

Editorial

Imphal, Thursday June 15, 2017

Mr. CM, it should be Rivers in Imphal and not only Imphal River

Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's serious concern to the flash flood, which had breached River Banks at many places, is indeed the need of the hour. There may be many reasons of the flash flood which had inundated many homes in valley area but one common notice is the constructions of structures on the river bank.

'Mora' Cyclone was considered reasons for heavy rains in NE states particularly in Manipur and subsequent floods and Mudslide in the state during June first week.

When the impact of the Mora Cyclone flood is yet to be recovered Monsoon Rains started sprinkling to neutralize the summer hit. The nature's cycle turns devastation. Overnight torrential rains overflow almost all major Rivers in Imphal. Several homes were inundated living many homeless as River water over flows and breached at many places.

Construction of infrastructures on the bank of rivers is also one reason for the uncontrolled flash flood. When Mr. Chief Minister said that his govt. is all set for clearing up all construction along the River banks of Imphal River, he did really showed his concerns. But what about other structures that are constructed, giving obstacle to the river flow at Nambul, Irl, Thoubal, Wanjing river etc.

It has been discussed time and again that the massive deforestation that has been taking place in catchment area of rivers flowing in Imphal is the cause of this artificial flood. Why don't our Chief Minister think of some long lasting plan to solve the artificial flood.

The need of the hour is to co-ordinate the Forest Dept., Ecology and Environment wing as well as other concern dept. like the IFCD, PWD etc.

Let the future generation talk about the good works of Today's govt. led by Chief Minister N. Biren Singh by making sure that no artificial flood occurs in the future.

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Contd. from previous issue

Manipur: The Boiling Bowl of Ethnicity

By: Dr. Aaron Lungleng

The Meitais

According to Iboogohal Singh, "The original inhabitants of Manipur were the Kirats (some tribes of Nagas), by that time, Manipur valley was full of water" (Singh, 1987:10). The present valley inhabitants (Imphal valley) were known by different names by their neighbors prior to being called the Meitai. Shans or Pongs, and the Keratis called the area Cassay, the Burmese Kathe, and the Assamese Mekle. Mythological origin dates back to 1500 BC begin with the reign of the "Konchin Tukthapa Ipu Athoupa Pakhangpa" (Pakhangpa was the name given to him meaning "The one who knows his father"). He gave birth to seven clans, 1. Mangang, 2. Luwang, 3. Khuman, 4. Angom, 5. Moirang, 6. Khapa-Nganba, and 7. Salai-leisangthem. According to *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, the royal chronicle, Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33-154 AD) was the first ruler and the creator of Meiteileiapok or Kangleipak (possibly could refer to mosquitoes, "kang"-mosquitoes, "leipak"-land as mentioned in the Nagas folklores that the mosquito menace cause to migrate at a higher altitude). He was the first historical ruler whose reign began in 33 AD according to the *Cheitharol Kumbaba*.

Contradictions surface when recorded historical facts are referred. The Ningthouja royal dynasty recorded Panheiba (1720-1751) as the first monarch and Bodkhardra Singh (1941-1949) as the last king of the 16 monarchs of Kangleipak. Therefore, Horam observed that the origin of the Meitais is obscure (Horam 1990, 4). This has become a subject of endless debate (Taraop 1993, 62). Kumar states that the great controversies still persist regarding the origin of the Meitais (Kumar 2001, 3). This is because most of their written records were composed after they became Hindus and therefore are not very reliable (Bhattacharya 1963, 180; Dun 1992, 15).

The literature shows that the name of the present Manipur was given to this land after the declaration of Hinduism as the state religion during the reign of Pamheiba (1702-1751) whose Hindu name is Garibniwaz, in the beginning of the eighteenth century (Kumar 2001, 1) that the name 'Manipur' came into being. According to Kumar, she (Manipur) had different indigenous names such as Tillikokong Anban in Haya Chak, Mira Pongthakoma in Haya Chak, Hanna sambakoma loiba in Khumng Chak and Muwappai Mayai Sumtongpan in early Konna (Langba) Chak. In the later ages, it was popularly known as Kanglei Pungmayol, Kangleipak, and Meitreibak. Her other names were Chakpa Langba, then Muwappai, and then Wangang Tengthong Mayung Kuiba Lemthong Maphei Pakpa and, later on she was called Poirei Meitai after the advent of Poireiton (Kumar 2001, 1-2).

The Kanglei which is now called "Kangla" was the first capital of the kingdom called "Kangleipak". The "Kangleichas" (the valley settlers now Meitai) were the subject of this small dynasty strictly restricted to the present Imphal valley. During the reign of its 16 royal kings there were no historical accounts of the Meitai invading the Naga country and vice-versa though relatively surrounded by their kingdom. She was instead privilege to have Nagas who strongly instituted socialist democratic village state engaging inter-ethnic ferocious Head hunting that sealed any foreign invasion.

Most of the time, Meitreibak/Kangleibak was engaged in the game of thron. History would say that the defeated brother would flee to Carchar or Awa in most of their confrontations to refuge in their kingdom. Gaining their favor, they would come back to Meitreibak either in assistance of the Awa or Cachar or Ahom and in the later British East India Company. There were a number of wars between the discontented royal brothers.

In 1758, the Burmese King Alaungpaya invaded Meiteileiapok. Then, Meidingu Marjit (1813-1819) who fled to Awa after defeating Chaurajit by the suzerain Awa King ruled Kangleipak for six years. The catastrophe of Chahi Taret Khuntakpa (the Seven Years Devastation (1819-26) that nearly depopulated was the outcome of annoyance or ungrateful attitude shown towards the Awa (Burmese) King who enthroned Meidingu to Meitreibak Kingdom. The new king of Awa, Bagyidaw, invited Marjit to

attend his coronation ceremony to pay homage to him. Marjit refused to attend the coronation, which offended the Burmese King. Thus, he sends a large force under the command of General Maha Bandula to humble Marjit. Has human grateful attitude learnt Meitreibak would never face such catastrophe as that brought about by the Burmese conquest and brought under the rule of Awa for the seven years between 1819 and 1826, which is known as Chahi Taret Kuntakpa in the history of Meitreibak until the British East India Company's interest to conquest the southeast Asia surface in 1834 (Anglo Burmese War). Then, on Meitreibak fought for British Suzerainty during the Battle of Yangan (May-December 1824), Battle of Danubyu (March-April 1825), Arakan campaign (February-April 1825), 17 September 1825, an armistice and the Battle of Prome (November-December 1825) until the Burmese were forced to accept the British terms to end the war, signing the Treaty of Yandabo in February 1826.

Humiliation was not learned yet, he fled from Meitreibak to Cachar. Seeing the kindness of the Cachar prince and weakness too, the fleeing prince starts vying for conquest to the Cachar territory. In 1819, three brothers occupied Cachar and drove Govinda Chandra out to Sylhet. Later, Meidingungu Gambhir Singh (1826-1834) with help from the British East India Company expelled the Burmese of Awa from Meitreibak beyond the Ningthi Turel (Chindwin River) and regained the lost Kingdom. Meidingungu Naga Singh (1844-1850) was the second cousin of Gambhir Singh and the regent, Kumindin, mother of Chandrakirti, was dissatisfied with the arrangement and fled to Cachar with her son. At the wish of the people of Meitreibak he ascended the throne in 1844 at the age of 51. He then shifted the capital from Langthabal to Kangla where he reconstructed the two statues of the Kangla Sha at Utra made by Meidingungu Chaurajit and that the Burmese had dismantled and destroyed.

The same story repeats; Meidingungu Chandrakirti (1850-86) came from Cachar, defeated Debendra and regained the throne in 1850. During his reign, all the sacred and holy places inside Kangla were developed and maintained. The revolt of the throne would go on until The Anglo-Manipur War of 1891 or known as Manipur expedition. Three columns of troops from Kohima, Silchar and Tamu were sent to Manipur. The strongest resistance from Meitreibak took place at Khongim on 25 April.

Ever since the inception of a princely kingdom known as Kangleipak and adoption of literature to record in its royal monarch ruled, no historical accounts mentioned either animosity nor suzerainty by its kingdom over the hill tribes (Hao) and vice versa. Meitreibak might at was successively invaded subjugated three times by the Awa. But, along with the loss of Meitreibak, Nagas do not lose their sovereign village state. Therefore, mentioned may not be found in any historical treaty of Meitreibak or the Awa or the Ahom and the Takhen (Tripura) that, Nagas pieces/fragments are subjected to. Unlike dynastic princely kingdom, the Nagas village state differs. To conquer/invalidate the Nagas one has to wage war to each and every village state in the hills. In Nagas traditional village republic state, other village does not hold any domination. Each sovereign village republic state enjoys separate autonomy and administration within their jurisdiction. In this society, the concept of submission does not subsist. The fall of the father shall be vengeance by their responsible kins or community as a whole. In such a circumstance, one may overpower anyone for some certain events, but the vengeance search party would lurk around until the heads of the games are brought home. Therefore, to venture endless warfare is undesired to the neighboring kingdom be it Ahom, Awa or the Kangleichas and even to the British. Therefore, noninterference in the Nagas affairs has been the policy ever since their first contact. So, instead of provocation, they are left isolated. Thus, semi or non-administrative zone comes about during the rule of the British East India Company. Since the ancient time, Nagas have been known to be generous and kind to the

neighbors. Several times, neighboring kingdom men and royals pay a visit to the friendly Naga villages; they were treated as an honored guest due to generations' contacts through trade even in the time of headhunting. Their sympathetic treatment cannot therefore be taken as conquest in any sense. Today the dynastic princely subjects called the Kangleichas the central valley (Imphal valley), which is made up of only 700 square miles (Singh, 1980).

The origin of the Meitais cannot be precisely determined from the literature available. Horam observed that the origin of the Meitais is obscure (Horam 1990, 4). Scholars differ sharply in their opinion on whether the Meitais are Aryans or Mongoloids. There are those who claim that the Meitais are descendants of Arjuna of Mahabharata and are therefore Aryan in origin. But the journey of Arjuna to Manipur by the sea cannot be Manipur/Kangleipak found in the Mahabharata.

Referring the folk tales, the mitai is the younger brother of the Nagas. Therefore, without the representation of the Nagas, Leiharaoaba/Haojongba cannot be observed. This tradition is still practised till today. "There can be little doubt that some time or other the Naga tribes to the north made one of their chiefs Rajah of Manipur, and that his family, while, like the Manchus in China and other conquerors, adopting the civilization of the country, retained some of their old customs. This is shown in the curious practices of Ranece appearing in Naga costume; also in the palace a house built like a Naga's, and wherever he goes, he is attended by two or three Manipuris with Naga arms and accoutrements" (Sir James Johnston, 1896). From time immemorial Nagas and Meitai does not, neither raid or conquering. It is suspected that a policy of inflicting one another and subjugation was not adopted between them which must be due to their bond of common descent/brotherhood. Naturally, by the origin if the elder brother is a Mongoloid that younger brother must belong to the same unless matrimonial intervene to become blended or otherwise. So, traditional theory, which is widely accepted by scholars and writers, is that the Meitais originated from the Mongoloid race. Historians and scholars such as Roy, Thuma, Horam, Hodson, N. Tombi Singh, and Parratt support this tradition. N. Tombi Singh, a Meitai scholar, states, "Many... think that there is a basic difference between the valley people of Manipur (Meitais) and those who are in hill areas. In fact, it is not so. The entire people of Manipur belong to the same ethnic group and trace their origin more or less to the Sino-Tibetan group of human species." (Singh, 1972). Despite the various claim, "It is difficult for the Meitais to claim any racial purity due to their long stories of migration and a series of invasion by the Aryans, Shans, and Myanmar" (Singh 1988, 149). Beyond doubt, Meitai would show an admixture of race as seen through the many invasions by awe or expulsion to Ahom and Cachar. Such blended communities cannot be easily ascertained to one racial stock anthropologically. Yet, the majority of the population would manifest a mongoloid racial physiology due to intermingled to the same racial carrier but the smaller immigrant Bengali stock. Yet, Mongoloid-Aryans blended race existence is an admitted fact. "However, it is beyond doubt that they originally belonged to the Mongoloid race. Another group of Meitai people, who are the Brahmins believed to have come from Bengal with the coming of Hindu Vaishnavism during the seventeenth century. They are altogether a different people group, probably belonging to the Aryan race" (Rimai, 2017).

The Kuki
Sir James Johnston (1896) said that the original home of the Kukis cannot be correctly ascertained, but there seem to be traces of them as far south of the Malay Peninsula. Once during Hudson was on expedition in the south they happen to come across a travelling band and when asked where was their home, this was what T.C Hudson (1911) quoted the words of Kuki chief, "we are like birds of the air, we make our nests here this year, and who knows where we shall build next year". It makes one understand beyond doubt that the Kukis are migrant nomadic tribe migrating from places to places

up till the beginning of the 20th century. Whereas, the Nagas and Meitais at that time had already set up a proper village state on the other hand the Meitai had established their own kingdom.

The probability of the Kukis migrating upward from the Burma cannot be amenable. But the genesis of the word "Kuki" is woven into confusion and complexity. It is best guess that the term "Kuki" must be given by the outsiders.

The precise description of Kuki by G.A. Grierson reveals in his Linguistic Survey of India, Voll-III, Part-III, Calcutta, 1904, P. 23 that the Kukis, are migrants, shifting their village sites every 4 or 5 years and never take to permanent irrigation and terraced rice cultivation by means of irrigation. Their cattle are invariably 'Methun'. On the other hand, Nagas had permanent village sites and permanent irrigated and terraced rice fields and they keep ordinary Indian cattle. While Miri, Mrinal (2003) states that there is no historical information about the Kuki before the 19th century. Likewise, Johnstone, states that, Kuki settlement in Manipur was started from 1830 (Manipur and Naga Hills, 1896, p. 25) which affirms that Kukis are the last immigrants into the present northeast states of India.

Earlier, this Tibeto-Burman language speaker Kuki spread throughout northwestern Burma, and the Chittagong Hill Tract of Bangladesh. Now in Northeast India, they are present in all the states except Arunachal Pradesh. "This dispersal across international borders is a culmination of punitive actions made by the British during their occupation of India" (T. Haokip, 2013). At some point of time, 'Chin' or 'Kuki' or 'Lushai-Zos' were compounded taking as synonymous. It was due to social and political isolation even non-Kukis are also at random amalgamate into the fold of Kuki species by the outsiders. On the basis of linguistic affinity G.A. Grierson placed the so-called Chin-Lushai-Kuki people in the Kuki-Chin group of Tibeto-Burman family. He, however, correctly states that the people do not themselves recognize these names (G.A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. III Part III, Calcutta 1904.) thereby a generic group such as 'Khulni' who claimed to have originated from a 'Kuhl' meaning a 'cave' are said to be a total distinct ethnic group from the Kukis. Similarly, the Hmars (scattered in different parts of North-East India and Burma, most of them live in Churachandpur district and concentrate in and around Tipaimukh, Vangai ranges and Jiribam areas) strongly protested to be called a sub tribe of Kuki on the grounds that—the Hmars never called themselves even to their forefathers and would never do so in future. They believed that they were also originated from 'Suiling' somewhere in china similar to the Paite who believed that they were originated from "Chinnuu" (Chinwe) somewhere from Southern part of China or Chin hills. Different Zomi tribes hold the common belief that they originally emerged out of a cave or hole. This mythological cave is known by various names like Khul, Khur, Khurpui, Khuru-bijur, Shiung, Chinlung, etc. by various tribes like Thadou (Shaw 1929:24-26), Lushai (Shakespear: 1912), Lakher (Parry 1976:4), Tedim/Paite-Chin (Kamkhenthang 1967:1-2) and Moyon-Monsang, etc. There is another Chin-Kuki-Mizo group who claimed to be a 'lost tribe' of Israel, a descendent of Bnei Menashe. Several hundreds have immigrated back to Israel during the late 1990's. Due to such different notion of ethnicity resulted to Hmar-Kuki conflict in 1960 and in 1997-1998 there was an instance of violent ethnic clash between the **Thadous** and the **Paites** owing to the policy of *Kukiazation*. Dr. H. Kamkhenthang therefore, contends that Kuki or Chin terms are used only in reference to the outside world, but not in use among and within the group. The ethos of belonging to the Chin-Kuki group did not have a common name anymore after it was disowned by the ethnos who were once known as Kuki. Excepting **Thadou**, most of the tribes now want to identify themselves by their individual tribal names and not as Kukis. (Dr. H. Kamkhenthang, "Groping for Identity", pp. 1-16.)

(to be contd...)