

Editorial

Thursday, January 17, 2019

Has the Loktak Lake mortgaged to Multinational Company?

January 8, 2019, a cabinet meeting's first agenda was Amendment of Loktak Protection Act. There were also two other agenda, but the matter discussed on that cabinet meeting about the issue of Citizen Amendment Bill was not listed in the agenda but, picked up as a matter of urgency. What was the amendment that has decided by the state cabinet could not be known at the moment as, the matter has not been let public. But there are certain things which worried the people particularly the environmentalists as talks are around that the government may mortgage the Loktak Lake to a multinational company to convert it into a world class resort. Source with the Imphal Times said that a multinational company from outside the state has offered a sum of Rs. 500 crore for completion of the deal to construct world class resort in and around Sendra area and also in the middle of the Loktak Lake. For that the state government has to clean all the occupants of the Loktak Lake and recently a phone called to this media house by a resident of Sendra told that some people who identified themselves as government officials had ordered the owners of the Phumdi huts and those sheltering in the periphery of the Loktak Lake to leave as they are going to take up developmental works.

In April, 2011, round 1000 people mostly women belonging to fishing families from the surroundings of the Loktak resolved to press the Government for scrapping controversial Manipur Loktak Lake (Protection) Act, 2006.

Many who discussed the Act threadbare highlighted fundamental flaws in the process of formulating the Act that directly affected the livelihoods of thousands of fishers' population (90%) surviving by the Lake and stressed the importance of the rights of community participation in protecting the endangered ecology of Loktak Lake.

Many women leaders and men representing various fishers' organizations expressed serious concerns on the intent of the Act which overlooked the socio-economic and cultural rights of the people and ecological relationships with the Lake. The Act was term by many as a direct and immediate threat to the rights to daily livelihood

As of now, there is no official document to show whether the government is amending the act for the good of the people. But the source said that, the amended act may be another nightmare for the people of the Loktak Lake.

Well, Loktak lake is situated approximately 38 km south of Imphal (the capital of Manipur) in the Bishnupur district of Manipur. It acts as a natural reservoir for the rivers and streams of the valley and hills in the state. Loktak is the largest freshwater inland natural reservoir in the eastern region of the country and has been identified as a major Indian wetland by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The rich wildlife/biodiversity of this area had earned it the status of a Ramsar site of international importance in 1990. Loktak Lake also finds a mention in the Montreaux Record, which is a record of Ramsar sites 'where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring or are likely to occur'.

The open waterbody provides a habitat to migratory water birds in winter months, starting from October up to March-April. An area of around 5200 ha in the southern part of Loktak lake, inclusive of the Keibul Lamjao portion, was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1954, but the area was later reduced to around 4050 ha and was declared a national park, called Keibul Lamjao National Park (KINP), in 1977 under the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, and the Manipur Wild Life (Protection) Rules, 1974.

In addition, the state forest department (wildlife wing) has proposed the adjoining area of Pumen Pat (approx. 2200 ha, located on the south-eastern side of Loktak Lake and across the eastern bank of Manipur River) as a bird sanctuary.

Vegetation growth like tou, singnang and singmut in the park area provide shelter to various species of wildlife including the sangai or swamp deer, kharsa or hog deer, lamok (wild boar), sanamba (common otter), moirang sathibi achouba (large Indian civet), moirang sathibi macha (small Indian civet) and kak-thenggu (Malayan box turtle) among others.

There are approximately 55 suburban and rural settlements within and around Loktak Lake. The predominant community is meitei (both Vaishnavite Hindus and orthodox meiteis) with a sparse population of meitei Christians and meitei Pangal (Manipur Muslims) living in separate pockets around the lake. There is also a small population of kabui (rongmei tribe) in Toubul village near Bishnupur district headquarters on the western side of the lake.

It is estimated that around 30,000 people depend on fishing for their livelihood in the lake area. The number of hutments constructed on the phumdis is estimated to be more than 1000, with a rough population of about 4000 individuals. The total human population in Bishnupur district according to the 1991 census is 1,80,773 with a density of 364 persons per sq km.

Well if the source, about mortgaging the Loktak Lake than, Manipur is not only losing the gift of the mother nature but also livelihood of many thousands will be shattered.

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Symbolism in the Tribal Art of Manipur

By- Mutua Bahadur

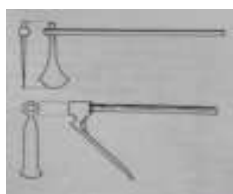
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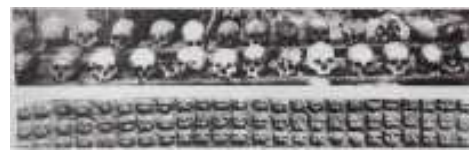
Various tribes inhabiting in the hills of Manipur since the earliest times had their respective separate art forms. In all material objects used for their existential day-to-day need, and in various activities in their lives, carving and painting had been compulsorily associated since times immemorial. On walls of houses and on objects and artefacts related to mortuary rites, the tribes used to carve and paint. Easy motifs like birds and insects were used to be carved on wood and attached to tips of house-roofs, with a sign of V. The origin of these arts was traced to the practice of representation of real life events, imitations of happenings and experiences of individuals in day to day life. These carvings and paintings were reminders to those incidents or achievements of individuals etc. Certain villages today reflect genuine concern for the continuity of these art works and cultural expressions and with it a desire to preserve these art forms had also arisen. Influences from modern times were sometimes assimilated in the continuity of these forms and at the same time there were strong indicators to preservation and continuity without substantial departures from original models. Many villagers however are still following traditional practice. A few areas where modern education had penetrated show awareness of the necessity of preserving these arts. All these art forms were built up on the intrinsic relationship with the culture, customs and traditions of tribal life. With the passage of time, no doubt new forms and concepts were however added to the carvings and Paintings.

These tribes did not know the use of the saw for piecemeal use of planks. To hack a piece of wood took quite a long time amongst these tribes. In order to hack a solid timber, the Maos used a tool called 'Mari' (axe), with an elongated chopping system on the whole length of the wood and then using the same process on the reverse side of the plank, and thus finally getting two planks from one after a repetition of these chopping processes. In order to piece out from one, the wedge system was utilized. After that the axe work continued. This system was similar amongst various tribes. To carve the figures on the planks, the tool called 'Chiro', which had a curved face, with flat tooth, 30cm. in length, and 5cm. broad, and the angular fixing of the handle at 45 degree, was utilized. For the Tangkhul, the tool was called 'Thingsokngaho', which was similar to the chiro, but slightly larger in size with 50cm. in length, 13cm. in breadth and weighing about 2 kilograms. These tools were never sold in the markets. Local blacksmiths used to prepare these tools, and were also self-made by the owner.



Mari (Axe), Below: Chiro (Carving tool)

At each carved houses of tribes, it was customary to have animal heads, especially buffalo heads and mithun (bofrontalis) heads. These animal heads have their distinctive differences from one village to another. Most of the Mao tribal houses have animal heads carved in high relief, and with



The skulls in the verandah of the Tangkhul's house at Ukhrul Khunjao

dimensional thrusts.

SOLAR SYMBOLS

Choosing certain suitable spaces at the walls, the tribes used to carve or paint the images of the sun, moon, stars etc. At Mao, taking the cue from the brightness of the sun, they used red and white colours to paint circular symbols. For the moon, it was usual to draw two circles one inside the other, the thickness of the lines in the circles somewhat similar to one another and these lines were painted by the same colours. At sight, these figures reflect the gentleness of the moon. The Tangkhul houses however have carvings of many other suns, moons and stars but the carvings are sharply on linear forms. The representation of the sun is basically designed with delineation of inner and outer circles with division into smaller and bigger ones, with the lines wavy, elliptical, joining in the circles with an intense relief. At first sight, they give an impression of a circling ball of fire. At some Mao tribal houses, the moon is represented by a circle on high relief. There are also bending and curving lines on the faces of the circle, in order to represent the blurs on the face of the moon. The stars are represented on the upper beams and cross shaped X on the tip of the roofs. At some front friezes of Meetei nobilities' houses, they have paintings of a circular base in which were projected representations of the sun and the moon. At the 'ahongyum' of the Kabuis, paintings of the sun, moon and stars were traditionally done. There were similarities between the Kabui and Tangkhul tribes on the practice of representation of the sun and moon. They however have the practice of carving the half moon representing the moon. In most of the tribal houses, the practice of carving and painting the sun, moon and stars are done on the upper corners of the front walls. At Mao areas, the moon is represented in between the two horns of animals.

Other Aspects

Some of the things represented on the wall of tribal houses are scabbards, spear, spear handle, wooden seats etc. Some of the wooden seats are represented without any differences, the carvings done with a broadened upper frame and the waists narrowed down. The Tangkhul carved the scabbards in lines. At Mao, Purul, Oinam, Tungam etc., there are carvings of discs, with a thickness of approximately

2.5 centimeters from the surface, with a hollowed out depression 5 centimeters diameter. At Tusem khunjao, there is a carving of a mortuary symbol called 'hakoi', a sort of conical headgear, with inner and outer lines. There is also a pyramidal, gothic type symbol called 'kongra', which is representation of the presiding deity of the ravines below the hills. At the Tangkhul houses, some very prominent lines and designs are carved in the geometrical pattern, which are intrinsically one with the designs embroidered in the traditional costumes of these tribes. The Kabuis also paint the traditional cloth designs on the walls of the ahongyums. The Kabuis reflect articles of day-to-

houses). There was also the custom of building as many as nine different houses if one wish to build the 'talangkai' (ahongyum). The community danced and spent in merriment the entire wealth of the village in the construction of these houses, and they were reduced to poverty which led to the desertion of the settlement later on. They moved eastwards leaving the houses behind.

Before carving of the houses, the tribals performed a lot of rituals as feasts of merit. At Mao, they are (i) Novii Kovii, (ii) Omo Kozii, (iii) Ozho Koso, and (iv) Ochizho Koso. If these four actions were not performed, the tribe would not build the houses. The auspicious time of the rituals are in between 'chothone.khro' (January), and 'Chosolopra' (February). Some of the other tribes in the Mao however perform the 'Omoozi', 'Otokosii zoso', 'Ochizo koso' in the respective months of 'Okrokhol' (December), chosolopra, chothonekhro. After the performance of these rituals & feast of merit, Mao construct three types of houses namely,

'Onymosochi', 'Ochiyo kosomychi', and 'Urip Koyhinmchi'. When the house owner had to construct the Onymosochi, he would spend five days without consuming rice, but having only drinks and meat. When the ochiyo kosomychi, had to be built, the owner would have to spend one solid month on only wine and meat.

At Tungam village, two types of houses namely (i) Keechee and (ii) Kolamthrok are built during the month of 'asillompa' (January). At Purul two types of houses (i) Puki and (ii) Ngaiki are customary. At Oinam village, three types of houses (i) Posingka (ii) Reeka (iii) Pongka are customary. At the construction of the above houses, it was customary for the owner to spend the duration of the period of construction only on wine and meat. The Tangkhuls like the Oinam, build three types (i) Khurtchon, (ii) Kharuk, and (iii) Sheikhui. The denomination of the houses are however different. They are given as (i) Lengcheng shim (ii) Ngaishim shim or ohongnao shim and (iii) Rameishim. The elders of Nungbi build three types of houses namely (i) Phen saam, (ii) Phen salaka asari maksa and (iii) Sambat takakasa. Among the Tangkhuls adjacent to the Mao tribes' first after the day of the decision to construct the houses, the owner would not cut his hair wash his clothes or sleep with his wife. Many elders also confirm that during the house construction season the owner would not have sex with his wife, change his clothes or even wash the same.

At Oinam Purul and Paomata, if the headman had to construct a house it was essential to search for a tiger for sacrifice. After the killing of the tiger a representation of it would have to be carved on the front-wall of the house, carved with its head upside down. At the house of the headman of Oinam, it was also customary to carve not less than three tigers. At Purul, not only at the headman's house, but also almost all houses had one tiger carved on the walls, that too in life size. The headman would spend five days during the construction without speaking a word, without taking food or wine. After this he would spend another five days only on wine, keeping respect for customary taboos. If by chance, there is a breakdown of construction materials or the house they would stop work for three days, observe the taboo. (To be Contd.)

day use in families in geometrical forms on the walls, but at the same time add other experiences provided by changed outlooks and new visual aids.

Use of Colour

Most of the tribes in Manipur used colours provided from natural sources, by herbal and mineral materials. Most of the colours used were white, black, red and green. Paintings on the walls of the houses seem to be the natural propensity of the Kabui tribe alone. The Mao and Tangkhul tribes however use colours on the friezes and crossed X with decorative flower patterns. In some of the carved portraits, there are some coloured designs too. In some areas, the carved buffalo and tiger heads do have paintings on them,



Carving in the front wall of the House

though most of them were in patches, without a full colouring process.

ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURE

In order to build a house with carving, the tribals needed a lot of men and materials and incurred heavy expenditure. If a person in the village had accumulated a lot of stock in paddy, the community would have force him to build a house. After constructing a carved house, he would be reduced to a miserable condition after the exhaustion of his wealth. Mention may be made here of an ancient settlement at the top of Koubur Hill by the Longdamei at an area called 'Koklounou' (um). At one season, these people built as many as thirty 'talangkai' (painted and carved