

A land where wetlands are shifting:

Manipur is a land where two kinds of lands are shifting both in momentum and speed against the backdrop of a natural constant called rainfall. Just as shifting nature of jhoom cultivation in the hills is creating renewed and renewable problems in habitat, crop production, eco-environmental disaster, extinction of biodiversity etc. the wetland in Manipur are also shifting non-stop in the valley of Manipur creating the same problem of eco-unfriendliness and habitation. The momentum of soil erosion is so great, both in speed and mass, that it has now become almost impossible to determine with accuracy the position and magnitude of the problem at a time. This, uncertainty is pointing towards the future of the state.

The thinking part is very simple but very loud now. Both the shifting nature of jhooming in the hills and that of wetlands in the valley have been there for centuries, but silent till they were not sizeable enough to hurt human interest. So a vedic definition of jhooming and wetland may be rearranged like this : when “jhooming” is sizeable enough to attract human attention it is socially recognised as shifting cultivation. In like manner any moist place when it has become sizeable enough to hurt human interest or create human interest is defined as wetland. Shifting cultivation is virtually stopped, rather stagnant in Manipur hills as there is no place which is shift-worthy. But the shifting properties of wetlands in Manipur valley starts working in full-swing. How ‘keishampat’ (‘pat’ means ‘lake’) and ‘Nityaipat’, both very near the present Residency of his Excellency the Governor of Manipur, have become a land mass in the heart of the city is a history now. The Lamphelpat, another lake is being metamorphosed into a New Imphal. ‘Kharungpat’ once a big lake is now an agricultural land; “Sumusang” another wetland, in between ‘Yangoi Achouba’ (Nambul River) and ‘Yangoi Macha’ (Nambol River), situated at the mouth of the Loktak Lake is now turned into pattalands under the statecraft, much to the rejoice of the people and the Government. Similar is the case to ‘Lousipat’, still a beautiful natural fresh-water lake but sucked to the bone by a pompous artificial drain, is now dead; ‘mustard seeds’ are sown on this huge grave yard. People are happy as if they are earning something new; the Government is still searching for such more areas for egging a few morshels of rice for its poor people.

But, the irony is that both the people and its governance do not remember one thing that something is produced at the cost of something; there is nothing like profit. “Rice” is done at the cost of lakes. Rice can be purchased from the market, but lakes are never marketable. Alas, nobody can sense the smell of the snake under the carpet. Rainfall is as much as it has been so long. Manipur River is the only natural drainage line doing its work to the fullest capacity to drain the water to the Chindwin of Myammar. The same water balance remains in the valley-no less, no more. The only difference is that accumulation of water is very quick due to slippery watersheds all around, the momentum gained is so powerful that the same tonnage of water can do more work of devastation. Have we ever thought, when mankind has converted these lakes into their granaries, where does the water go. It remains as if can’t go out, So the quantum of wetland water is constant. Having natural capacity to form new wetlands with the basic urge to maintain its equilibrium, This water forms new wetlands as its compensatory mechanism.

On the other side of the scale, Loktak lake, taking the advantage of the heavy “cubes” of the Hydro-electric project- is expanding; and as its new form, many wetlands are formed along its neighbours swallowing up more than 60,000 hectares of heritage paddy lands of the state. That is not enough, the ground water is also silently creeping underneath towards the human habitation, and starts functioning as a high initial base for flash floods in the mainlands destroying properties worth of crores of rupees every year in a strange way - let alone the question of Biodiversity hazard to the Environmentalists, as one among the silent and helpless observers.