

Land and Law in Manipur circa 1891-1947

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This paper focuses on the problem of land possession and ownership in Manipur following the Palace Revolt of 1891 when the British introduced a Residency form of indirect rule. The paper will critically examine the changing rights on land from pre-British period to post 1947 period through the prism of land regulation. The prevalence of land *pattas* in the Manipur valley vested individual *ryots* with landed interests somewhat analogous to that of the *ryotwari* system. In contrast, the Raj recognised another type of land right for hill chiefs who collected house tax on behalf of the whole village; and as such, this practice reflects elements of the *zamindari* system. In the pre-colonial era, certain chiefs of Manipur hills were familiar with the idea of *tauzi* land tenure which indicated settlement of a village, partly mirrored in the later colonial collection of village house tax. The hill chiefs soon internalised the language of rights under the Raj; and even today they refer to *dai* (right) with reference to their chiefly domains. The coming of Anglo-Indian law of *patta* into the entire valley of Manipur and gradually in parts of the hill areas heralded the origins of private property in land. The British interpreted *patta* as ‘the right of occupancy to a land by a tenant, provided it pays revenue punctually’. Further, the paper will see demarcation of boundary not as a definition of territory, but rather as a way of generating revenue. Therefore, this paper will connect colonial boundary making, origins of landed property, and the dual system of land tenure in the valley and hills of Manipur.

Keywords: Land laws, Boundary, Chieftainship, Identity politics

Pre-Colonial Period

The colonial notion that all land belong to the king was rather simplistic. Although the king has his personal crown land, a huge chunk of his domain consisted of *sagei* (clan) land, private land rewarded to his loyal officials and land donated for religious purposes. The Raja showed little interest in waste land that produced no food crop or no timber. In the pre-colonial period human labour was generally more valued than land.

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The value of land for princely Manipur depended on what a piece of land can contribute to the building of a tributary state. Since the pre-colonial state would have easily recognised the value of hunting grounds, timber forests for housing or boat making, irrigated paddy fields of the valleys, etc. The king exercised strong control over land use in the four *pannahs* (districts) of the Manipur valley, namely, Ahallup, Naharup, Khabam, and Laipham. A nineteenth-century colonial functionary noted the existence of a sort of land survey officer in Manipur:

...under the Raja is an official name the *Phunan Salungba*, whose duty it is to superintend all matters connected with land cultivation; he looks after the measurement, receives the rent in kind, and transact all business matters connected with land on behalf of the raja (Brown 1873: 85).

The royal chronicles of Manipur (*The Cheitharol Kumpapa*) made a number of references to land grants made by the Raja to individual holders. Two such references to land grants came from the early nineteenth century. A man by the name of Angom was rewarded by the king with land grant for his role in successfully negotiating tribute payments from eleven heads of villages in 1804 CE. After non-payment of tribute for forty-one years, the flow of tributes (gold, silver, etc.) resumed to the coffers of the prince. This was the context for land grant to an individual owner. The relevant passage in the *Cheitharol* reads, “Angom Cha Biramani was given free land for his role in the negotiation”.¹ Angom was rewarded for his services in augmenting the revenue health of the state. The meaning of granting “free land” is far from clear. Does it mean a permit to reclaim new land for rice cultivation? Or does it mean grant of ready-made paddy field? It may probably be assumed that “free land” here is the equivalent of colonial “waste”.

The Raja made another kind of land grant in the form of paddy field to a man who claimed to have brought a highly venerated religious symbol from the land of Ava (Burma) in 1822 CE. The *Cheitharol* reads, “Sakonsem Soipai brought (a symbol of) *Snamahi* from the Aawa (modern Myanmar) village of Chengkang. He was rewarded with five paddy fields in the area of Sarong”.² While the *Cheitharol* is silent about the size of the irrigated paddy fields, the rare distinction of getting paddy fields as royal land grant was a high honour indeed for the recipient, Sakonsem. In pre-colonial Manipur, it would appear that land was used by the Crown as payment for individual services that allowed the land holder to join the ranks of the landed aristocracy. In this sense, land (especially paddy fields) may be considered as the mark of social class.

During the Seven-Year Devastation of Manipur (1819-1826), Burma occupied Manipur and took “three lakh Meeteis [Manipuris] to Aawa. Kane Woon and two thousand Aawas stayed behind to live and devastate the country”.³ In such an atmosphere of political instability, forest lands in Manipur began to expand in the absence of clearings by humans even as irrigated wet land deteriorated due to neglect. Forests can reclaim back clearings and even irrigated fields into a state of relative wildness. The loss of Manipuri population to Burma changed the land-human relation immediately before the advent of the British.

Early Colonial Period

The Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-26 subdued an aggressive Burma and turned princely Manipur into a British protectorate. This British protectorate, though not yet formally annexed, was officiated by Lt. (later Captain) Gordon as the first Political Agent of Manipur in 1827.⁴ This measure of Indirect Rule heralded the consolidation of British power in securing safe land routes between Bengal and Burma.

This Anglo-Burmese war marked the turning point in reshaping the land history of Manipur. The discourse of land tenure in the hills and valley developed in the context of fluid boundary, divided political authority, strategic positioning of the British in Manipur. Karlsson (2011: 135-136) rightly states that:

The hill areas of the northeastern frontier that were brought under British rule during the nineteenth century were exempted from the land settlement and instead came under special regulation based on the idea of minimal interference and the maintenance of customary laws- a form of indirect rule.

The manner of land holding system in Manipur had elements of the ryotwari in the hills areas and of the zamindari in the Imphal valley. In the hill areas, the early colonial era had a system of land tenure where an individual tenant or villager paid a token rent for land use for agricultural or hunting purposes to the Chief. Late nineteenth-century British observers noted that Chiefs were “lords of the soil” among the Kuki-Chin hill groups. Does this mean that the hill lands were the property of the chiefly family or individual chiefs? Or was land communally owned by clans or the entire village community? While we doubted the factual accuracy of the colonial observation, that at least represented the colonial discourse of hill forest lands, and this discourse had serious consequences for subsequent institutional (especially legal) developments. Carey and Tuck (1896: 201) argue to the effect that hill forests were chiefly property:

The Chiefs are lords of the soil within their boundaries, and, if any aliens wish to enter a chief’s territory and work his land, they must pay him the customary tithes. A Chief, besides the tithes which he receives as lord of the soil, receives tribute from tribes, villages, or families which he has conquered.

Due to the weak penetration of the cash economy, tax was paid mostly in the form of “*dhan*” (i.e., in kind) which was the most prevalent and convenient form. On the other hand, people of the four *pannas* of the valley paid tributes to the officials appointed under the Raja of Manipur, known as *Phunan Salungba*, who acted as an intermediary between the tenants and the Raja, reflecting elements of the zamindari system. It should also be noted that some villager of hill areas paid tribute to the Raja in kind as long as the Raja remain militarily formidable. It can be hypothetically stated that the essence of zamindari system that culminated during nineteenth-century in Manipur came up after Lord Cornwallis’s Permanent Settlement of 1793.

The dual system of land tenure in colonial Manipur emerged from the variegated historical experiences of the hill areas and of the four *pannas* of the valley. The

valley of Manipur was tightly integrated into the revenue administration of the princely state; but the hill areas slipped out of princely control apart from extracting occasional tribute payments. The British administration initially made no rigid distinction between hill areas and the valley. But a series of tribal uprisings in the early twentieth century led to changes in colonial policy towards the hill tribal groups. A distinct 'hill administration' came to be created to bring the semi-independent hill people closer to the arms of the Leviathan. This turn of event had important bearings on how land is to be refigured in political and legal discourse in the post-colonial era. Absence of substantial evidence of formal document to claim land, prior to British turned claim making into a legal complexity. Bengt G. Karlsson (2011: 144) rightly states that "Today, we know, legalistic politics have come to dominate the rights struggles of indigenous peoples in most part of the world".

The formal annexation of Manipur in the last decade of the nineteenth century forced the Raj to get more entangled in issues of land regulation in the valley and land-related house tax in the hills. Racially white British personnel called Sub-Deputy Officers were posted in newly created hill districts from 1919 onwards. Varieties of land disputes were brought to these hill officers for legal settlement. Payment of house tax instead of pre-colonial tributes was a necessary evil that the hill groups learnt to live with. But it also soon became clear that there was (and is) a link between land claims and tax payment in the procedures of colonial law.

Before proceeding over the legitimacy of possession or ownership in colonial law, it is useful to cite an instance of disputed Loutei Village in Ukhrul district of Manipur to understand how payment of colonial tax became synonymous with post-colonial land title. The idea of possession and ownership was entering into the legal language of the local courts. The disputed civil case runs as follow. Thongkhothang Baite, (the plaintiff) put up a legal battle in 1952 against the defendant Homi Tangkhul over the claims of Loutei village land and chieftainship, where the court saw contrasting evidences that both claims to have received a tribute called *Lousal* (annual rice payment as rent for cultivating land) from the other since the time of their ancestor. The case became more vital when the defendant sold a piece of land which he claimed belong to him while the plaintiff made a stiff opposition against it. Therefore, elders and nearby village chiefs were called upon as witness testimony, still no conclusion can be reached. Surprisingly it began to trace the history of the said village dating back to the late colonial period in 1929 when hill house taxes were paid; yet both the claimants proved before the court that they had paid their hill house tax respectively. Considering the *prima facie* evidence, the court held the village as joint possession. To quote the proceeding of court paper,

That right must have been derived from some source. This source is the title. A person shown to be in possession of land is to be presumed to be its owner under section 110 of the Evidence Act. The joint possession of the parties therefore, proves their *prima facie* joint title. Section 110 has been based on the well-known principle that possession is prime proof of title in as much as possession follows title.⁵

To sum up the case to its verdict:

It is hereby ordered and declared that each of the plaintiff and the defendant is entitled to one half of the suit land, that the suit land be partitioned into two equal shares and that a commission be issued to make partition or separate possession of the same according to the rights of the parties declared above.⁶

The connection between land title and tax payment got reflected in the court decision, and dual payment of tax logically meant joint possession and hence joint land title. Here is an echo of Roman law filtered through English common law.

The legal question of ownership and possession in the above case of Loutei village invoked Roman law where it stated that “possession is the foundation of ownership” (Nicholas 1962: 107). Under Roman law a land occupied for a minimum of 12 years can make claim of ownership by the occupants. This view has been supported by English Common law too which was applied to India in the form of Bihar Tenancy Act 1885. D.Thakur (1989: 69) said that “A person who holds any land situated in a village for twelve years, either himself or through inheritance, becomes settled raiyat of the village”. However, this criterion is debatable in the present context of Manipur or in present legal opinion since inter-tribal misunderstanding and feud compelled some villagers to disband their villages, leaving the land into the hands of others. One such instance of inter-tribal feud where land ownership and possession conflicted in Manipur may be the case of Swemi village.

In 1892 a band of Kukis led by one Toki raided Swemi, as the Angamis call it or, to give it its correct Manipuri name, Chingjaroi, a village in the north east corner of the State, and massacred some 286 persons. This was duly punished by the Political Agent. In February 1910 a punitive expedition was sent by the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam against two villages of Kukis lying in unadministered territory on the eastern boundary of the State, who had been guilty of raiding both in the Naga Hills District and in Manipur (Reid 1942: 78-79).

Thus ownership or possession of land overlapped intermittently and became vulnerable for political exploitation and thereby encumbrances surpassed the nature of conveyance. A large share of land disputes since colonial times were related to demarcation of boundaries between individual chiefs or between villages. But land boundaries had another purpose for colonial rulers who wanted to fix responsibility for ‘outrages’ committed on British subjects. Land boundaries were seen as aids to the rule of law. Political stability was often threatened by inter-tribal feuds at the edges of Manipur’s princely or colonial domain.

To fix responsibility for the behaviour of raiding tribes within particular territories, the British began to concentrate on boundaries that demarcate administered and un-administered zones. To achieve this end, the British negotiated a treaty with the southern inhabitants of Manipur in 1873 where 11 chiefs swore to halt aggression and instead devoted themselves to mutual trade.⁷ The northern boundary with Naga

Hills remains a long standing issue, and so was the eastern side of Manipur. To present a clearer picture it is noted that:

The territories of Manipur varied according to the mettle of its rulers. Sometimes they held a considerable territory east of the Chindwin River in subjection, at other times only the Kubo valley, a strip of territory, inhabited, not by Burmese, but by Shans, and lying between Manipur proper and the Chindwin (Johnstone 2002: 87).

Under this circumstance, Colonel James Johnstone (the then Political Agent of Manipur) was determined to sketch a political map of Manipur without conducting any actual survey on the ground. So this became the first political map of Manipur showing her territorial possession (Johnstone 2002: 96). Land boundaries had a distinct lineage in colonial discourse of fixing responsibility for ‘tribal outrages’ in the interest of maintaining law and order. Further, boundary questions made their way into the law courts dealing with land disputes. And later cartographic surveys and administrative boundaries gradually began to inform the language of identity politics. The connection between hill lands and tribal identity was not immediately obvious in early colonial discourse.

Sanghamitra Misra (2011: 84) has remarked that establishing ‘proof of boundary’ in colonial law can reveal differences in the colonial and indigenous perceptions of what counted as ‘evidence’. The British insisted on the precedence of the written word over oral testimonies whereas the local customary laws took an opposite stance (Misra 2011: 84). To a point, boundary sketches or cartographic maps are representations of the lie of the land; but they also have wider implications for a community’s worldview itself. David Zou (2011: 141-170) rightly states that “Maps are not mirrors that passively reflect the world; they have always been a way of seeing or a mental image to make sense of the world”.

Intensified Colonial Period

Though the colonial establishment (Political Agent) was already made in 1827, this indirect rule was intensified after the Palace Intrigues of 1891 where Manipur experienced the harsh reality of internal dissension among its princes and the conspiracy deliberated by British government under Chief Commissioner of Assam J.W Quinton against Manipur finally led into its annexation. As a result, levying of hill house tax marked the beginning of British intensification of indirect rule with minimum employment of official to maximum utilisation of Manipur resources. This event of 1891 marked a significant chapter in the history of land tenure, since efforts for management and control of land as commodity was seen through the expansion of wet land and inclusion of waste and arable land into the domain.

The coming of *patta*, “which is in English, merely states the amount of land, the revenue thereon, and the instalment in which it is to be paid”.⁸ Introduced by the colonial administrator for better uniformity in land management partly mirrored the consolidation of land classification and the introduction of hill house tax indicated an aura of new system in Manipur which marked the emergence of private ownership or beginning of land as commodity.

The examination of the accounts of the *Laorungshang* (the revenue office of the Durbar) shows that Raja's receipts for the year from land revenue were 85,000 maunds (approx, 1 maund= 39kg) of *dhan* (in kind). About half the receipts were intercepted by revenue officials, and the other half of the *dhan* was consumed by the Raja.⁹

Keeping the financial statement from 1892-1898 administrative report in view,¹⁰ land revenue yielded the highest income continuously. Simultaneous high revenue income was unfortunately generated forcefully through the inclusion of hill area into the bounds of administrative boundary through subordinate official called *lambus* (head clerk). The resistance of hill people to pay tax in the following statement throws light to the impeding circumstance, "the Kukis have large number of Tongkhul Nagas slaves, and are well armed, and should be completely subjugated"¹¹ that "the Kukis asked that they might be permitted to collect revenue from the Tangkhul villages and pay it in here, as they used to in the time of the late durbar".¹² Similarly the murder of nine British subjects in March 1891 coupled with the murder of two Manipuri *dak* (mail) runner in August 1891 at Maram was taken as an opportunity to collect house tax from the Makhel Naga (Maram, Senapati district) with force.¹³ This collection of house tax of Rs 2/- per house in valley and Rs 3/- per house in hill area was the immediate impact concerning the land tenure of Manipur. Further, the boundary that was imperative for economic reason during early colonial period soon internalised into a boundary of administration for hill area that would accommodate law and order problems such as raiding or intermittent murder of officials. "The absence of a police force in the hills is leading to a number of petty raids, the Nagas, seeing no authority in the neighbourhood, are paying off old scores".¹⁴ The concern of colonial power towards hill areas does not end here.

Since the hill people possess terrace land which can be brought under uniform and systematic revenue system, states Maxwell in his diary, that "they have terraced lands, and can always be brought into submission when the time for cultivation arrives".¹⁵ Interestingly, during the British intensification period the dual land tenure-ship undergo thorough changes. The termination of *lalup* (force labour) and abolition of slavery was substituted by house tax of Rs 2 in valley and Rs 3 in hill area respectively, thereby assessing the land revenue at Rs 5 per *pari* (2 ½ acres) which reflected a punitive tax against the prevailing tradition. According to colonial administrator Maxwell, all lands belong to the king in Manipur. Land management was not in uniformity as the king mainly manage by favours leading to insecurity of land holding by tenants,

Land in the valley has always been considered to belong to the ruler, and as such he has disposed of it to whomsoever he willed. Merely because some person has come into favour he has been given plots of land which were under cultivation by another, and the old cultivator has been ousted and compelled to seek land elsewhere. Up to the present time there has been no security as to occupancy.¹⁶

This circumstance of insecurity compels the authority to issue *patta* on 27th August

1892¹⁷ marking the beginning of private property or land as commodity. “*Patta* are issued to the tenants, who will obtain a right of occupancy to their lands, provided the revenue is punctually paid”.¹⁸ The issuance of *patta* made fallow or waste land into the domain of taxable land. Ironically, certain predicament follows over *patta* system where the southern Manipur declined to pay any tax unless the boundary question is settled,¹⁹ or more precisely no tax without boundary settlement. Further, fallow land came to the notice of the political agent P. Maxwell when he inspected Moirang on 29th August 1892; at the same time warned the inhabitants that if not cultivated it would be given to Imphal residents. Fearing this registration for *patta* or ownership became the daily routine. The ambiguity of boundary over *patta* goes even further that, the chief of Senam, a Kuki village in south east Shuganu, wish to know whether he was to pay revenue or not. He having been forbidden previous year by the Political Officer, Forth White, to no longer pay revenue any more to Manipur,²⁰ and the statement that “the Chassad Kukis are not yet settled in their minds whether we intend remaining or not in Manipur”.²¹

It was behind this background of *patta* system or taxation that land tenure underwent a drastic change. Hill house tax of Rs 3 was levied per house in every village. This tax was collected and submitted on behalf of the village by the Chief or head, representing as middlemen between the government official and the tenants (villagers). In return, the government paid him 10% of the collected amount annually. This system somehow resonates to the elements of zamindari system. Thereby the Chief, losing his authoritative power of governance in terms of the economic sphere with reference to his own village which in the long run hampered the tradition and custom of the hill people. On the other hand, concerning the valley land tenure, each *pannah* was now headed by an official known as *Lakpa* who was entrusted to collect land revenue and house tax of Rs 5 and Rs 2 respectively, keep up the register, and the expenditure of each *pannah* will not exceed 10% on the revenue collected.⁶ Unlike the early colonial period, uniformity in land management towards hill and valley can now be seen in the eye of zamindari system. It is astonishing to note that, though the main source of revenue was generated under the classification of the amount received such as; “land tax of Rs 5 per *pari* (2 ½ acre), house tax of Rs 2 and Rs 3 in valley and hill, fisheries, and salt”²³, the increasing trend of expenditure is seen to be above 10% in the following years as the Raja civil list increase which include (a) grant to royal temple and family (b) education expense of the young Raja at Ajmere (c) increase pension and allowances of exile and Andaman prisoners²⁴, which shows that the above expenses were bore mainly by house tax payers, perhaps hill house tax since they pay heavier.

Soon after the issuance of *patta* was completed on 30th July 1894 revenue boundary gradually tends to be an administrative boundary following the regularisation of land tax, inclusion of waste land into the taxable domains, importance of forest and its product became imperative, brisk trade become the monopoly of the government, setting up of police *thana* (station), hospitals, schools etc. It is within such predicament that the discourse of land tenure over revenue boundary makes sense about territoriality, rooted towards social complexities and pave for independence struggle.

As Maxwell states “If these Kukis wish for independence, they have to cross the frontier and locate themselves in no man’s land, but, for reason best known to themselves, they prefer remaining in Manipur territory”²⁵

Late Colonial Period

Though the *patta* system was applicable only towards the four *pannah* in the valley, the notion of boundary and ownership that are reflected from *patta* had greatly left its implication over the hill area that surrounds the valley, thereby frequent claims and disputes of land among villages climb up the files of government judicial civil cases during the late colonial period. Gunnel Cederlof (2014) found that fiscal ties constituted the ruler-subject relation in the early days of the East India Company. In the hill areas of Manipur, the tribal groups were addressed in the late colonial state as British subject and as legal persons as well as house-tax payers. By the 1930s, disputes among hill tribes were routinely brought before the court of law, presided usually by the white Political Agent. The following examples shall show the process of constructing hill peoples into legal subjects.

Mr. Hinggis, the then political agent, laid down a village boundary of Mollen and Manamjang (Ukhrul district) in 1921 since the village of Manamjang had later abandoned their occupation, Mollen villagers began to cultivate the abandoned village wet land thereby Manamjang, though not settled yet claim the land to be theirs.²⁶ The waste land of Makui Thawon in Tamenglong district became a subject of dispute when the Kukis began to cultivate in 1933 by paying both *lampun* (tax for cultivated land) to the Nagas and hill house tax to the colonial authority. Their wet land cultivation was situated at Lanka valley in Tamenglong district, which was far from their village. As a result colonial intervention led the Kukis to cultivate the said wet land without any double payment of tax by the order of political agent Cosgrave on 8th July 1933.²⁷

The third case concerned about forest product. In 1941 Paokholet of Bongbal Khullen accused Limsuo Haokip for cutting 15 trees for building houses which were under the village boundary of the former. Limsuo claimed 10 years before, i.e. in the 1920s, there was a mutual agreement between their villages to use forest product commonly. However, Paokholet declined any such agreement therefore at the court of E.A. Young on 22 December 1941 order the later to pay the cost of per tree at Rs 14.²⁸

Further in the case of Kaiphundai village in west Tamenglong district in 1942, the hill subdivisional court of R.M. Shaw (SDO) issued a clear boundary for Kimthang chief of Kaiphundai village on 16 July 1942.²⁹

The creation of Haokip Reserve in 1907 by Mr. Cosgrave at southern Manipur (now Churachandpur district) needs a particular mentioning. After the Kuki rebellion of 1917-1919, the British felt the necessity of setting up Administrative Units in the Hill Areas of Manipur so it was re-organised,

At an open Durbar held at the Palace on 16th October, 1919, by the Chief Commissioner, Sir Nicholas. Beatoon-Bell, the new proposals were pro-

claimed. For the better administration of the Hills the area was divided into 4 Sub- divisions, one with headquarters at Imphal and three outside, viz. for the southwest area, inhabited by Kukis, with headquarters at Churachandpur; for the north-west area, inhabited by Kukis, Kabul Naga and Kachha Nagas with headquarters at Tamenglong ; and for the north-east area inhabited by Tangkhul Nagas and Kukis, with headquarters at Ukhrul (Reid 1942: 85).

The following year, Mr. B.C. Gesper (ICS) was posted as the first SDO, Songpi. To felicitate the homecoming of war veterans of Labour Corps, who were deployed in France during the World War-I, B.C Gesper (SDO, Songpi), organised a grand feast in 1921, in which the then Manipur Raja Churachand Singh attended the celebration as a guest of Honour. In honour of the Raja Churachand Singh, Songpi Sub-Division was later renamed as Churachandpur Sub-Division.³⁰

Again on 1st January 1930, a rearrangement of the administration of the Hill areas was tried. The Subdivisions constituted in 1919 were abolished, the outlying Subdivisional headquarters being done away with, and the whole hill areas was placed immediately under the President with two Sub divisional Officers to assist him, one being in charge of the South and one of the North (Reid 1942: 86).

However the so-called Haokip Reserved ceased to be a Reserve on 15 July 1938 by order of Mr. Stewart, the then political agent of Manipur. For some reason this order was not communicated to the hill people concerned until 25 July 1941. From that time petition came in from almost all the villages in the Haokip Reserve asking for separate village boundaries so that *lousal* can be enjoyed. Since Songpi village remain the landlord and overlord, non-Haokips were not allowed to settle. Nevertheless after coming to settlement with the chief of Songpi (Shemthong), several non-Haokips were given permission to settle around Khuga valley to cultivate wet rice, gradually each village began to levy *lousal* to whomever they could lay their hands on. Whatever may be the case, giving boundary to every village settle within Songpi is not possible for a simple reason that *lousal* cannot be allowed to be levied by every village. So the area of influence was divided into three landlord and overlord such as Teisheng and Waishong (both DOUNGUL clan) who were a *piba* (overlord) for the Haokip, Munpi and Thingkangphai (both Lunkhel clan) who were close relatives of Songpi, and Songpi village (proper).³¹

The most important sphere in which the Political Agent and President of the Manipur State Darbar exercise control is that over the hill tribes. For that control there are historical reasons. In this connection, a reference is invited to letter no. 6484-P of the 4th July 1919 from the Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department, in which it was emphasised that from the installation of the present Maharaja the hill tribes were treated as on a footing distinct from that of His Highness Manipuri subjects, being only “dependent on” the Manipur State. The phrase “dependent on”

exactly describes the position which has existed from time immemorial and still exists to-day (Reid 1942: 87).

The creation of Haokip Reserves suggests a linkage between clan (Haokip being a dominant Kuki clan) and hill land in colonial law. While clan land was not a novel concept then, its legal recognition was. It set a precedent for later identification of tribe or ethnicity with the emotive idea of land in the post-Independence era.

Notes

¹ Arambam Parratt, Saroj Nalini. (2009) "Sakabda 1726(CE1804)", *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur, The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Cambridge University Press India Pvt Ltd, vol-2, 1764-1843, p.68

² Arambam Parratt, Saroj Nalini. (2009) "Sakabda 1744-45(CE1822-23)", *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur, The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Cambridge University Press India Pvt Ltd, vol-2, 1764-1843, p.87

³ Arambam Parratt, Saroj Nalini. (2009) "Sakabda 1741(CE1819)", *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur, The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, Cambridge University Press India Pvt Ltd, vol-2, 1764-1843, p.82

⁴ Though the post of political agent was officially created in 1835, the work as political agent began when Lt. Gordon took charge of administration on behalf of British as a *de facto* ruler of Manipur in 1827

⁵ Private Papers of the judicial proceeding copied from Thongkhotang Baite

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Annual Administration Report of the Manipur Agency, 1873, Foreign Department, No CIX

⁸ Manipur State Archives, Imphal (hereafter MSA), Administration report of the Manipur political agency for 1891-1895, p.17

⁹ Diary of Major H. St. P Maxwell, political agent of Manipur and Superintendent of the state, 9 October, 1891, p.05

¹⁰ MSA, Annual Administrative Report of Manipur Agency for the year 1892-1898

¹¹ Diary of Major H. St. P Maxwell, political agent of Manipur and Superintendent of the state, 23 January, 1892, p.22

¹² *ibid*, 26 March, 1892, p.35

¹³ *ibid*, 12 December, 1891, p.16

¹⁴ *ibid*, 31 October, 1891, p.08

¹⁵ *ibid*, 11 December, 1891, p.16

¹⁶ *ibid*, letter to Chief Commissioner of Assam, 13 May, 1892, p.46

¹⁷ *ibid*, 27 August, 1892, p.75

¹⁸ *ibid*, p.44

¹⁹ National Archive of India (hereafter NAI), Finances of the Manipur state and connected question, Foreign department, sec E, 1893, p.10

²⁰ Diary of Major H. St. P Maxwell, political agent of Manipur and Superintendent of the state, 21 February, 1893, p.94

²¹ *ibid*, 21 August, 1894, p.133.

- ²² *ibid*, 30 July, 1894, p.130
- ²³ NAI, Report on the administration of the Manipur Political Agency for 1895-96, Foreign department, external A, 1896, p.01
- ²⁴ NAI, Budget estimates of the Manipur State for the year 1897-98, Foreign department, external A, 1897, p.01
- ²⁵ Diary of Major H.St.P Maxwell, political agent of Manipur and Superintendent of the state, 06 January, 1896, p.199
- ²⁶ Private paper of N.Mollen village, judicial, form No.II-9, Manipur state, 1921, vide civil case order No.627
- ²⁷ Private paper of Chaljang village, judicial, form No.II-9, Manipur state, 1933-46.
- ²⁸ Private paper of N.Mollen village, judicial, form No.II-9, Manipur state, 1941
- ²⁹ Private paper of Kaiphundai village, judicial, form No.II-12, Manipur state, 1942, civil suit No.17
- ³⁰ Memorandum to deputy commissioner, churachandpur by Thadou Students Association on 17 February 2014, Ref. No.: TSA/CCP/GEN14/1
- ³¹ Private paper of Songpi village, judicial, form No.II-12, Manipur state, 1942.

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