

**PEOPLE'S INITIATIVES ON AGRICULTURE LAND
MANAGEMENT: A STUDY OF TAIRENPOKPI VILLAGE
OF IMPHAL WEST DISTRICT MANIPUR**

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Introduction:

In Manipur, the traditional governments system continues to manage the natural resources in larger areas of the stat even after the implementation of three tiers of institutions under the Indian Political System. The areas where this system is in vogue are in the entire hills districts and the foothills of all the Scheduled Caste Lois inhabited villages of Manipur. Tairenpokpi is one of the Scheduled Caste villages where the villagers control the larger community agriculture land (with a total area of 24.8 acres) of Umung Laokon and Tairenpokpi Laokon. Half of the landless farmers of the village are dependent on the community agricultural land. It was

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controlled by the Phamneiba for centuries. But recently, the control has been transferred to the Ahals. The village is located at the distance of 17 kilometres from Imphal City.

Objectives

To explore the management of community agricultural land prevalent during the Phamneiba period.

To examine the factors leading to the transfer of management of community agricultural land management from the Phamneiba to the Ahals.

To study the present management system of community agriculture land. By the Ahals

Methodology: *A qualitative method was adopted for the study. Case studies and in-depth interviews were undertaken to collect data for the study.*

Findings: *The findings reveals that the community agricultural land has been the main source of income for celebrating festival of God and the minor maintenance of the intra-village road. The Ahals have been managing the community agricultural land more successfully than the government's institutions in the grassroots level.*

Keywords: *Tairenpokpi, Phamneiba, Ahal, agriculture land and landless farmers.*

Introduction: A community consists of a number of families living together on the basis of kinship, ethnic and caste characteristics with corresponding associations in occupation and ways of life. Common property resources include: land, water-bodies, trees, pathways and the atmosphere. Local communities are dependent on land, water and minerals resources which were available in the area even before the emergence of state power and market forces (Saint, 1993). There are various types of governance - global governance, project governance, information technology governance, participatory governance non-profit governance, Islamic governance, measuring governance and the local government (Dua, 2011). According to Scott (2009), there are broadly two types of people - self-governing and the non-state governed people. Non- state Institutions have been in existence even after the encounter between self- governing and the state governed people. However, at the end of 18th century, they were no longer a majority of the

world population, but spread across the globe. Zomia, is among the largest remaining non-state spaces in the world. Geographically, it occupies the larger area of the periphery in nine states (Southeast Asia, East Asia, and South Asia).

Unlike the others states of India, the larger natural resources in the North Eastern states (except Sikkim) are controlled by the traditional institutions and organisations, even after the implementation of three tier institutions under the Indian Political system. The eight north-eastern states of India, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura occupy 7.9 per cent of country's total geographical area and 3.8 per cent of the total population of the country. It is surrounded by five neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Nepal and Myanmar. In the recent study conducted by (Poffenberger, et.al, 2007, pp 4- 13), it was brought out that the natural resources in these states are largely controlled by the traditional institutions and organisations. The position in the North Eastern states (other than Sikkim) is given in the Table below

Community Managed Forest Areas in the North East

State	% of Forest Area of Total Land Area	% of Forest Areas Controlled by the Community
Arunachal Pradesh	82	62
Assam	30	32
Manipur	78	68
Meghalaya	70	90
Mizoram	87	33
Nagaland	85	91
Tripura	55	41

In **Arunachal Pradesh**, the traditional institutions, or Village Councils, still play a vital role in managing the natural resources. In Banderdewa forest range of Papumpara District, the

community is controlling the natural resources by following 15 traditional management practices since time immemorial (Panggingl.et.al, 2011 pp 169-75).

Assam. The Bodos who are recognised as the largest recognised tribe of the state, have controlled large areas housing community natural resources through traditional institutions like ABSC, BSS, and ADWF for centuries. They have predominantly inhabited the four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri (interview with Niranjay, on 11th August 2012).

Mizoram. In this state, the Mara District Council, the Lal District Council and the Chakma District Council control and manage village affairs through village councils. The government of Mizoram has no control in this matter (Prasad, 2002).

Meghalaya. In Khasi Hill District of the state, 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).

Nagaland. In this state, the 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:

- I) The village level Hoho at every Naga village.
- II) The range, or area level Hoho, at every defined area.
- III) The District level Hoho in every district of the state
- IV) The state level Hoho as the apex body of Hoho. (Ao, 2002).

Tripura. The Jamatia tribe, one of the most organised among the 19 recognised tribes of Tripura, control the forest area through traditional institution, which is called Hoda (Burman, 1983).

Traditional Institutions and the natural resource management:

Manipur is situated in the extreme northeast frontier of India. It was once a princely independent state - inhabited predominantly by the Mongoloid race, with a mixture of slight Aryans. The state has a rich culture and religious peculiarities. Manipur was an Independent State, which was ruled by 76 Kings since 33 A.D. (Singh, 2009). According to 2011 census, it has a population of 2.7 millions. The state occupies a geographical area of 22,327 Sq. Km (0.7 per cent of the total area of India). There are nine districts in Manipur - five in the hills and four in the valley. The hills

cover 90 per cent and plains cover the balance 10 per cent of the total geographical area of the state. The hills are predominantly inhabited by 33 recognised Scheduled Tribes and the valley by the Meiteis, Meitei Pangal and the migrants. The considerable numbers of Lois communities of Scheduled Caste and non- Scheduled Caste members predominantly inhabit the foothills of Manipur.

In Manipur, the traditional institutions continues to play a vital role in controlling and managing the natural resources, even after the implementation of three tiers institution under the Indian political system. The status of the ownership of forests is not clearly defined, except for the reserved forests which constitute only 9 percent of the total forest areas. The hill people claim the ownership of the land and forests, other than reserved forests.

In Makhan Village of Senapati District of the state, the indigenous Liangmei Naga tribe members occupy a large area of about 750 hectares. The village authority, under its traditional institution, manages the land by dividing into five types:

- 1) Settlement areas, including homestead trees and horticulture gardens.
- 2) Agriculture land under sedentary farming system.
- 3) Shifting cultivation areas.
- 4) Protected areas for watershed, water resources and village reserve.
- 5) Economy forest area which overlaps with utilisation forest for timber, firewood and non-timber forest production (Poffenberger, et.al, 2007).

The traditional institutions play a vital role in controlling the community land. The ownership system of the Rongmei Naga tribes varies from village to village. There are generally three pattern of land ownership: (i) clan ownership, (ii) single or multiple clan ownership and (iii) community ownership of land. They predominantly inhabit the Tamenglong district.

The village chiefs own the community land of the Tangkhul Naga tribes. They are the largest of the Naga tribes and predominantly inhabited Ukhrol District of Manipur. The land ownership is broadly divided into four types: (i) the village homestead/settlement area, (ii) the individual reserve forest, (iii) the clan lands, and (iv) village reserves (Devi, 2006).

The village chiefs control the natural resources among the Kuki tribes which predominantly inhabit the Churachandpur district and Saitu Gamphazol and Kangpokpi Sub-divisions of Senapati district. The village chiefs were usually the first settlers of the village (Kabui, 1990). In

Andro Scheduled Caste Chakpa village of Imphal East, the traditional institution of Phamdous of seven members has been controlling the community natural resources since the pre-history period (Basanta, 2008). In Sekmai Scheduled Caste Loi village, of Imphal West District, the traditional institution Phamneiba of thirteen members has been controlling the community natural resources since their settlement (Khwairakpam, 2012. P.p. 1-10).

The study village: Tairenpokpi village is located in the foothills at a distance of 19 km from the capital city of Imphal. The village connects Imphal, either through Chakpa Phayeng or through the New Cachar Road of National Highway No. 53. It is predominantly inhabited by 120 households of the Chakpa Loicommunity. The village falls under the Sekmai (SC) Constituency. The village is surrounded by Atong Khuman village in the east, Chakpa Phayeng village in the north, Sangaitel village on the south and the forest in the west. Tairenpokpi village is one of the oldest Chakpa villages in Manipur. The first villagers, the descendents of Ningthoujam Paramsingh, are believed to be separated from their kin in the Leimaram village about four generations ago. The reason for separation was the elopement within the clan and pressure from the relatives. Later on, after the settlement of the villages, some people have also shifted here for their convenience, *data extracted by elderly men of the villagers and Phayeng Khullakpa Ningthoujam Toya Chakpa of the neighbouring village.*

Research Issue: Manipur had undergone many significant administrative changes during the kingdom of Manipur, British rule from 1892 to 13 August 1947, implementation of Manipur State Constitution Act of 1947 and end of monarchy. After the merger to Indian union from 15 October 1949, the three tier institutional system was also implemented. Despite all these, the traditional institutions still play a vital role in managing the larger natural resources. Tairenpokpi is also one of the Chakpa Scheduled Caste villages which have been controlling the community agricultural land with a total area of Pari Mapan Marak (24.8 acres) since the beginning. The uniqueness of Tairenpokpi village is that the age group members of 45 to 57 years control the community natural resources.

Rationale for the study: The present study explores the historical background of traditional institutions Phamdou and their management pattern from the beginning to 1989. It explores the factors responsible for the transfer of the control from Phamdou to Ahals. It also explores the latest pattern of community agricultural land management through the case studies.

Methodology:

A qualitative method was adopted for the study. Five case studies and in-depth interviews were conducted during the field work from the insider perspective. Collected data's were transcript thematically by the researcher.

Reason for choosing qualitative methods: The qualitative method was considered appropriate for this study because it is exploratory in nature.

Objectives:

- 1) To explore the management of community agricultural land during the Phamneiba period,
- 2) To examine the factors responsible for the transfer on community agricultural land management from Phamneiba to Ahals.
- 3) To study the present management system of Ahal on community agriculture land.

Division of age group among the Tairenpokpi village: A man's life of Tairenpokpi village is broadly divided into six main stages: (i) Angang (birth to 11 years), (ii) Sansen Naha (12 to 16 years), (iii) PakhangNingol (17 to 23 years), (iv) Thoumi (24 to 44 years), (v) Lai Haraoba Committee (45 to 50 years), and (vi) Ahal (51 and above) date extracted by interviewing *Ningthoujam Sanajaoba* one of the Lai Haraoba Committee members on 26 July and 11 September.

The agricultural land management system during the Phamneiba Period: The community agricultural land, with a total area of Pari Mapan Marak (24.8 acres), was controlled by the traditional institution of Phamdou for about 150 years. The Phamdou was represented by 13 members. They were: Khullakpa, Lupllakpa, Khunjahanba, Yupalba, Teloihanjaba, Teloihidang, Hijanglakpa, Pakhanglakpa, Naharakpa, Loumirakpa, Loumidang, Chabolhanjaba and Laiselungba. During the kingdom of Manipur, the king of Manipur used to appoint the members of Phamdou. They enjoyed full autonomy in the village administration. After the end of monarch and merger of Manipur to Indian Union, the villages used to elect Phamdou from among the able villagers. They administered the village, as long as they enjoyed the confidence of the villagers. The Community agricultural land has been a source of livelihood for the landless farmers since the beginning. It is also the main source of income for the community festivals. They only collect in kind from the tenants. The total quantity of the collected food grains was not announced to the villagers. Like the others Meitei's, the Tairenpokpivillage also celebrated Lai Haraoba festival

(the festival of God and deities) since the beginning. They celebrate the Lai Haraoba festival every alternate year. There are five types of Lai Haraoba in Manipur: (i) ChakpaHaraoba, (ii) KangleiHaraoba, (iii) KakchingHaraoba, (IV)) Moirang Haraoba, and (v) Sekmai Haraoba (Khwairakpa and Khwairakpam, 2012. pp.1-9). They celebrated Chakpa Haraoba as they belong to Chakpa community. The income of the community agricultural land was being utilised for Lai Haraoba. Sometime, it was utilised for intra-village development pathways and roads. The traditional institution of the Phamdou was abolished on December 1989, *data extracted by interviewing Mr Ningthoujam Tomba who is popular known as Engine Tomba one of the initiators of Ahal on 28 to 30 July 2012.*

Community agricultural land management at present:

The management of community agricultural land was replaced by age group of Lai Haraoba Committee and Ahalon from January 1990 with three objectives:

- 1) Deserving landless tenants should have the right to cultivate community land till they have their own land.
- 2) If any tenants own agricultural land, they have to cancel the right to cultivate community land.
- 3) Fixed amounts of food grains or cash should be collected from the villagers

The transfer of the management responsibility from the Ahals was mainly due to two factors: firstly, cancellation of some names from the list of deserving landless tenants and giving the right to their kith and kin among the Phamdou. Secondly, failure of the general body meeting news and tendency of not taking the people's opinion into consideration. The age group 45 to 50 years play a vital role in managing the community agricultural land. They are known as Lai Haraoba Committee. They are mandatorily required to manage the natural resources. The age group 51 and above is known as Ahal. They are the advisors with legislative power in the village administration. The yearly food grain share from of the community is Phao Pot Taruk(traditional six bags of food grain) from 0.62 acres of land. There are thirty two households owning agricultural land. Out of 25 per cent landless farmers, 18 household tenants are depending on community agricultural land for their livelihood, data extracted by interviewing Mr. Ningthoujam Lokendro on 1 to 3 August 2012 one of scholars with a M.Sc. degree.

The researcher conducted five case studies from the diverse families' backgrounds. These are discussed below

Case Studies:

Case 1: Ningthoujamongbi Tombi is a 58 years old widow. Her husband passed away 15 years ago. She had studied till Anisuba standard (class II) from a Government School. She belongs to Scheduled Caste (SC) Chakpa Loi. She has two daughters and one son. Her family has been cultivating the community agricultural land - an area of Laorak (1.24 acres) - after her marriage. The community agricultural land is the most fertile field in the village. It is located 1 km away from the village. When her husband was alive, her family could afford the education expenditure for their children. But after he died, her first and second daughters dropped out from school due to poor economic conditions. Gradually they started assisting their mother for the family's livelihood. Despite all the family problems, her youngest son has been studying out of Manipur since July 2010 from the income earned from the community land. There was no kind of financial assistance from the government. The land management of Lai Haraoba Committee and Ahal is better than that provided by government institutions.

Case 2: Chingakham Ningthoujaisa 52 years old married man and has three children. He is a cultivator by profession. His family migrated from Andro village before he was born. His wife distils local wine and rears pigs. He has been cultivating one Laorak (1.24 acres) of the community agricultural land since 1989. It provides sufficient food grains for consumption of the family after the payment of yearly taxes. In addition to the community land, he has been cultivating another private land of one Laorak from 2007 to earn additional income. The community agriculture land is more productive, carries fewer taxes and even provides for exemption from payment yearly taxes during the disaster seasons. He even admitted his children's in a private school. At the time of the study, the first and second daughter was studying in class VIII and VI and the last son was studying in class V at Tairenpokpi English School. The community land management is better than that of any government's institution because there is a feeling of belongingness.

Case 3: NingthoujamSanajaoba is a 55 year's old married cultivator. He has five children. His wife distils wine and rears pigs, chicken and ducks. He has been cultivating the community agricultural land of one pare (2.48 acres) since 1980. His family is not only dependent on community agricultural land for food grain consumption, but this is also the source of income provide for the expenditure of his three daughter and two sons. His first and second daughters

completed general nursing & midwifery (GNM), the third son is teaching at the local private school, the fourth son is studying GNM at Hyderabad and the last son is studying in class VIII in the local private school. During the 35 years of his cultivation, the community exempted him from paying the yearly taxes for a year in 1989 due to floods in the village. He is happy at being a villager even without owing any agricultural land.

Case 4: Ningthoijam Sanamacha is a married youth of 29 years. His mother passed away after the birth of his youngest sister. When Sanamacha was 17 years old, His father passed away after a long treatment. He borrowed a huge amount of money from Marup and private a money lender at a high interest rate for his father's treatment. He sold his agricultural land of sangamahum for paying back all the debts. He has two dependant siblings a brother and a sister. He was one of the best students and topped in IIIrd till VIIIth standards during his studies. He dropped out from school and subsequently started cultivating the community land of one laorak (1.24) for his livelihood. His brother and sister also dropped out from school due to shortage of income and to assist the family. The community agricultural land has been the only source of livelihood for his family. Recently, he got married and lives a descent life with his wife and siblings. There are no grants and assistance from the government and NGOs. He thanks the forefathers for controlling the most fertile community agricultural land. He is satisfied with the management system of Lai Haraoba Committee and Ahal because there is no bias of any sort.

Case 5: Ningthoujam Inakhunbi is a 40 years old married woman from a nuclear family. Her husband, Ningthoujam Nongal is handicapped. She has seven sons. The five older sons dropped out from early schooling due to extreme poverty. The two sons got married and separated from the family. Recently, she sold her agricultural land for two reasons; first, to repay the amount which the family borrowed for the marriage of her two sons and secondly, to cultivate the community agricultural land. There has been a customary law and agreement to give more preference to the agricultural landless villagers for the cultivation. She has been cultivating a total area of Laorak (1.24) of the community land with her sons. It has been their livelihood source since 2006. She thanks the Lai Haraoba Committee and Ahal for not showing gender differentiation while allotting community land for cultivation.

Case Analysis: The case studies reveal that the tenants of community agricultural land are the landless farmers. The landless farmers are from the diverse family backgrounds. They enjoy

certain rights to cultivate community agricultural land as long as they not have their own land. The community agricultural land is located near the village. It is the most fertile and productive agricultural land at Tairenpokpi village. The yearly share/taxes of community are fixed by the Lai Haraoba Committee and the Ahal. This is accepted by the villagers. There is no bias, in terms of gender, age, clan and sub-clan, .in managing the community agricultural land. The customary law has been followed by the villages since January 1990. About 50 per cent of the landless farmers are dependent for their livelihood on community agricultural land. They prefer their traditional way of community agricultural land than from any government's institution, finding NGOs and private donors.

Conclusion: In Manipur, the natural resources are closely related to their livelihood and their settlement. The tribes of Kukis and Nagas controlled the larger areas in the hills through traditional institutions, even after the introduction of district councils. The Chakpa and Sekmai Scheduled Caste Loi members are still controlling the natural resources of forests, agricultural lands, and rivers even after the introduction of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The uniqueness of the community agricultural land management among the Scheduled Caste Lois Tairenpokpi is the land management system through the age group in between 45 to 70 years. About 50 per cent of the landless farmers of the village are dependent for their livelihood on community agricultural land. The traditional land management has been accepted by the people of the village and it is the main sources of community festivals.

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