Chapter Four:

Dams and Land Relations in Manipur
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IV: I: Land Relations in Manipur

Land is the most important and valuable natural resource, whose planning and development offer major prospects for increase in output and income for people. Land differs from place to place so that techniques suitable in one place are often of little use elsewhere. Role of land in economic development is central because most of the people in poor countries make their living from the land. However, continued population growth is rapidly pushing people out onto the world's diminishing supply of arable land. Still, the real issue is not whether the world is running out of surplus land, but whether yields on existing arable land can be raised fast enough to meet the needs of an increasing population with rising per capita incomes. Therefore, it is often suggested that before one goes on to focus on the issue of productivity of land, it is best to explore the problem of land and the way it is owned and organized. Because, conditions of land tenure set the context within which all efforts to raise economic output must operate.

Agriculture being the mainstay of the rural Indian economy around which socio-economic privileges and deprivations revolve, any change in its structure is likely to have a corresponding impact on the existing pattern of social inequality. Indian agriculture has experienced a series of substantial changes since the British Raj days. The changes in the post-independence period are significantly different from those in the pre-independence period in nature and extent and the approach to them. British colonialism introduced new land tenures, commercialization of agriculture and expansion of the politico-legal system to transform the agrarian economy with the aim of increasing agricultural production that could be used for Britain’s industrialization on the one hand, and on the other, for polarizing Indian rural society into classes for pursuing the ‘divide and rule’ policy.

In Manipur, agriculture has been the backbone of the state's economy and the farming community has been the backbone of the state agriculture. As per record of 1991 Census of the Government of India, of the total population of 18.37 lakhs of Manipur, the total number of workers is 7.75 lakhs which constitutes 42.18 percent of the total population. It was 43.20 percent of the total population in 1981. Thus, a slight decrease in the percentage share of farmers and agricultural labourers to the corresponding total workers of the state was noticed in 1991 as compared to 1981. Against this trend of decrease in the number of farmers and agricultural workers, the total cropped area has increased from 1,40,283.51 hectares in 1982-83 to 1,49,615.00 hectares in 1989-90.

Table: IV: I: Land Use Classification in Manipur:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Category of Uses</th>
<th>Area in Sq.Km.</th>
<th>Percentage to State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Forest including pasture and barren</td>
<td>174118.00</td>
<td>78.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Permanent Agricultural Land</td>
<td>338.04</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Crop Land</td>
<td>2242.72</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Urban Sites</td>
<td>293.13</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Current Jhum Cultivation</td>
<td>2035.11</td>
<td>9.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>22327.00</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table: IV: I shows the limited area of permanent agricultural land which is only 1.50 percent of the state's total area and is nearly of the same size as the urban site of the state. This has led the economy of the state to a critical situation. At the same time, a large forest area of 78 percent is not able to contribute much to the economy of the state due the existing system of forest laws and other constraints in the hill areas.

The absence of individual land ownership in the hill areas has restricted the cultivators to practice settled cultivation in the hill areas. So the most fundamental requirement of agricultural development in the hill areas is the
reform of land holding system to confer permanent, heritable and transferable ownership amongst different communities, on the one hand, and to strike a balance between the imperatives of modern state and those of the traditional societies, on the other hand. Land reform has been part of the controversy around the different levels of development in different parts of the region. However, in order to understand the complexity around the issues of land, it is pertinent to investigate the nature and historical evolution of land use patterns which have carried over numerous elements from the past to arrive at the present state of affairs. Analyzing the genesis of these issues also calls for an examination of various legal regimes at different stages of the evolution.

It is also important to look into the differences in the existing norms and regulations which have led to the formulation of separate legal systems of control at present. Land in Manipur has become an issue only after people became conscious of these different legal obligations for the hills and the valley thus erecting a dichotomy between the two. This consciousness is due mainly to the limited availability of land in the valley as well as to the land holding system in the hills which often turns out to be a source of conflicting claims among the inhabitants of particular areas. However, before going deeper into these issues, it would be necessary to examine how land has evolved in different phases as a focal point of the economy in both hills and plains of the state.

IV: II: Land and Its Implication for the Economy of Manipur

During the pre colonial period, Manipur had a self-sufficient economy with high surplus of agricultural products along with an extremely weak subsistence manufacturing sector. The principal manufactured items at the turn of the nineteenth century included coarse cloths, muslin and silk. Silk was traded with Burma and Yunan. During the colonial period, the closed agrarian economy was opened up and the growth of the export sector led to the commercialization of

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agriculture. As a result, a commercial class of outsiders started to emerge in the state. It was a time that the economy was experiencing export-led retardation. The colonial rule left an economy with a strong agricultural base. However, instead of capitalizing on further strengthening of the agricultural sector, the process of tertiarization was intensified thereafter at the cost of a rapidly marginalized productive base. The consolidation of the hold of the contractor-bureaucrat-politician nexus sabotaged corrective measures towards real growth and industrialization. This nexus is responsible for the persistent high plan expenditure on administration, health, education, roads and bridges at the cost of industry and agriculture. In this context, the evolution of state’s economy during these different phases becomes important in order to understand the present surge for establishment of ‘perceived economy’ through various developmental projects in the state. It is within this perception that plans and policies are formulated in order to exploit the available natural resources of the state in which land becomes central.

The structure of the pre-colonial agrarian economy is defined by the system of land holdings. All land was distributed by the King. Only 23.4 percent was taxed and 76.6 percent of cultivated land was distributed tax-free. The feature of rack renting that one often comes across in colonial India, seems to have been absent in Manipur as rent paid to state or land owner ranged between 1 percent to 6 percent on the best land, 2 percent to 12 percent on the worst land. Only small slave population cultivating the King’s land had to share 50 percent of the crop.

In the pre-colonial period, the land relationship system was thus primarily non-exploitative if rent is a criterion. The landed gentry, who did not cultivate, held 36 percent of the cultivated land but had very little incentive for economic extraction and exploitation as tertiary sector population was miniscule and there was virtually no market for surplus rice. Thus, the feudal mode of production- a

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system of localized production and localized appropriation and also an ensemble of extra economic coercion weighing on the peasantry and thereby retarding the expansion of agrarian capitalism characterized agrarian relations in Manipur.223

Agriculture is the mainstay of the people of Manipur and, except the first five Year plan, all Five year Plans of the state allocated a substantial proportion of the total plan outlay to agriculture and allied services/activities. From the fourth plan onwards substantial allocations were made for closely related heads of development, viz. water and power development and irrigation and flood control and energy. As a result, Manipur has been able to participate modestly in the Green Revolution of India. The yield per hectare of rice in Manipur valley in 2003-04 was estimated at 2, 809.48 kgs, against all India average of 2,051 kg in the same year.224 The productivity of maize, estimated at 3,217.95 kg per hectare in the hills of Manipur, in the same year was much higher than all India average of 1,983 kg per hectare.225

A notable dimension of development of agriculture in Manipur is the diversification of farm activities in the areas of pisciculture, poultry, piggery and horticulture. These areas, however, await sufficient growth of demand for achieving their immense potentials. The development of agriculture in Manipur is not so much due to public intervention as to private enterprises. Despite substantial plan investments in agriculture and allied activities and in water and power development, and irrigation and flood control, only 57, 290 hectare of areas under rice cultivation are irrigated till 1991226, and no power is available for

use in agricultural operations and extensive areas of standing crops are damaged by floods every year.

Rice is the main crop and stable food in Manipur. Before the British occupation of the state, Manipur had a record of productivity of around 3,250 kg of paddy per hectare.²²⁷ It was on this agrarian structure that the colonial economy was built from 1891. Confirming Brown's Report of 1875 about the surplus of the valley's rice production, the Administrative Report of 1894-95 wrote, 'at the present moment a two years' food surplus is stored in the village.'²²⁸ It may also be noted that rice and rice product export rose from 2,655 tonnes in 1900-1901 to 21,694 tonnes in 1938-39, an eightfold increase during four decades.²²⁹ The export business was facilitated by the introduction of a commercial class of Bengalis and Marwaris in the capital town of Imphal.

At the same time, the rich tropical forest of Manipur was also a source of direct and indirect surplus extraction. Forest products like rubber, tea seeds, wax, elephant tusk, etc. and textiles like silk and coarse cloths were also exported.²³⁰ Royalty and duty on forest products alone amounted to Rs. 64,022 during 1898-1932 out of the annual revenue of Rs. 18,830.²³¹

The colonial rule had left an economy that was distorted and tertiarized to some extent, but having a strong agricultural base with sizeable surpluses upon which an economy with a stronger productive base could presumably be built. But in pre-liberalization period, tertiarisation of the economy and occupations had been heightened, while the productive base of industry had not expanded significantly, and that of agriculture was moving toward stagnation. The impact of the evolving power structure in the state's polity and the changing nature of the

²²⁹ An observation on Administrative Reports of relevant years indicates this trend.
state’s economic structure could not but have its reflections and consequences on the future trajectory of investments.

It was during this colonial period that a change in the structure could be observed. The conversion of a closed agrarian society into open agrarianism under the impact of outside forces must be accompanied by the development of new institutional arrangements to replace the old social order. With this, the new land system and its introduction of private property in land and taxation in money started the process of monetisation and marketisation of the economy and commercialization of agriculture. The rush for patta system was such that agricultural land in the valley, which was only 26,500 hectares in 1891, had risen to 75,370 hectares in 1941. The population in the valley had also grown from 1,35,782 in 1891 to 3,43,694 in 1941. Thus the man-land ratio had risen from 0.195 in 1891 to 0.219 persons in 1941, whereas, by the end of the British rule, a hectare supported only 4.56 persons.

During the colonial period, the population increased by 153 percent as against an increase in cultivated area by 184 percent. It is worth mentioning that in 1891 when the colonial rule started, Manipur valley had 26,500 hectares of land under rice cultivation. Based on an estimate of rice requirement and production, the agrarian sector in the valley had surplus potential of 26, 35, 42 and 34 percent of production in 1891, 1901, 1931 and 1941 respectively. Such productive base of agriculture in the state has tremendously expanded and it was on this base that the impact of planned development would shape new agrarian relations and the structure of the economy. Thus, the developed culture of crop husbandry, especially for rice, led to the abundance of rice production in the valley and stability of the food economy. R. Brown reported paddy yields of 2,700 Kg per hectare on the worst land and 4,320 to 5,400 Kg of paddy per hectare.

233 Ch. Priyoranjjan Singh, op. cit. p. 152.
on the best land.\textsuperscript{235} He estimated a yield of 4,959 Kg per hectare on the average which is not much below the yield in Post- Green Revolution Manipur.\textsuperscript{236}

In 1990-91, the agricultural areas in the state were only 157 sq. km. against the 188.55 sq. km. in 1980-81.\textsuperscript{237} Despite appreciable productivity, there are various factors affecting agricultural development, emanating from a lack of smooth transition from traditional system to a modern one. These factors include socio-economic and institutional factors and conflicts arising from traditional land relations and ownership patterns, customs and beliefs. These factors directly or indirectly influence the land utilization pattern, the incentives to the development of land and hence the productivity of agriculture.

In fact, the farmers do not have easy access to other inputs like agricultural credit, modern farm equipments and fertilizers. The farmers cannot get remunerative prices for their produces because of lack of market facilities. As a result of these limitations, only 6.81 percent of the net crop is sown twice a year and the total production of rice in the state falls short of the requirement of the population by about 55,000 tonnes a year, i.e. 20.2 percent of the requirements. The development head ‘water and power development’ which remained as a single head from the First Plan to the six Plan was bifurcated in the Seven Plan into two heads, ‘irrigation and flood control’ and ‘energy’ emphasizing the importance of hydro power generation for the economic development of the state along with the provision of irrigation water and prevention of flood damages. Interestingly, up to the Ninth Plan, only 4.28 percent of investments went into industry, 12.54 percent into agriculture and all of 78.0 percent into transport, water, power and the social sector.\textsuperscript{238} However, one disappointing fact is that by

\textsuperscript{235} R. Brown, Ibid.
\textsuperscript{236} Ch. Priyoranjan Singh, op.cit. p. 150.
\textsuperscript{237} This trend can be seen in the Table: IV: III (p. 158).
2002-03 hydel stations in the state had a meagre installed capacity of 3.2 MW in total generating only 0.165 million KWH of power. \(^{239}\)

At present, Manipur has neither investible resources of her own nor the ability for efficient spending. Therefore, it is likely to get liberal central assistance for development purposes on a long-term basis. \(^{240}\) For a primarily agricultural economy like Manipur, the need is to increase the plan allocation on agriculture and allied activities by transforming some resources from 'social services' which are not directly productive. Diversification of farming also deserves high policy priority in the valley areas of Manipur along with macro-level policy incentives to which farmers with progressive ideas will respond positively. Thus, the evolving tertiarised structure of the economy is mainly explained by the patterns of plan investments in the state and the type of political economy that has emerged out of that development process.

All these economies are underdeveloped agrarian societies with very weak industrial sectors and inflated service sectors. The share of agriculture, although declining, is still much higher than the national level. Despite the changes witnessed, the economy of the region remains primarily agricultural. The full potential of the sector has not been properly exploited. Primitive farming practices of slash and burn shifting cultivation in most of the hills and mainly single crop traditional farming in the plains continue. As a result, the state is not even able to produce adequate food grains for the consumption of its own population.

IV: III: Productivity of Land and Land Utilization in the Valley of Manipur:

Historical facts indicate that the people of the valley had been known for their mastery of the art of dredging rivers and digging new water courses in the First Century AD and the peasantry had become a solid aspect of life. By the Fifth


century, wet rice cultivation through irrigation systems of dams and canals known as the *Ethei Loukhong* complex were being carried out.241

In fact, the rapid expansion of area under rice cultivation, much faster than population growth, had a private property effect in it but was mainly spurred by the need to pay cash taxes and generate surplus for cash requirements in a monetised and marketised economy, flooded with new and cheaper consumption goods in the face of native de-industrialization and lack of new employment opportunities. In late 1030s, the peasants faced an unfavourable term of trade as the price of paddy hovered around an average of Rs. 1 and 5 annas a maund. One paree (one hectare) of land at the productivity level of 40 pots (assumed) gave him 37.9 maunds of paddy and, after deducting his subsistence requirement for five persons, would leave him a surplus of 10.65 maunds or about Rs.13 and 15.65 annas as surplus cash. After paying land revenue of Rs. 5, the peasant was left with only Rs. 8 and 15.65 annas as surplus cash.242 The peasant's position was precarious. The landed gentry had to pay almost half of his paddy rent as tax. These were the people who resisted the new land taxes and agitated for lower land taxes.

**Table: IV: II: Population, Area, Production and Rice Surplus in Manipur Valley (1891-1941):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Valley Population</th>
<th>Area in Hectare</th>
<th>Demand in Tonnes</th>
<th>Rice Production in Tonnes</th>
<th>Surplus in Tonnes</th>
<th>Surplus in Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>1,35,782</td>
<td>26,500</td>
<td>28,107</td>
<td>38,160</td>
<td>10,053</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>1,91,207</td>
<td>42,283</td>
<td>39,580</td>
<td>60,755</td>
<td>21,175</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>2,86,843</td>
<td>71,316</td>
<td>59,376</td>
<td>1,02,695</td>
<td>43,319</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>3,43,694</td>
<td>75,370</td>
<td>71,145</td>
<td>1,08,533</td>
<td>37,388</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from the Administrative Report of 1897-98 and 1901-1902 and R. Brown


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* Ethei Loukhong in Manipuri means canal for irrigation.


Table: IV: II: indicates that the state’s valley region had been in a position to maintain a growth in rice production. At the same time, it can also be observed that a drastic increase in the size of agricultural land was the major consequence of the circumstances around rising population growth. Another element that maintained this surplus growth of production was the fertility of the land and the various indigenous varieties of crops that were found in the state.

As a result of this surplus productivity, the export sector revolved around the rice economy and the forest economy. But, the ongoing process of institutional changes in management of forest and agricultural land, the administrative and judicial structures, the nurturing of a commercial class of outsiders, modernization of communication and transport structures, all served the expansion of the export sector and budgetary extraction. By the end of colonial rule, forest resources had become depleted and excessive rice export affecting prices and local consumption led to the Nupi Lal\(^{243}\) in 1939 against the export of rice, signaling the limits to extraction.

India inherited in 1949 the colonial economy of Manipur through a Merger Agreement with the then Maharaja of Manipur. A budding modern tertiary sector had become functional, and substantially arable land was still there to be colonized. The population was still small at 5,77,635 in 1951 with a decadal growth rate of merely 1.28 percent. Colonial rice exports, being stopped and being internalized in terms of consumption, saw its impact on Manipur’s population growth rate which jumped to 3.75 percent and 3.26 percent during the fifties and sixties,\(^{244}\) while it was 2.5 percent and 2.41 percent for India.

One significant event during this period was that the emergence of big landlords was effectively stopped by a Manipur State Durbar resolution of 1952

\(^{243}\) Nupi Lal is a popular women’s movement in 1939 against the excessive export of rice from Manipur to outside.

by prohibiting the acquisition of more than 10 hectares of land\textsuperscript{245}. Feudal landlordism, as prevalent in India, was conspicuously absent in Manipur, exploitation and extraction of surplus being in general extra and non-economic. The Census of India 1951 reveals that landlords constituted only 2.4 percent of the agricultural population, against whom 85.3 percent wholly or mainly owned their land and 12 percent wholly or mainly did not own any land. Agricultural labour was insignificant at 0.3 percent (1,381 persons only).

Table: IV: III: Trends of Agricultural Land Size and the rate of Rice Production since the Statehood of Manipur:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area in Square Kilometer</th>
<th>Production in Tonnes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972-73</td>
<td>146.60</td>
<td>152.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973-74</td>
<td>169.78</td>
<td>238.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974-75</td>
<td>176.78</td>
<td>274.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-76</td>
<td>177.19</td>
<td>279.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976-77</td>
<td>177.20</td>
<td>266.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-78</td>
<td>179.13</td>
<td>299.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978-79</td>
<td>159.60</td>
<td>255.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-80</td>
<td>155.20</td>
<td>227.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-81</td>
<td>188.55</td>
<td>273.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-82</td>
<td>168.30</td>
<td>253.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982-83</td>
<td>158.49</td>
<td>219.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-84</td>
<td>161.22</td>
<td>255.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984-85</td>
<td>167.41</td>
<td>332.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-86</td>
<td>164.60</td>
<td>332.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-87</td>
<td>165.14</td>
<td>242.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-88</td>
<td>165.76</td>
<td>312.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-89</td>
<td>176.06</td>
<td>319.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-90</td>
<td>162.37</td>
<td>245.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-91</td>
<td>157.41</td>
<td>274.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table: IV: III: shows that there is a sign of gradual expansion in agricultural land starting from the early 1970s and a decline in the late 1980s, keeping pace correspondingly. An explanation for this up and down scenarios can be derived from the nature of the land transformation processes during these

\textsuperscript{245} Census of India, 1961, District Census Handbook, Manipur, p.17.
periods. In the initial years, there was a process of converting numerous *paats*, as mentioned earlier to firstly the unused barren lands due to siltation and then to agricultural lands in various parts of the valley region. The deforestation in the surrounding hills causing erosion of soils coupled with the blocking of river systems which have been a connecting part of the natural water system in the state were the major reasons for the higher rate of siltation that caused the death of these water bodies. At the same time, people, living around these water bodies or *paats* and surviving on an economy maintained by the ecosystem of these *paats*, were forced to look for an alternative for their living after the death of *paats*. As a result, converting these unused barren lands into agricultural land became the easiest way to avail such an alternative. Moreover, lack of the proper management of land and adequate planning had again led the villagers to easily encroach these lands that they once thought to be theirs and bring them under their titles in connivance with the corrupt official machinery. A study of the history of land holding records of different phases indicates that a large portion of land came to be legally owned by villagers during this phase and hence the agricultural land in the valley expanded.\(^{246}\) It may be argued that both the expansion of swamp-turned-fertile lands and the adoption of new agricultural technologies within the concept of Green Revolution could have contributed to the rise in the crop productivity level.

**IV: The Changing Role of Paats in the Agrarian Economy of Manipur**

As mentioned earlier, there are a large number of *paats* in Manipur which play an influential role in agriculture as well as act as preventive mechanism to control floods. During the lean season, these *paats* serve as water reservoir to supply water to the surrounding agricultural lands. Some of the lands are reclaimed as permanent dry land for agriculture and settlements, some are left as seasonal flooding zone where wet rice agriculture takes place while others are left as *paat*

\(^{246}\) The increase in the number of pattdars recorded by the Department for Settlement Land Records and occupation of these *paats* as agricultural land as well as settlement at present are the the indicator of this scenario.
which literally means wetland or water body. In fact, *paats* are a unique and fragile ecosystem in which water is the key driving force and perform a variety of vital functions like flood mitigation, water purification, and sustenance of local economy.

Table: IV: Some of the Important Paats of Manipur which are currently under threat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Geographical Location</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Area (in Hectare)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Loktak Paat &amp; Thaonamcha Paat</td>
<td>93.45'35&quot;-93.54'45&quot;E 24.27'00&quot;-24.40'58&quot; N</td>
<td>Bishnupur &amp; Imphal West</td>
<td>24,672.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Utraa Paat*</td>
<td>93.50'00&quot;-93.50'42&quot;E 24.41'11&quot;-24.41'42&quot; N</td>
<td>Bishnupur</td>
<td>18500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Sana Paat*</td>
<td>93.51'04&quot;-93.51'25&quot;E 24.40'45&quot;-24.41'38&quot; N</td>
<td>Bishnupur</td>
<td>282.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Pumlen Paat* &amp; Khoidum Paat*</td>
<td>93.52'10&quot;-93.56'15&quot;E 24.24'46&quot;-24.33'00&quot; N</td>
<td>Bishnupur</td>
<td>8022.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Ikop Paat &amp; Kharung Paat</td>
<td>93.54'30&quot;-94.58'00&quot;E 24.32'05&quot;-24.37'43&quot; N</td>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>6520.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Waithou Paat* &amp; Punem Paat*</td>
<td>93.57'30&quot;-93.00'05&quot;E 24.40'00&quot;-24.41'24&quot; N</td>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>455.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Ushoipokpi Paat</td>
<td>93.57'15&quot;-93.54'45&quot;E 24.00'00&quot;-24.01'12&quot; N</td>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>65.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Ongbikhok Paat</td>
<td>93.57'30&quot;-93.57'30&quot;E 24.39'10&quot;-24.40'00&quot; N</td>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>225.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Lousi Paat*</td>
<td>93.57'30&quot;-94.02'10&quot;E 24.40'56&quot;-24.41'31&quot; N</td>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>1864.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Karaam Paat</td>
<td>93.56'34&quot;-93.57'00&quot;E 24.40'56&quot;-24.41'31&quot; N</td>
<td>Thoubal</td>
<td>65.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Yenka Paat*</td>
<td>93.57'00&quot;-93.58'00&quot;E 24.42'30&quot;-24.43'06&quot; N</td>
<td>Imphal East</td>
<td>85.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Heingang Paat</td>
<td>93.57'20&quot;-93.57'45&quot;E 24.51'40&quot;-24.50'04&quot; N</td>
<td>Imphal East</td>
<td>62.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Porom Paat*</td>
<td>93.02'00&quot;-94.02'52&quot;E 24.42'00&quot;-24.42'40&quot; N</td>
<td>Imphal East</td>
<td>810.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Manipur Remote Censing Application Centre, Imphal.

* *Paats* which have turned into agricultural land and then have partially been occupied by governmental infrastructures and human settlement after their inundation.

The potential of these *paats* to provide economic and environmental security to the state continued to be under grave threat. As the figure shows, there
are numerous *paats* living and dying with the course of time. The pattern of development activities in modern times has often caused large-scale damage to these *paats*, reducing some of them to wastelands, and turning them into personal assets. As a result of this practice of draining or filling up a number of *paats* for different purposes, most of them have fallen prey to the ongoing expansion of urban settlements, infrastructural adjustment, population growth, disconnection of feeder channels and so on.

Any alteration of the water regime in these *paats* would cause an adverse effect on these ecosystems with implications not only to environment but also to economic and social sphere. Since these *paats* provide an unending range of food crops, fishes and plants which form the vital resources for energy and shelter building materials, they are considered an indisputable source for sustenance of livelihood for many. Today, these *paats* of the state can no longer perform the natural role they once played due to the ‘single purpose’ developmental activities. Many of these *paats* are found to have been increasingly encroached upon as a result of the urban expansion and human settlement, construction of roads and other developmental projects. *Paats*, like *Porom Paa* and *Lamphel Paat*, indicated in Table: IV: VI, have been included in the Master Plan for Greater Imphal.247

It may be argued that the importance of these *paats* cannot be estimated on one or two of its useful values. Their values have to be seen in totality taking into account all the functions and roles that they perform in the environmental, social and economic spheres. They ensure a proper balance between human factors and environmental factors to ensure that humans do live in harmony with nature. The well-being of the *paats* begets the economic well-being of the people.

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IV: V: The Changing Nature of Agrarian Conflicts

The impacts of the structural shifts, especially in labour, have been telling on the agricultural sector. The impact of high population growth rates on agriculture and the near constancy of labour force shares of 70 percent are clearly visible in the data shown in the 48th Round of National Sample Survey Report.248 Small and medium farmers holding below 2 hectares of land constitute 92.15 percent of all land holdings. The medium farmers holding 4 hectares have become insignificant (0.09 percent) and operate only 0.39 percent of land and the large farmers (above 10 hectares) have completely disappeared.249 Thus, de-industrialization and tertialization of the economy have led to marginalization, structural retrogressions and near stagnation in agriculture, turning agriculture into secondary occupation for many part-time farmers.

The level of consumption of fertilizers per hectare of gross cropped areas of Manipur has also increased from 7.40 kg. in 1975-76 to 71.90 kg. in 1990-91 against the corresponding all India figures of 17.1 kg. and 72.40 kg. respectively. This fertilizer consumption has direct bearing on the efficiency of the production of agricultural products. Generally, a higher level of fertilizer consumption implies a higher level of production. However, Manipur has turned into a net importer from the position of a net exporter of rice during the colonial days.

In order to bring better yield of agricultural product, use of improved variety of seeds is an important requirement. At present, high yielding varieties available in Manipur are Pinsi, Phouoibi, KD-2-6-3, KD-5-3-14, KD-5-2-8, Prasad, IR-15, IR-24, Mashuri, KD-6-14-3, China-1039, China-988, Pusha-33, etc.250 The integrated use of these improved varieties of seeds with fertilizer and irrigation facilities generally tend to raise the yield rate per hectare in agriculture. However, it may be argued that introduction of these new agricultural

249 Ibid.
technologies have created serious regional imbalances in production due to disparity in availability of these resources as well as the inequality in the quality of land. It has resulted in the growing proletarisation and partial pauperization of the marginal and poor peasants; accentuation of class conflict between the landowners and landless labourers, and sharpened social cleavages.

IV: VI: Land Holding System in the Hill Areas of Manipur

Historically, the monarch rarely interfered into the matters of traditional tribal administrative institutions in the hill areas of Manipur. They enjoyed real autonomy from the monarchical administration of the Manipur King. Despite a formal and militarily organized system known as Lallup,* most of the historical literature indicates that the Meitei Kings, at no point of time, superseded the tribal chiefs in matters of their identity as a people and their land. Therefore, it is believed that the political and cultural arrangement was not disturbed. Though Manipur was politically united, the hills were left to the tribals inhabiting them. Collective ownership of land in the hills based on tribal customary practices also shows that no land in the hill areas belonged to the chiefs or to any individual. What emerges from these facts is that the tribal chiefs and the people inhabiting the hills had administrative autonomy but exercised no permanent individual control over land. This meant that there was a collective use of tribal lands without the notion of ownership. This pattern of land usage and control was never translated into legal ownership—collective or otherwise.

The Meitei Kings got annual tributes from tribal chiefs and the tribal chiefs received tributes from the villages not from the point of view of ownership of land but as legitimised by political or military control. People to people trade and commerce also flourished between the valley dwellers and the hill tribes.

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* Lallup is military or labour service paid to the Manipuri King and any citizen at the age of 17 years old and above can serve these services. Those who serve lallup are free from tax for lands allotted to them by King.

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251 The writings on McCulloch, T.C. Hudson, Gangumei Kabui, etc., as quoted earlier, are simple examples of this evidence.

Pointing out the non-interference of the Meitei Kings on the land-people affairs of the hills, some claim that the tribal lands neither in the Naga nor Kuki-Chin inhabited areas ever belonged to Manipur.254

In Manipur, land man ratio in the hills is substantially higher than the valley. In terms of density of population, number of persons per square kilometer, the hill districts stood as follows: 64 in Senapati, 39 in Churachandpur, 21 in Ukhrul, 21 in Chandel and 20 in Tamenglong.255 But the total area under rice cultivation is recorded as 34, 970 hectares only.256 As a result, agriculture in the hills continues to be of low productivity. Besides, the incentive system for adoption of modern technology seems to be weak due to the prevailing land ownership system. There are two systems of land ownership among the hill tribes. Among the Nagas, there is a three tier land ownership system: the village community land, the clan land and the individual land. Among the Kukis, the chiefs claim ownership of village land. The villagers who till the land are like tenants, as they pay something in kind or otherwise to the chief.

However, in both cases, due to absence of record of rights establishing title to the land, no patta system exists in the hill areas. On one hand, people in the hills on their own do not have the resources to invest. Funds are needed for agricultural development. On the other hand, financial institutes shy away from advancing loans to them due to lack of collaterals.

Among the major Naga tribes like the Tankhuls and the Maos, there has been a traditional recognition of both private and communal land holding systems

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254This claim is often found in most of the literature on Naga Nationalism (see Mani Charenamei, Unification of Nagas. Symposium on the Unification of Naga Areas, organized by NPMHR on 23 October 2004 at Constitutional Club, New Delhi, pp. 6-11).
within the respective tribal communities. Buying and selling of private land is permitted but with certain restrictions. As of the communal land, customary transaction and utilization is different from privately owned land. However, usufructuary rights were traditionally recognized in communal lands. These rights allow a tribal villager to use as much area of the communal land as he or she can utilize and to continue to do so as long as the land was in use. No other person could make any claim over it or reclaim to it.

Traditional system of land holding and relations did not create any problem of inequality as such in the past when tribal economy was based on subsistence farming with limited or no interaction with the outside world and in the absence of monetised economy. In such conditions, tribal families could not think of occupying large tracts of land by available age-old equipments with their own family labour. But in the last four or five decades, significant changes have taken place in tribal land holding system with the increasing influence of money economy, interaction with the outside world and availability of transport and communication facilities.

With this changing scenario, some tribals have become more resourceful than others. Tribals with better economic background have taken advantage of traditional customs and started occupying large tracts of communal land. They have also started buying private lands from the marginal tribal masses. This trend has led to inequality in land holdings among the tribals.

However, the emergence of prominent land holdings on the one hand and existence of poor and landless tribal tenants and labourers on the other have challenged the traditional egalitarian concept of tribal society. For general

259 P. Binodini Devi's work on Tribal Land system in Manipur is one of the sources for this statement.
agricultural and economic development of the tribals, funds are needed. These funds can be mobilized from either private or institutional sources. Tribals in remote area in the state are short of individual sources and in this context, institutional sources are really important to supplement individual credit needs. However, they cannot get credit on the ground that they have no registered landed property to offer as security.

Among the Kuki-Mizo tribes of Manipur, chieftainship system of land holding is still in practice. This system is subject to highly unequal land relations. Under the system, land ownership is the exclusive right and prerogative of the chief in absolute terms. Thus, individual villagers have no rights over the land whatsoever. They are in complete subservience of the chief. Therefore, jhumming is the only known traditional method of cultivation. In this system, an ordinary tribal villager gets jhum land through allocation by council of ministers, constituted by the village chief, with a stipulation of payment in kind or cash as rent to the chief. Thus, some claimed that 'in Kuki customs, everything in a village belonged to the chief who could demand anything he required. At the same time, presents given to the chief were common property and might be taken by anyone.' There is no permanency of a villager in cultivation of jhum land even for two or three years.

Given the land relationship in which a villager has no right on land including the right of cultivating jhum land for two consecutive years, there is hardly any incentive for the jhummia to take care of the land for further utilization, leave alone the idea of adopting soil conservation or terracing the land for permanent cultivation. As the tribal chiefs play an advantageous role in the existing land relation, they will be at the most advantageous position in the wake of introducing any other alternative form of cultivation. The ordinary villagers

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260 Lewin as cited in A Study of the Land System of Manipur, Law research Institute, Eastern Region, Guwahati High Court, Guwahati, 1985, p.123.
will be left with little or no cultivable fertile land. This is likely to lead to a sharp rise in the number of landless labourers and landless tenants.

There is an emerging sign in which the rich people of the hills are often found to invest in real estates and other forms of investments in the commercial sectors like hotels, shops, cooking gas agencies, etc. in the valley where land rights are certain and clear. However, the entrepreneurs in the valley find it hesitant to invest in the hills because of the existing land rights system. There is, therefore, a need to settle the land rights issue with a sense of urgency to enable the hill people to use the land optimally.

IV: VII: Dams and Their impacts on Forest lands in India's Northeastern States:

There is no denying the fact that India has witnessed large-scale deforestation; only 19 percent of India's landmass is reportedly under forest cover today. This has adversely affected both human communities that depend on the forests for survival and wildlife, due to the loss of forest. Though there is evidence of deforestation even in pre-colonial India, especially due to the expansion of agriculture, the large scale destruction of the forests was started by the British India's colonial rulers. Vast tracts of forest were chopped to create the railway network that criss-crosses India today. The aim was two fold; the fast, cheap and efficient transport of inexpensive raw materials to the ports for export to Britain's industries and the quick movement of security forces to maintain the hold over the empire.

Of equal relevance was the takeover of the forests by the British by the creation of exploitative bureaucracies like the forest department. Majority of the forest of the country were converted into state owned and controlled or reserved forests, and protected forests by the enactment of the Indian Forest Act of 1865 and 1927. This has resulted in the alienation of the local communities from their
resources and forest and the loss of responsibility for their conservation and protection.\(^{261}\)

Many environmental historians hold the opinion that the large scale destruction of the forests in India is rooted in the commercially oriented forest use and ownership policies of the British government which continued even after India gained independence in 1947. Another major cause of deforestation immediately after Independence was agricultural expansion, often state sponsored. In between 1951 and 1980, over 26.20 lakh hectares i.e., 26,200 square kilometer of forest was converted for agricultural purposes all over India.

In more recent times, it is the new policies and programmes of development, rapid industrialization, urbanization and growing consumerism that have resulted in the wide-scale destruction of forests. In certain parts of the country, particularly the rain-forest region of the northeastern states of India, bordering China and Burma and the remote island of the Andaman and Nicobar, a lot of forests have been fed into the plywood mills. Besides, many parts of India have witnessed a spurt of large projects from big dams, and thermal power projects to huge mines and massive industrial complexes. Many of these have been located in what were once thick forest areas. So these forests were drowned in the back waters of dam projects or were cleared for mines or industrial complexes. Simultaneously, demands for food, fuel and fodder by an increasing human and cattle population have built up the pressure on the forests tremendously.

The developmental projects' very insensitivity alienated communities living in the forests, depriving them of their basic sources of survival, forcing them to move away and making them refugees in their own land. The very people who live in and tended the forests for generations were forced to participate in the destruction of the forests and then also share the blame for it. This process

continues even today in various forms in many parts of the country, resulting in the rapid decline in forest cover.

Table: IV: V: A Select Number of Hydel Projects in Northeast India and Their Impact on Forests and Local Residents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>River Basin/State</th>
<th>Type / Size</th>
<th>Installed Capacity in MW</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Impacts</th>
<th>Operating Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gumti</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.6 MW</td>
<td>Commissioned in 1976</td>
<td>Submergence area of 46.34 Sq. Km. and affected population of 8,000 - 10000 tribal families living in the forest.</td>
<td>State Govt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuivai / Manipur</td>
<td>155m high dam</td>
<td>210MW</td>
<td>Environmental Clearance granted.</td>
<td>Submergence area of 16,00 hectares and 1,60,000 mature trees to be felled in this forest area only.</td>
<td>NEEPCO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipaimukh / Manipur</td>
<td>162.8 m high and 390 m long earthen core rock filled dam.</td>
<td>1500MW</td>
<td>Forest &amp; Environment clearance granted.</td>
<td>Submergence of large portion of tribal lands including villages.</td>
<td>NEEPCO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loktak / Manipur</td>
<td>10.7m high/ 58.8 m long</td>
<td>105MW</td>
<td>Operational since 1983</td>
<td>Submergence area of 20,000-83,000 hectare of paddy field and 65 affected villages.</td>
<td>NHPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bairabi</td>
<td>62m. high &amp; 18m long earth filled dam.</td>
<td>80MW</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Required 9,294 hectare of land including 7,721 hectares of forest land.</td>
<td>State Govt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loktak Downstream / Manipur</td>
<td>64.5m high &amp;250m long earthen core dam.</td>
<td>90MW</td>
<td>Environmental clearance granted but delayed due to security concerns.</td>
<td>Submergence of 257 hectares including 170 hectare of wet paddy land.</td>
<td>NHPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kameng / Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>Two dam on Bichom(96m. high) &amp; Tenga (60.5m. high)</td>
<td>600MW</td>
<td>Under construction after the project was cleared in 2001.</td>
<td>Submergence of 710 hectare of forest land.</td>
<td>NEEPCO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raagndali / Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>112 m high</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>Already commissioned.</td>
<td>1640 hectare of land submergence.</td>
<td>NEEPCO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Siang / Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>257m. high dam, largest Hydel project in India.</td>
<td>11.000MW</td>
<td>Under Survey and Investigation/ already received clearance from MoEF</td>
<td>Loss of 13,500hectare of land including 9,015 hectare of dense forest.</td>
<td>NHPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Subansiri / Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>116m high dam</td>
<td>2000MW</td>
<td>Undergoing Environmental and Forest Clearance</td>
<td>42 hectare of Tale Valley Wildlife Sanctuary in its total submergence area of 3,436 hectare</td>
<td>NHPC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teesta-V / Sikkim</td>
<td>96.45m high and 182.5m long concrete gravity dam.</td>
<td>510MW</td>
<td>Under construction</td>
<td>Submergence area of 326.66 hectare including 122.17 hectare of forest land and 201.4 hectare of private land.</td>
<td>NHPC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ecologist Asia, Vol. 11, No.1, January-March, 2003
As above Table: IV: V indicates, in Northeast India, a large area of forest have been submerged due to dam construction. This has led a large section of tribal population to search for an alternative to their previous livelihood.

In Manipur, forest areas are classified as Reserved Forest, Protected Forest and unclassified forest. Out its total forest area of 17418 square kilometer, 67.60 percent of the forest area falls into the category of unclassified or other forest area which means easy accessibility for people living around the area. This area falling under the hill region which has no clear ownership of land in record has been a controversial issue on the question of the exploitable level of forest products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Status of Forest</th>
<th>Area in Sq.Km.</th>
<th>Percentage to Total Forest Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Reserved Forest</td>
<td>1467</td>
<td>8.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Protected Forest</td>
<td>4171</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Other Forest</td>
<td>11780</td>
<td>67.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17418</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There is an apparent flaw in the present classification scheme if one measures the sizes of reserved forests in the hills and the valley against the availability of land in the respective areas. The existing size of the district wise reserved forest provides a favourable position to the hills in terms of exploitation of forest products. Though the hills occupy an enormous size of geographical area with vast forest area, the size of reserved forest is smaller when compared to the valley. However, the contribution of the forest revenue from the hill districts has been rather vague due to the prevailing forest laws and regulations in the tribal societies of the hill areas in Manipur.
Table: IV: VII: District wise List of the Reserve Forest and their Area in Manipur:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Reserve Forest</th>
<th>Area in Sq. Km.</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chingkhei-ching</td>
<td>14.23</td>
<td>Imphal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Langol</td>
<td>19.22</td>
<td>Imphal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Langol Reserve Forest Extension</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>Imphal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Heingang</td>
<td>9.71</td>
<td>Imphal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nongrengching (Khema)</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>Imphal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ningthemchakhul (Laiching)</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>Imphal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Jirimukh</td>
<td>7.74</td>
<td>Imphal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sambel Purum</td>
<td>19.40</td>
<td>Imphal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yaingangpokpi</td>
<td>48.20</td>
<td>Imphal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nongmaiching</td>
<td>67.00</td>
<td>Imphal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Heirok Chingdongpok</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>Thoubal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Gwarok</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>Thoubal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Thongam Mondum</td>
<td>8.90</td>
<td>Thoubal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Waikhong Pine Forest</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>Thoubal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Thonjao Kabui Chingkhongching</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>Thoubal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Khunulaba Ching</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>Thoubal*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Khongjamngamba</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>Bishnupur*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Warok</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>Bishnupur*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Konung</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>Bishnupur*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kangchup</td>
<td>9.60</td>
<td>Senapati**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Kangchup Chiru</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>Senapati**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Khamenlok-Gwaltabi</td>
<td>85.47</td>
<td>Senapati**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Tadubi-Maram</td>
<td>7.77</td>
<td>Senapati**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Kanglatongbi-Kangpokpi</td>
<td>85.47</td>
<td>Senapati**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Khuman Ching</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>Senapati**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Kaiphundai Extension</td>
<td>15.54</td>
<td>Tamenglong**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Irangmukh</td>
<td>92.68</td>
<td>Tamenglong**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Vengal</td>
<td>57.00</td>
<td>Tamenglong**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Tolbung</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>Tamenglong**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Laimaton</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>Tamenglong**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Jiri-Makru</td>
<td>36.84</td>
<td>Tamenglong**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Yangenching</td>
<td>32.56</td>
<td>Chandel**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Kangbung</td>
<td>67.34</td>
<td>Chandel**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Longya</td>
<td>41.96</td>
<td>Chandel**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Chenglaphai</td>
<td>52.84</td>
<td>Churachandpur**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Langjingmanbi</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>Churachandpur**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Dampi</td>
<td>135.89</td>
<td>Churachandpur**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Valley Districts & **Hill Districts

A calculation from the above Table: IV: VII: indicates that large area of forest lands are under reserved category in the valley districts which restrict the people of the valley in utilizing them for their economic sustenance as well as for settlements.

IV: VIII: Land and Constitutional Framework in Northeast India

Traditionally, the issue of land holding in the northeast region is closely linked to the provisions of Indian Constitution which contain a number of special provisions under Schedules five to seven for self-governance of various tribal groups living in various parts of India. These measures are designed to accommodate sub-regionalism within a broader region, whether based on tribal identity or linguistic identity. The Sixth Schedule provides for greater autonomy than the Fifth and the Seventh schedules. Some salient aspects of the Sixth Schedule relating to tribal self governance may be identified as follows:

i. The provision of the Sixth Schedule (Articles 244 (2) and 275(1)) deal with the tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. There are nine such areas falling under Sixth Schedule. These tribal areas are to be governed as autonomous districts.

ii. Although they are within the overall executive authority of the state concerned, provision is made for the creation of District Councils for the exercise of certain legislative, executive and judicial functions.

iii. The council has legislative power in certain fields such as the management of a forest, inheritance of property, marriage and social custom. The laws made by the council have to be approved by the Governor.

iv. The council has the power to assess and collect land revenue, and to impose certain taxes.

v. The council may establish, construct or manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, fisheries, roads, road transport and water ways, and also with the prior approval of Governor, prescribe the language and the manner in which education shall be imparted in the primary schools in the district. The other areas to which the power of the council
extends are: agriculture, animal husbandry, community projects, cooperative societies, social welfare, and village planning, etc.

Such provisions for self governance were designed and served to accommodate sub regional aspirations of the relatively underdeveloped sections of the society. Thus, the regional or district councils for the tribal people have often been the stepping stone for demanding greater regional identity in the form of states under the Indian Constitution. The powers and functions of the tribal regional district councils have also been clearly demarcated and protected in the constitution.

Historically speaking, the provision of the Sixth Schedule is important for Northeastern India. It is an attempt at providing the tribal people 'with a simple and inexpensive administration of their own, so that they could safeguard their own customs, traditions and cultures, etc', allowing them maximum autonomy in managing their own affairs. In order to deal specifically with the management of tribal affairs, the Constituent Assembly therefore incorporated two Schedules to the Constitution of India – the Fifth and the Sixth. The former was meant for tribes living in states other than Assam. The latter was explicitly meant for the tribal areas of the then composite province of Assam. By following the Cabinet Mission's recommendation, the Bardoloi Subcommittee was formed under the Chairmanship of Gopinath Badoloi, Prime Minister of Assam on 27 February 1947 by the Advisory Committee of Constituent Assembly. After extensively touring a number of the tribal areas of the Northeastern region the Baardoloi Subcommittee made a report which was submitted to the Advisory Committee on 28 July 1947. The later placed the Report and the Draft of the Sixth Schedule before the constituent Assembly in early 1948. The Bardoloi Subcommittee in its Report underscored the necessity of a separate model of administration for the tribal areas of Assam to protect them from exploitation by the plainsmen.

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safeguard their way of life and their traditional self governing institutions which more or less efficiently managed their affairs. It also noted the fear and concern about their future and identity vis-à-vis the plains people. The report expressed concern that there was absence of 'assimilation' of the hill people with the plains people of Assam and that a feeling of separateness was created instead. Thus, the Bardoloi Subcommittee's Report formed the basis of the Sixth Schedule, while the Thakkar Subcommittee Report laid the foundation for the Fifth Schedule in a similar process.

The provisions of these schedules emerge with the idea of the Bordoloi subcommittee that there should not be sudden assimilation of the tribals by destruction of their institutions; that the process should come through 'evolution or growth on the old foundations'. It emphasized the necessity of outside influences, while stressing the need to preserve the distinct features of their way of life. It cited the less expensive and simple system of justice dispensed by the tribal councils to argue against the imposition of a different system from outside. At any rate the future of the hill people, it emphatically stated, did not seem to lie in absorption in that the hills people will become indistinguishable from non-hill people but in, political and social amalgamation. The experiences elsewhere in India and the World would necessitate protection of tribal lands, which also called for provisions to control immigration to tribal lands for agricultural and non-agricultural purposes. Such provisions would allay the fear and suspicion of the hill people. Among other recommendations was included centralized management of the forests with the Local Councils having no power over reserve forests and retention of tribal councils and courts administering their own customary laws, codifying or modifying them. While such Councils would have powers of legislation over land, social customs, administration of local laws, etc., the Governor of Assam was to have powers to dissolve these Councils in order to check abuse of power, mismanagement of local administration, and activities

266 B.L. Hansaria, op. cit. p. 97-99.
prejudicial to the safety of India. Based on this report, the constitution provided special mechanism for the administration of areas occupied by tribal communities and ethnic communities in order to protect them from exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous elements and preserve their identity.

Today, the Sixth Schedule operates in the state of Mizoram and Meghalaya and two hill districts of Assam. However, the state of Manipur and Tripura, formerly princely states that had acceded to India in 1949, were outside the scope of the Bardoloi Sub-committee even though they were mostly hill territories. Therefore, the Sixth Schedule does not prevail in these states. But, Manipur got autonomous district Councils by Manipur (Hill Areas) District councils Act of 1971, outside the Sixth Schedule and Tripura was granted a District Councils under the Tripura Tribal Autonomous District Council Act of 1979.267 In early 1990s, there were various pressure groups from tribal communities on the demands for extension of Sixth Schedule in the Manipur Hill areas and in the Bodo areas of Assam. Such demands were seen by certain sections as a threat for the non-tribal communities of the states thereby leading intensification of ethnic antagonisms. For example, the demands from the Nagas and the Kukis for extension of the Sixth Schedule to the Hill areas of Manipur led to the ethnic feud between Meiteis of the valley and the Hill tribes in the state.268 The major concern of the issue emerges out of the question of territoriality and the sharing of resources.

In this context, the provisions in the Sixth Schedule can have a larger impact on both land and ethnic relations in the northeastern states. It may be pointed out that such impact can be more serious when the issue of acquisition of land becomes imperative for the developmental projects in the region. Therefore, there is need for critical observation on the contents of the schedule as well as the nature of social and political transformation within the developmental discourse.

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of the region. It is also generally agreed that developmental planning of the region requires some form of policy in which traditional values could adjust to the emerging choices suggested by modernity.

In fact, the MLR and LR Act of 1960 proposed to root out communal ownership of land and replace it with individual ownership. The extension of such Act to the hill areas of Manipur is nothing but a sort of regulation of land for public uses to promote economic growth. It may be noted that after the extension of this Act to the hill areas particularly to the hill valleys and foothill regions, there is growth of private land holding system among the tribal individuals. For example, the nine tribes in chandel district (Anal, Aimol, Chothe, Kom, Lamkang, Maring, Monsang, Moyon and Tarao) have their individual patta lands in which the revenues of these patta lands are officially collected by the respective offices.269

In Manipur, the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform Act of 1960 was framed under the pattern of the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reform Act of 1960. Since then, the MLR and LR Act has been amended several times. The Act has not been able to transform the customs of hill people into a uniform law. As a result, the real territorial unification of Manipur has hung in a cloud. The first eight Chapters of the Act deal with revenue administration, record of rights, mode of recovery of revenue arrears, mutation and participation of estates and other similar matters. According to the provision of the sub-section II of the section 99, every person who, at the time of the commencement of the Act, held any land from the government for agricultural purposes, whether as settlement holder or patta holder, or his successor in interest, shall become the owner thereof as and from such commencement.270

269 P. Pramodini Devi, op. cit., p. 96-97
270 Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reform Act, 1960.
The provision under section 158 primarily deals with land holding system of the tribals as a whole. It states: No transfer of the land by a person who is a member of the Schedule Tribe shall be valid unless,

i. the transfer is to another member of the Schedule Tribe, or

ii. where the transfer is to a person who is not a member of such tribe and it is made with the permission in writing of the Deputy Commissioner who shall not give such permission unless he has first secured the consent thereto of the district council within whose jurisdiction the land lies, or

iii. transfer is by way of mortgage to a co-operative society.

The above section implies strict measures on transfer of the tribal land to non tribals. Besides giving adequate legal safeguards, the MLR and LR Act also aims at introducing the concept of individual ownership with rights to posses, use and dispose of land.

Besides these, there are also some ceiling provisions which fix two limits—one for irrigated land and the other for non-irrigated land. For a five member family, the ceiling, according to the Act, is five hectares of irrigated land and 10 hectares of non-irrigated land. In this regard, some exceptions to the provisions as provided under Section 150 need to be noted. The provision of the Act can not be applied to land owned by the government and such as those lands held by co-operatives and commercial banks, educational and research centres, co-operative farming societies, existing religious, charitables or educational trusts, but not exceeding 50 hectares of land. Thus, the MLR and LR Act is a significant legislative measure to legalize land ownership system in the state. Accordingly, under this act the state becomes the absolute control of the whole landed property in conformity with the traditional rights exercised by the monarch who had proprietary rights over the territory in the valley.

After the failure to pass the Sixth Schedule Amendment Bill and extend the Act to the hill areas due to the serious opposition from the tribal leaders, there
was hardly any attempt to discuss the merits and the demerits of the MLR and LR Act of 1960. At present, the Act applies to only 665 villages out of which 550 villages are in valley districts and only 105 villages in the plain areas of the hill districts. Thus, only 31 percent of total villages come under the provision of the Act.\textsuperscript{271} The very reason for non-application of the Act in the hill areas is that these areas are still governed by the various customary laws. The factors that greatly influence these customary laws are the village organisations and the mode of cultivation in these areas.

Of late, to cope with the emerging economic transformation without compromising with the interest of every individual, it is realized that a people-centric reform of the MLR and LR Act would have been able to bring a uniform land law in the state. It may be here claimed that with the current land people imbalance, it is important to see the full implementation of the MLR and LR Act in the state with the required amendment. Therefore, those who prefer a reform argue that in the name of protecting customary land laws and collective usage of land, the tribal people cannot be befooled by a few learned individuals who have always been taking a negative stand to the amendment of the Act itself. However, leaders of the hill areas are not keen to get the Act extended as they consider the conditions of the hill areas to be vastly different from those of the valley or other developed areas in the state.

The widespread nature of community rights in land have led to difficulties in individual development. The incentives to undertake improvement and increase productivity have been blunted, as the individual does not know how long the land will be in his possession. Permanent rights over settled land are increasingly being recognized and the movement from community to individual has begun. However the individual needs to be given a legal right to land.

IV: IX: Land Tenure System and Land Reforms: Constraints and Difficulties in Manipur

It is worth noting the fact that the property right that matters most in the agricultural sector is the right over the use of land. If that right is well defined as well as exclusive, secure, enforceable and transferable, the farmers with those rights will have an incentive to invest and work on the land efficiently. It may here be noted that land tenure and land tenure relations refer to the way people own land and how they rent it to others if they choose not to cultivate it themselves.

It may be observed that land tenure system also has a major impact on agricultural productivity. It is because of the fact that an individual proprietor who has well defined, exclusive and secure rights to land knows that increased effort or skill that leads to a rise in output also will improve income. This result does not necessarily follow if the land is owned by some one else and property rights for the farmer are not well defined and secured. Tenancy usually refers to a situation where an individual family farms a piece of land owned by a landlord to whom the farmers pay rent. In most cases, share cropping is a form of tenancy in which the farmer shares the crops with the landlord. Under sharecropping, the landlord gets a percentage of the share in output. If a tenant’s rent contract is only a year or two in length, a rise in output may cause the landlord to threaten eviction of the tenant so that all or much of the increase in production can be captured through a rise in the rent. However, a different relationship between the landlord and tenants can be obtained in the case of absentee landlords who tend to live in cities or other places far away from the land they own and collect some agreed amount of crop at the time of harvest. In such cases, the satisfaction of the landlords at the level of production decides the fate of the farmer. For the case of landlords who live near their land, little interference is found on the production, except rents. Some resident landlords provide seeds and certain kinds of capital to tenants. Community farming is practiced in parts of the region where inhabitants of village still may own some of their land jointly. Individuals and families may farm plots on communal land, to which they gain access by custom or by collection from the
community's leaders. Thus, Land tenure system embodies those legal and contractual or customary arrangements whereby people in the farming gain access to productive opportunities on land. It constitutes the rules and procedures governing the rights, duties, liberties and exposures of individuals and groups in the use and control over the basic resources of land and water. With all these complexity, the kind of land-tenure system existing in any given country or region has an important bearing on economic development for several reasons.

Land reform has the greatest positive impact on productivity where the previous system was one of small peasant farms, with high rates of insecure tenancy and absentee landlords. The impact of land reform on agricultural productivity depends on what kind of system is being reformed as well as the content of the reform measures. Elsewhere in India, a law limiting the amount of land that can be owned by a single person has been enforced but has had limited real effect. It is more frequently found that an individual with more land than allowed by law registers the extra land in the name of trusted relatives or associates. Under such conditions, reform has little impact on cultivation practices since farms are small both before and after reform.

In the context of India, the land reform programme has been envisaged as follows: (i) abolition of intermediary tenure, (ii) tenancy reforms aimed at security of tenure, regulation of rent and conferment of ownership rights on tenants, (iii) ceiling on land holdings and distribution of surplus land, (iv) consolidation of holdings and compilation, and (v) compilation and updating of land records. Thus, it is often viewed as an instrument primarily for the achievement of greater equity and social justice. The main motive for undertaking land reform usually is political, not economic. Two types of politics lead to reform. A society with a large tenant and landless labour population that is controlled by other classes may find itself faced with increasing rural unrest. In

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the first type of land reform, to keep this unrest from blowing up into a revolution, bills are passed to reduce the burden on the peasantry and give them a stake in continued stability. In the second type, land reform takes place after a revolution supported by the rural poor has occurred. The main purpose of reform in this case is to consolidate support for the revolution among the rural poor and eliminate the economic base of one of the classes, the landlords, most opposed to the revolution.274

In fact, land reform is to have a major impact on the distribution of income in rural areas only if land is taken from landlords without compensation or at least without anything close to full compensation. If former tenants are required to pay landlords the full market value of the land received, the society's distribution of wealth will be the same as before. The tenant will receive land together with a debt exactly equal to the value of the land, hence no change in net wealth of the former tenants.

According to Mukul Sharma, the land reform programme has three elements: redistribution of land through subsidies, restitution to compensate people who lost their land through forced removal and other apartheid policies, and tenure reforms in order to improve security of tenure and to provide for a wider range of ways to hold land.275 However, the reform process is threatening the power of the propertied chiefs and is therefore meeting a lot of resistance. Therefore, the approach to land reforms in the tribal areas of Northeast India requires a critical appreciation of (a) the concept of land tenures and land reform, (b) the methods of determination of the existing status of the rights and obligations in respect of land, (c) the diverse perception about land relations, (d)

the nature of problems arising out of approaches based on diverse perceptions and (e) the emerging perspective.276

Another feature of land reform effort is that land reform legislation is extremely difficult to enforce in the absence of a deep commitment from the government. Most developing countries have some kind of land reform legislation on the books, but relatively few have experienced real reform. In some case, no serious effort is made to enforce the legislation. In other cases, the legislation is enforced but has little effect because of legal loopholes. Such instances can be evident from the implication of the Sixth Schedule in some areas of the Northeast India and the provision of MLR and LR Act in Manipur which are considered as the protector of tradition tribal land holding system.

In Manipur, with the introduction of Manipur Hill Areas (Acquisition of Chief’s Rights) Act, 1976, an attempt was made to bring a drastic change in the tenancy system in the hill areas of the state. The Act provided that all rights, titles and interest of the Chief in the areas to which the notification applied would, with effect from the date of vesting, cease and be vested absolutely in the government free from all encumbrances and that it would not be lawful for Chiefs thereafter to collect charges for any period after the date of vesting from any resident of a village in such area. However, the Act could not be enforced for a long time due to constant and organized opposition. It was only in 1975 that an amendment was introduced in view of bringing the MLR and LR Act of 1960 in the line with the changing socio-economic condition of the people of Manipur and to create an egalitarian society in the state. Section 1 (3) of the MLR and LR (Amendment) Act of 1975 empower the state Government to extend, by notification in the official gazette, the whole or part of this Act to any of the hill areas of Manipur also as might be specified in such notification. However, such legal initiatives could not be implemented in the hill areas of the state. Nor has it had any major

impact on the land holding system in the hill areas. Another attempt was again made by amending the same Act in 1976 (Second Amendment) to provide adequate legal safeguards against the alienation of tribal lands. However, this act also has been facing constant and organized opposition of the chiefs. For instance, among the Kuki ethnic groups, there is a claim that chieftainship is a vital organization and the chiefs' right over their lands never affected the economic life of the community, rather the right acts as the effective protection of the tribal territory. In a memorandum submitted to the Deputy Commissioner of North District, the Sadar Hill Kuki Chief's Organisation gave the following note: 'very often than not, there is more on the part of the state Government to violate the rights of the chiefs over the land by attempting to enforce various Manipur Land Revenue Acts. The Argument put forward in favour of bringing tribal lands under the Revenue Acts is undoubtedly specious but in reality ruinous to the poor tribals.

In fact, there is a need for land survey and land settlement operation in the hill areas, no government could so far successfully implement these Acts. It is due to the strong fear of land alienation to the non-tribals that has strengthened their point of opposition to the land reforms. Such problem of land alienation among the tribals of Manipur is commonly viewed as the leading cause of tension between the tribals and non-tribals in the state while it is true that tribal land in Manipur has been alienated mainly to such non-tribals. In this context, it is important to note that lack of clarity on legal perspectives on land has this alienation. Thus, land reform is a powerful force, perhaps the most difficult one that the government and the people have to deal with. It has the power to tear the region apart or the potential to build a community.

278 Memorandum submitted to the Hon'ble Deputy Commissioner, Senapati District, Government of Manipur, Manipur by the Sadar Hills Kuki Chiefs' Organisation, Manipur on 20 October 1986.
IV: X: Large Dams and their Impacts on Agrarian Relation in Manipur:

One of the principal pre-requisites of the post-independence development projects has been land acquisition. Most of these projects have caused major changes in land use, leading to dispossession and displacement of a large number of people and their involuntary resettlement in other areas- a process that still continues.\footnote{279 Enakshi Ganguly Thukral. 'Development, Displacement and Rehabilitation: Locating Gender', \textit{Economic and Political Weekly}, Vol. XXXI, No. 24, June 15, 1996, p. 1500.}

With this, displacement is increasingly being understood as a multi dimensional phenomenon, affecting people's lives in their entirety, encompassing not only the economic but also the social and cultural spheres, all of which revert-back to each other. In fact, land can either be purchased directly or acquired through any of the relevant legislations created by the state or central governments. The land requirements for public sector, as well as, for the major private-sector projects, are met through the Land acquisition Act of 1894.

The Land Acquisition Act of 1894\footnote{280 \textit{The Land Acquisition Act of 1894.}} which has nation-wide coverage was passed by the colonial British government to make it possible for the state to acquire private land for any public purposes. The act provides for payment of cash compensation to those who have a direct interest in the title to such land. Under this Act, the legal obligations of the project authorities do not go beyond 'monetary compensation' to a narrowly defined category of project-affected persons. The enormous expansion in the state's role in promoting public welfare and economic development through industrialization, building of institutions, infrastructures, etc. has necessitated acquisition of land for what is called 'public purposes'. This Act has been generously used by successive governments to meet such an end. However, natural justice requires that in doing this, a balance has to be maintained with the rights of the individual, whose land is acquired, often depriving him of his means of livelihood. Section 16 of the Act stipulates that when the District Collector, has made an award under the Section II of the act, he or she may take possession of the land, which shall there-upon vest absolutely in the government, free from all encumbrances. The owner compulsorily loses his
right, title and interest to the land in return for a cash compensation declared under the terms of the award.

Thus, the processes of land acquisition and compensation were governed by the Land Acquisition Act (LA) of 1894 which lays down the provisions by which the government could acquire land for public purposes and fix compensation for the land so acquired. Under Section 11 (3), the LA Act has a provision for the grant of land in lieu of money compensation, but the provision has seldom been used. It is on the line of conceptual framework that, the individuals and institutions whose rights on the land are deprived need to be adequately compensated for their loss. This is, in fact, a return to the sacrifice they have to make for the larger interests of the community. As cash compensation alone has not been acceptable to the majority of tribal people, especially in areas where large-scale displacement has taken place, it has become the practice to give jobs at the rate of one person per family in addition to cash compensation or sometimes a piece of alternative land.

In 1984, the land acquisition Act of 1894 was comprehensively amended based on the recommendation of Law commission. A Land Acquisition Review Committee headed by Justice A.N. Mulla was constituted which held due consultations with the state governments. The main aim was to make the LA Act internally efficient, while strengthening the rights of the individual and guaranteeing a modicum of public accountability. In amending the LA Act, the policy makers attempted to bring about a rapprochement between the interests of the landowners and those of the state, yet they failed to consider the interest of the dependent groups who did not formally own land and yet were displaced, in the process. Emphasizing on these realities, problems and priorities, a major amendment to the Act was made, according to which, the government could acquire land for purposes of resettling those who have been displaced by developmental projects. Introduction of this amendment indicates some
recognition of the need for resettlement and rehabilitation to go beyond mere cash-compensation, and for direct provision of land as compensation.

Such compensation, according to the Act, is calculated on the basis of prevailing market prices of land. But, compensation and rehabilitation is determined on the basis of ownership to land. As a result, one argument always lingers because of the fact that as only those who hold legal titles to land are to be entitled to compensation and those without legal titles such as landless agricultural labourers, the encroachers on government owned forest lands and others, are not entitled to compensation, under the Act. This has created a critical situation for the livelihood of the indirectly affected section of the people.

In most cases, the emphasis has been on cash compensation for the loss of land and the other causes of hardship. This concept accepts the debatable premise that most projects resulting in displacement are beneficial for the larger sections of the society, but also recognizes that for project-affected persons, displacement represents the imposed un-raveling of their economy and society due to various factors like the dismantling of production systems, the dislocation of long-established residential settlements, the scattering of kinship groups, the disruption of traditional structures of authority and solidarity, and related processes.

Another crucial example of the interconnections between different kinds of movements is the relation between migration and urban resettlement. It is because of the environmental degradation of a local habitat due to a combination of factors including population pressure, enhanced biomass needs, and the depletion of resources due to past technological innovations, that people are forced to migrate to other places in search of a way to survive. This migration into areas of perceived opportunity then puts pressure on the places to which the migrants have moved, such as urban centres. The resultant demands for such services as road development, supply of electricity and water supplies, to un-
authorized colonies, inevitably lead to displacement of rural populations in those areas.\textsuperscript{281}

Most crucial issues of developmental projects of Manipur can be highlighted through the nature of impact of dams on the socio-economic and political front of the state. These impacts can be analyzed under the following issues:

i. **The Rise of New-Classes and Social Strata**

In Manipur, the rise of new economic classes with the same community can be easily visible among the project-affected people. For example, the construction of the Ithai Barrage to control the water level of the lake has led to the inundation of a large area of agricultural land that went under the water thereby completely destroying the agricultural activities of more than 32 villages for more than 20 years without getting any compensation. Many of those whose means of livelihood depends on agriculture are forced to search for an alternative. Consequently, this has led the traditional farmers to change their occupation from cultivation to other activities. The major occupation taken-up by most of these farmers is (pisciculture) fish-farming. But, as fish-farming requires large amount of investment for constructing ponds, fish nursery, feeding, maintenance of the water ecology, etc, only a 'particular' section of the people which has potential to manage the resources are left to engage with agriculture, while others, are forced to migrate to the urban-centres for other opportunities. Such instances can be evident from the increasing migrant population like daily wage labourers, rickshaw drivers, etc., thereby contributing to the growth of urban expansion in and around Imphal City.\textsuperscript{282}


\textsuperscript{282} An interview with 50 rickshaw pullers and daily wage labourers in Imphal City during the field survey of this study indicates this trend. Out of this total respondent, 28 respondents are migrated in search of job in the city due to loss of their livelihood as a result of the degraded ecosystem of the *paat*. 186
However, the project report have not taken into account the facts that the Loktak Lake has no definitive boundary and it expands well into the towns and villages located along its peripheries due to the rise in siltation level of the paat. This has caused the spreading of flood water, particularly during the monsoon, to these areas. Hence, the water level is to be maintained at a certain point for the purpose of generating electricity there-by submerging the vast areas of land including the paddy fields of the villagers which were not submerged before the project was taken up.

It is also found that concerned authorities, like LDA and NHPC, are fully aware of the damages towards the villagers and their paddy fields and other general public who are residing in the peripheries of the Loktak Lake, and in spite of such colossal damages done to the villagers, no action has been taken for preventing such damage or rehabilitating the project-affected people who have been seriously affected by the project since the commissioning of the Project.

Aggrieved by the conduct on the part of the authorities concerned, for not taking-up any remedial measures for rehabilitation with regards to the grievances faced by the poor villagers who have been deprived of their means of livelihood by the project-operator agency of the Loktak Hydro-Electric Project, a case was filed in the Gauhati High Court, Imphal Branch, by those people whose rights and interests over their respective paddy fields, ingkhol or homestead have been deprived-of, by land submergence, for compensation. But, the with-holding of the court's final verdict has again led the project-affected people to a miserable state in various respects.

Another similar story can be derived from the case of Mapithel Dam. The way in which the project-affected villagers are compensated through a policy of installment in different phases after a long struggle has caused the emergence of landless villagers within the community. As the amount compensated in each of the phases is not possible to buy a new price of land, most of the affected villagers
are left without any alternative land to cultivate. This has led to the rise of wage
labourers who depend on their daily earnings for their livelihood.

i. Impacts on Communal Land Holdings in Manipur

In Manipur, the tribals, who constitute a major proportion of those affected by
large-scale irrigation and hydel-power projects and, who may have only
customary titles, are also being denied compensation in the event of community
owned land being resumed. Given the existence of land-ownership system in the
hill districts of the state, one easily assumes that the construction of such hydel-
power projects will only add another critical situation to the existing one. For
example, the Khoupam Earth Dam has submerged more than 200 acres of
cultivable land belonging to Rongmei tribes of Luwanglon village. Though they
were paid compensation and promised employment in the dam, after spending the
compensation paid they have become landless.283 Besides, many of them have lost
their land in ethnic conflicts and to the Loktak Hydroelectric Power Project in the
Bishnupur district, but they have not been compensated since much of what they
owned was CPRs that the law does not recognize.284 Therefore, it may be argued
that without having a properly formulated land-reform policy in the hill areas, any
planning of such projects is premature.

It is also a point worth noting, that the tribals have a democratic way of
life involving community-consensus decisions. Therefore, it is necessary to be
aware of the need to preserve social and cultural homogeneity, which is central to
their way life. The sudden breakdown of community life may prove havoc in
tribal societies because of the largely non-monetised and non-commercialised
nature of their economic and social system. Therefore, such societies face not
only physical impoverishment but also socio-cultural disorientation and a net
social loss. Therefore, resettlement should be in an environment as similar as
possible to that environment which they have left behind. Past experience
suggests that whenever people have been taken from one group and settled amidst

284 Walter Fernandes and Gita Bharali, The Socio-Economic Situation of Some Tribes of Bishnupur and
a different population, conflicts have arisen. This has created 'social discord amongst different groups whose members find it difficult to share the common resources around the new settlements.

Therefore, the issue of the provision of land-for-land thesis has been a consensus aspect of rehabilitation planning. Activists argue that for most of the displaced persons, particularly, those engaged in primary activities, their sole skill is agriculture. The tribal society respects agriculture as a livelihood. The minimum area of land to be given would depend upon factors such as land productivity, irrigations facilities and the value of land.

For the tribal communities in the hill areas of Manipur, hill life does not imply images of isolation and backwardness. Therefore, they are found to articulate their preference for life in the hills as compared to the other alternatives, in terms of what they see as the advantages of hill life. This is because of the fact that generally the community is very proud of the tribal economy and often this pride is deployed to articulate their difference from other groups. Thus, most tribal communities emphasize that their land, due to its variety of sources like forest, rivers and agriculture, allows them to be self-sufficient in the production and consumption of food. It is this self-sufficiency that enables them to lead a life without much need for cash, thereby minimizing their independence on others and on market forces. Therefore, any threat to their self-sufficiency has been a source, both in the past and till today, to draw the community together as a unit highlighting dormant feeling of group identity. It is also a known fact that tribes in Manipur till recently remained somewhat 'untouched' by dominant or other groups and therefore, persisted in their independent existence in the remote hills and forests.

ii. Struggle of a New Kind and New Organization

Today, the state is witnessing a kind of new struggle for rights over natural resources among the people who have been adversely affected by construction of dams. For instance, struggle for rehabilitation and compensation on account of
loss of the agricultural land is very much visible in the case of Loktak hydro Power Project in which new type of organizations have emerged among agricultural farmers and fishing communities in order to strengthen their movement. It is in this background that a massive protest movement against the proposed Tipaimukh Hydro-Electric (Multi-purpose) Project was launched in the state. The major reason for objection is the fear of loosing socio-cultural values of community life based on the traditional land holding system which prevails among the tribals living in the submergence area of the project. Moreover, without making much attempt to understand the needs of these tribes, extracting the tribal resources for public purposes is considered to be a major threat to their community life. At the same time, strong community feeling among the tribes has easily created group solidarity to raise their voice against this kind of development in the area which they traditionally conceived as their own.

Mention can be made of some factors which have contributed to the strength of these protest movements. They are the emerging awareness of ecological destruction by large hydel projects, adverse impact on the socio-cultural and religious sphere of the indigenous peoples, lack of transparency and accountability in the decision making process, absence of proper consultation with the affected tribal population and the past experience of the attitude of the project authorities, etc.

Keeping all these factors in mind, the Hmar Students' Association, a student body belonging to the affected Hmar tribe in a letter to the Chairman and Managing Director of North-eastern Power Electricity Corporation Limited wrote.

286 *Hmar* is a tribe largely found in Manipur. The largest concentration is found in today in Churachandpur, Tipaimukh and Jiribam sub-division of the state. A good number of Hmar is also found in North Cachar hills of Assam, Megalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.
287 “An Open letter” to The Chairman and Managing Director, North-eastern Electric Power Corporation Ltd., Shilong, Megalaya, by The Hmar Students’ Association dated on 17 March 2003, Imphal.
land required for the construction, operation and maintenance of the project and for the associated works as will be assessed by the NEEPCO, project operating agency, shall be acquired by the State Government and transferred in the name of NEEPCO. The issue of transferring large chunks of land in the name of NEEPCO should be seriously considered again by the Government and the people. Nowhere in the world are land being transferred to corporate today, they are either leased or rented for specific time and for purpose on definite conditions. If you sell your land once, either under duress or consent due to political or economic reasons getting it back is always a problem. You may not feel it now but the next generation will, as land will become, more and more, scarce. The issue of land being returned to the people in case of non-completion or decommission or after the life span of the dam must be the top priority of the Government. It should also ensure that the land is only for a specific project.

The letter seriously questions acquisition of land from its owners. Given such resistance, the tribal collective community holding should be sincerely looked at, especially in the ethnically volatile district of Churachandpur where a vast land is to be affected.

Emphasizing the difficulties of proceeding on the project, NEEPCO, during its Public Hearing on Tipaimukh Dam held on 2 December 2004 at Darlawn in Mizoram, promised that 'a new town one-third the size of Aizawl, Capital of Mizoram, will be coming up in this remote border of the state for the benefits of the villagers. Only 1680 square meters of their land will be submerged in lieu of which they will enjoy the benefits of a good higher secondary school, a well equipped hospital, a post office, a bank, markets, good roads and highway and employment. Jhum will be replaced by terraced and permanent cultivation; training in agriculture will be given free; fruit gardens and processing facilities will be given on demand... In spite of all these assurances, a close observation of the minutes of this public hearing, however, reveals a strong opposition from the participants. To quote one of the participants at the hearing: ‘...if our land is the price we are going to pay for modernization and development; the price is too

high; rather keep the land and remain as we are. It may here be pointed out that the way the public hearing was conducted in Mizoram where only a small portion of land is affected has often been criticized on the ground of its failure to conduct similar ones in Manipur where the issues on Tipaimukh dam have been widely known. However, the result of the public hearing proceedings indicates that the opposition from the participants in Mizoram has already strengthened the ongoing campaigns against the construction of this dam in Manipur. In a harsh language, another tribal organization from Tamenglong District wrote:

We, the people of Tamenglong Village are not concerned whether you construct a multipurpose high dam at Tipaimukh or not, we are concerned only in safeguarding our land, rivers and forest. Our land, rivers, forest should not be disturbed in any manners for any reason today or in the days to come.

It again continued:
We are not interested in your so-called 'compensation'. Our interest is to safeguard, protect and develop our land. Our land is everything to us in our life. We cannot allow our land to be taken away by anyone or allow it to be submerged under water for any reason, whatsoever. It should remain with us for generations to come.

The above opposition view on the construction of proposed Tipaimukh Dam is due to the fear of vast areas of land submergence.

iv. Rising Landlessness and Pauperisation among the people of Manipur

At the time of independence, Manipur was free from the Zamindari system in the strict sense of the term as applied to the rest of the India. However, there had been large landowners locally known as louveram chaba in the valley districts and chieftains who were, in principle, the owners of all the village lands in the hill areas. The large landowners leased out land to small and landless tenants against payment of stipulated rent in cash or part of their agricultural produce.

In the hill areas under the chieftainship system, ordinary villagers were supposed to pay a certain amount of rent in kind or cash to the chief in return for using the agricultural land. However, it is argued that the role of chieftains could

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289 Ibid.
290 A Letter submitted to The Chairman and Managing Director, North-eastern Electric Power Corporation Ltd., Shilong, Megalaya, by Tamenglong Village Authority, Tamenglong. Dated on 26 May 2003.
not be compared to landlords of the valley for which the only similarity was the procuring of rents from village dwellers or tenants.

Today, the practice of leasing in / out of land is no longer confined only to the valley districts. There are signs of emergence of this system among the tribal communities, for example, among the Tangkhul tribe in Ukhrul district of the state. The increasing population pressure and traditional practice of equal distribution of parental land to the off-springs have caused fragmentation of land holdings and consequent decline in the average size of land holdings or cultivable areas. In 1991-92, the average size of operational holdings was only 1.79 acres in Manipur.

According to the estimate made in 48th round of the National Sample Survey Organisation, 34.3 per cent of total cultivators were having less than one acre of operated area in 1991-92. This simply indicates the existence of a large percentage of economically unsustainable cultivators in the state. Thus, the number marginal cultivators tend to rise in the absence of any effective implementation of land reform measures constraining fragmentation of land, consolidation of fragmented holdings and introduction of co-operative farming, etc., among the operational holders.

Meanwhile, there are a number of landless tenants and absentee landlords in the state. In 1991-92, 12 per cent of the total cultivated area was leased in by tenants. Immediately after the passing of the MLR & LR Act of 1960 and the MLR Amendment Act of 1968, attempts were made to enforce these acts in the hill areas of the state. These Acts seek to recognize the rights of each person by recording and ascertaining their properties and to recognize individual holdings in permanent and terraced areas by issuing formal pattas as per the related clause of the acts.

However, extension and implementation of these acts in the hill areas could not be done, as there were sharp reactions from sections of tribal communities. Their main argument is that the land revenue system is not a part of the tribal traditional customs. They believed that traditionally land belongs to the people and not to the state and hence the revenue system is also seen as a system working against their traditional interest.

v. New Modes of Migration and Land Alienation in Manipur

In a state where divide is between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ among different ethnic communities, immigration adds to the complexities. The presence of the immigrants has resulted in many conflicts because most of them occupy land around which the local communities have built their economy and identity. The issue of immigration is important but the main issue is alienation of livelihood, in the case of land, water and biodiversity, the foundation of their culture, economy and identity. Hardened ethnic identities and exclusive claims over the depleted resources ensue from their feeling of alienation. Alienation of land, culture and identity and the indigenous status are the bases of conflicts such as the Naga-Kuki killing in Manipur. Further, changing land relations caused by immigration and other factors have also led to a new interpretation of the indigenous status in the state which differs substantially from that in the rest of India. Many communities of the state view the immigrants as a threat to their livelihood. In reaction to what they consider attacks on their land, culture and identity by outsiders, many declare themselves the original inhabitants of an area and lay exclusive claim to its resources based on this indigenous status. What causes conflicts is not the indigenous status itself but the fact that in claiming an exclusive right over land and forest each group rejects the claims of all others over what they consider their livelihood. Control over resources is basic to it. The land issue is expressed only in a covert form though the conflicts emerge from the realization of its depletion caused by the commercialization of forest and agricultural produce. In the state, the competition for land and feeling of alienation are combined with cultural revival in order to lay the foundation of unity among different communities. A
reason why land has become a bigger source of conflict is due to the consequent absence of livelihood alternatives to land. High dependence on land and lack of livelihood alternatives is the main reason why immigration causes tension since the colonial age and laid the foundation of various ethnic conflicts at present.

An overall observation of all these dams in the state shows that a comparatively vast area of land has been acquired for these projects thereby turning these lands into a different mode of usage. In the changing pattern of land use, the system of protection from misuses which prevails under the control of the community has now been bypassed. In a state with limited plain area of rice cultivation like Manipur, crux of the critical situation is the loss of arable land that will contribute to the adverse impacts on the productivity of food in the state. For the hills, though voluminous amount of lands are still available, the geographical environment that they farm in restricts the hill communities from changing their mode of agriculture to incorporate new crops. Therefore, it may well be concluded that there is a need to maintain a balance between required land and available land in the state before any acquisition of land for purposes of development.