murari, 1985, 96-98) entered in Manipur and settled different parts of Manipur. The processes of amalgamation of different tribes and absorption of smaller immigrant to the powerful tribes took place and settled on this valley. Such happenings also led to emerge another new villages. During the time of N.L. Pakhangba, different hords of migrants such as Poireiton's group, Thongaren's group, Nganhunthong's group entered in Manipur (Kabui, 1991, 86). Pakhangba allowed them to settle in different parts of Manipur. Thus king was a great responsible for establishing number of villages.

Traditional Meitei village community deeply engaged in wet rice cultivation. In additional to this villagers engaged various types of occupations viz. fishing, pottery, cattle rearing, handicrafts, wearing, blacksmith etc. to sustain their economic position. Meitei village was self sufficient that had only a small outflow of surplus food. On the other hand, economic contact between one village and rest of kingdom occurred largely through the market.

Probably, landholding is interrelated to the primary mode of production in the village communities. The wet rice agricultural villages hold more wider area of land than the jhuming villages possessed. Though the state is an absolute owner of land, an individual families were also given the right to held some parcel of land. By dividing the villages of Manipur into Siphai and civilian villages, the king had given the right to the Siphai villages to get one puri of land per head from the land around their villages free of revenue and provided same facility to the civilian villages also to held one puri (acre) of land around their villages but they were to pay land revenue (Singh, 1963, 99) apparently the villagers were main tax payer as well as the labour suppliers to the important communal lands are namely grazing ground, forest land, playground, cremation ground and fishing area.

According to the size and positions, the villages are coined different names like Kunjao (big village), Khunoun (new village), Avang Khunou (Awang norin, un-Village, and nou-new), kha-Khunou (Kha-south and Khunou-new village) and Khulen (Khu+n-age and len-last).

Though monarchy was the form of government, it is praiseworthy that the Meitei King consciously initiated decentralisation programme of administration. He systemtically organised the administration by displaying the art of decentralization. Delinitely the element of well establish village self-government was found to organise in traditional Meitei village. For general village administration, the king employed number of officials. They are the following as: Khulakpa, Luplakpa, Hajaba, Hidang, Pakhangba, Nahrakpa, Ningolakpa. Khunjabanba, Toloihanjaba, Toli Hindang Hiruba, Hinouba and Shellungba. For particular administration of Kei villages viz Khangapok and Kakching, some posts like Ningthou, Senapati, Pachahanba, Achombra, Achrombi, Keirungba, Dolairoihanjaba, Dolai Hidang, Akhanba Hajaba Akhanba Hidang. The post Yupalakpa (supervisor of wine) was also particularly for the loi rich bearer village" (Sharma, 1960, 27).

The village headman was the president of the village court. All disputes of minor events were tried by him in consultation with oidfellows. They decided the cases viz. Nipi Khainaba, Angang Chakthak, adultery, simple hurt, petty money suits and social religious cases (Singh, 1976, 98). The village administrati ve units and Keirup, Shinglup and Leirung.

Keirup : it is a military organisation. According to Nandala! Sharma, the main function of it was to act as a messenger of war. As soon as they hear the sound of drum beating from the capital, they or he informed the adjacent village keirup. This organization was responsible for fighting the tiger menace the catching of tigers and village protection.

Shinglup : It took the responsibility of the village development, programmes i.e. construction of bridges, roads, digging of tanks, draining of rivers and protection of forest. In case of death and illness by sending representatives of each family of this organization extended help.

Leirup : it is also another village organization which was in charge of development functions. Both Keirup and Leirup came to extinct of course, whereas Shinglup is still active in Meitei village.

The first appearance of the new Kukis in Manipur during the reign of Narasingh clearly indicates the sudden change of demographic structure of the hill people. Thus, the population pressure became another major factor in hastening the change of new fields and the increase in the number of villages. In addition to their vegetation, they began to get engaged in Jhum cultivation. Rain water was the only means to grow their cereals. The period of cycle must be five to ten years. The ecological balance of slash and burn agriculture is such that it could only sustain sparse populations. Slash and burn in hill villages varied throughout the region. Some groups like the new Kukis were nomadic in habit and were moving all of their belongings with them while travelling over hill areas, whereas other like old Kuki and Naga maintained permanent communities preferably on hill tops. A considerable change takes place in later period that in the hill area, "near the banks of the river and in the small strip of valley, permanent cultivation was carried on and most of the hill-men had to depend entirely upon their jhum cultivation on the slopes of the hills. The mountain land around the village within the certain fixed bound was usually the property of the village"(Brown, 2001, 77).

It is believed that from the earliest time, the Tangkhuls used to settle on the crest of a hill. They mainly selected their village site where abundant water source existed. Having got a definite village boundary of its own, the Tangkhul village land was classified into the following categories (a) village site, (b) cultivable site, (c) Public land, (d) Grazing ground and (e) Forest land, (Lokendra, 2004, 3) According to R.Brown unlike the Naga tribes, the Kukis were constantly changing the sites of their village to suit the exigencies of their cultivation. On this account the villages of the Khongjais were not that permanent. The village site got altered according to the kind of cultivation near them." (Brown, 2001, 85-86)

The area study of premodern village community in Manipur would have attributed a far reaching benefits in present time. It certainly tells about the origin of village settlement pattern, types of village, landholding system, naming of the village since the dawn of the civilization. Apart from these, it further highlights about the introduction of officials who were sole responsible of village administration and organizations that were mainly established to assist the decentralization process of the kingdom. To a greater extent, such a type of study would encourage a pattern of writing of the Manipur society from the bottom.

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