

Customary Land use Pattern of the Tribals in Manipur: a case study of the Zeliangrong Community in Tamenglong District

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Abstract: Land in the Zeliangrong community is controlled under the customary land tenure system in which the village owner (Nampou) governed it by granting equal access to all the families within groups with common lineages. Rapid changes in the domestic situation of the village through government policies of rural development, there is an increase complexities which led to the alteration of traditional land tenure systems in Tamenglong District. So also, economic challenges purely for commercial purposes and private interest gave rise to privatisation of the community land. Moreover, customary property rights system are not documented as a result there is inability on the part of the Nampou to provide tenure security which in fact create dilemmas among the villagers who live at the mercy of the Nampou. The customary tenure system seems to be collapsing slowly because of the emerging patterns of growing inequalities provoked by local politics, church, access, control and ownership by few. This article focus on the mushrooming evidence of problem between the domain of formal and customary tenure systems where opportunity resides with a potential contributors to effective cooperation between tenure regimes. There is the need for a new planning of land rights negotiated by a participatory process and coordinated by both state government and traditional institutions.

Keywords: Zeliangrong, Nampou, Land, Traditional, Tamenglong, Tribal

I. Introduction

Land has always been an important component of development especially for people in rural areas. From times immemorial, there is no commodity more valuable than land and tribals are no exception. Land is widely defined as including various benefits that arise out of land and the things attached to it [1]. Land has evolved over the past several centuries to place greater emphasis on individual land ownership. Control over land, however, may also be perceived less in terms of individual ownership and more in terms of land use, or through what is known as land tenure. Different people in a family or community had different rights to access this land for different purposes and at different times. Such rights were often conveyed through oral history and not formally documented.

The Report of the scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission (1960-61) under the chairmanship of Shri U.N. Dhebar has beautifully described economic and emotional attachments of tribal people to land. "The tribal people are bound to their land by many and intimate ties. Their feeling for it is something more than mere possessiveness. It is concerned with their sense of history, for their legends tell of the great journeys they made over the wild and lonely hills and of the heroic pioneers who made the first clearings in the forests. It is part of their reverence for the dead whose spirits still haunt the country-sides. The land is the mother who provides for them in response to the labours of their hands and who, when supplies run short, feeds them with hundred natural gifts. It is the setting of adventure, in love, in hunting and in war which can never be forgotten. The land is the foundation of a sense of security and freedom from fear; its assured possession is a lasting road to peace" [2].

Making a living requires some form of access to land without which the livelihoods of many would be in jeopardy. But the man, who attributes high value to land, sometimes forgets that human capital in any nation-state is basically more valuable than land. This is the main perspective in which we have to look upon the tribals as human capital to be developed and utilised for their own and national development. The urge to possess land, also called territorial instinct by biologist in a regional perspective is common to all human beings and primates. The land system anywhere in the world is a complex system of human relationships under which the rights and interests of the ruler and the ruled are regulated from times immemorial. Land systems of any area including the tribal area are vitally connected with survey and settlement operations of land by the ruler. Land system in the tribal areas is of special significance because land provides subsistence as well as a sense of security to tribals in several ways. Land tenure has proved to be one of the most perplexing issues in the world. The inability of formal and customary property rights systems to effectively connect in ways that provide for tenure security creates dilemmas not easily overcome.

The focus of the article being on the Zeliangrong of Manipur, it became possible to take a holistic view of the situation which is based largely on empirical knowledge and behavioural dimensions of people associated

with land reforms and development programmes leading to social change in general. This article deals on the process of customary land used system of the Zeliangrong and the conflict that emerges due to the current development programmes which challenges the traditional 'Nampou' (village owner) involvement and the recent dispossession of their legal powers in their respective villages. It also encompasses the effects of land use and its validity for public purpose and in public interest, economic challenges and problems of land for sustainable development.

II. Tamenglong and its people

Tamenglong District is endowed with rich natural resources which are essential for high economic uses of land. But they are not used even to a negligible extent for achieving the twin objectives of agriculture viz; rising sufficient food and uplifting the economic conditions of the people. Traditional land use system is still prevalent in the district and land is used in every aspect of life, be it sorrow or happiness. The people of Zeliangrong are unique and distinct from other. Zeliangrong comprises of Zeme, Liangmei and Rongmei and are located in the north-eastern corner of India. They are mostly concentrated in the Hills of Manipur, i.e. Tamenglong district which extends from 25° 7' N to 25° 27' North Latitude and 93° 10' E to 93° 42' E Longitude. It is bounded by the state of Nagaland on the North, Cachar District of Assam on the east, Churachandpur and Senapati Districts on the South and East respectively. It is a mountainous clad with thick forests except tiny Khoupum valley of 3 sq. Mile. The major rivers in the district are the Barak, the Irang, the Makhu and the Apah. The district has four sub-divisions; namely, Nungba, Tamenglong, Tamei and Tousem. The total geographical area of the district is 4,391 sq.km or 19.66 percent of the total area of the state of Manipur. The population according to 2011 census, is 1,40,143.

III. Settlement of Village and Emergence of Land Owners

In the olden days, people selected and settled down in no-man land. Any amount of land people could claim they could have it. So, whatever land one earmarked, it became his land. Demarcation of land was made with ditches, stones, hill ranges and rivulets. However, Zeliangrong community did not just settle down at any land. They made settlement only after observation of dreams and omens and performance of rites. People took serious consideration and examination of such factors as topography of the land, direction of wind, water resources, village defence site, etc. direction of wind is observed through branches of trees. If trees look pruning and scanty having no thick branches or bough, it cannot be considered for settlement. If wind blows through, without obstructing with mountain and hillocks, it is said to be good site. The land should be fogless and open so as to observe clearly the sun and the moon, mainly to know the changes of time and season and also to forecast the weather. If the mentioned requirements are met, an egg is buried on the ground and after the 5th or the 7th day; it is taken out to see whether the egg so buried get rotten or not. It is favourable for settlement if the egg remains as it is but if it is found rotten, they believe that the village will not be prosperous and populated and the village will face natural calamities in the future. On this very day, new fire is made. Bamboo gauge is produced by abrading the dried bamboo with Dao and this is known as 'Meilapmei'. Dried leaves are gathered around and burnt. Quick growing seed of crops such as paddy and mustard are sown and check it on the 5th or the 7th day. If it does not grow well or is spoiled by wild animals or birds, it is believed that the village will not be prosperous and prolific but if the crops grow well and lively, then settlement can be made without much doubt.

When the above conditions are met or fulfilled, an important rite, known as 'Khunh Nummei' or 'Intup Keimei' is performed by Nampou (owner of the village). 'Nampou' is the founder of the village and should be blameless; physically fit, mentally sound and he should be married. 'Khunh Nummei' is performed on the day of the inauguration of the village called 'Namgutmei' [3]. On this occasion, all the villagers and animals therein came out of the village gate till the rituals has been completed. But, 'Nampou' stays in and performs the rite. Persons known as 'Rangh dingmei' guard the village against entering the village by any human being or animal till the rite is completed.

'Nampou' taking the role of priest cuts sacrificial animal be it cock, or cow or pig at the neck and watch the favourable sign at the legs of the cock and spleen of the cow or pig. He makes an appeasement with god, goddesses, rivers, mountains and all the creatures in it such as fauna, reptiles, birds, insects, etc. people have firm belief that these creatures possess supernatural power to cause them prosperity or misfortunes. 'Nampou' will pronounce a prayer to the mother-earth, mountains, rivers and all these creatures for favour and to be friendly and also to give prosperity, good health and prolificacy to the villagers [4]. The 'Nampou' then buries the sacrificial animals on the ground. When he completes the performance of the rite he opens the gate of the village wide and call 'Nampei (Later known as Khullakpa) to step in and 'Nampei' leads all the villagers entering the village.

'Namgutmei' is usually done after having stayed therein for some time and have certain population and domestic animals or it may be done at the time of re-entry to the village after dissertation due to war, epidemic,

etc. Namgutmei is also performed when village needs occasional purification. While performing the rite, 'Nampou' will pledge even his own life for the well being of his subjects. It is believed with evidence in Zeliangrong society that 'Nampou' who performs this rite i.e. 'Khunh-Nummei' or 'Intup Keimei' do not enjoy long life and generally leaves no decedents. This must be due to the pledge he makes for the sake of the villagers [5]. Thus, it is believed that if 'Nampou' dies soon after the performance of the 'Nampou', the village becomes prosperous.

'Nampou' is the founder of the village and originally the whole land of the village belongs to him. According to V. Ramnath, deputy Commissioner, Tamenglong, during 1982... "Khunbu (Nampou) appoints khullakpa (nampei) to help him in the execution of rites at the time of the first settlement and later in administration of the village, khunbu by virtue of his highest status in the traditional social hierarchy of the village, has a better claim to headmanship of the village than the khullakpa." And later on it is the generosity of the 'Nampou' to distribute portions of land to individuals or clans in the village. This is the way how private land ownership and clan ownership came into being for the first time. However, the case may be different if settlement is made by groups of people. The leader of the group who also performs rites will automatically become Nampou.

IV. A Background of Traditional Land Ownership Practices of the Zeliangrong

A Zeliangrong village is administered by a village council headed by a 'Nampou' (owner of the village). Traditional Zeliangrong polity is democratic and for that matter gerontocracy mingled with theocracy. Elderly people of the village represent household of clans to the Village Council. 'Kullakpa', known in some villages as 'Nampei', is appointed by Nampou to help him in the execution of rites and administration of the villages. Both 'Nampouship' and 'Nampeiship' are hereditary. Nammupou (functionary in charge of agricultural rites) is appointed for one agricultural year. 'Tingkuh' (Priest) is the oldest man who has good knowledge of rituals and traditional practices in the village. And 'Tingkuh Kiakja' is junior or assistant priest selected from amongst the villagers to assist 'Tingkuh'. 'Banhjas' are elderly people generally representing each clan to the Village Council. They are responsible for maintaining orderliness of religious practices as well as other socio-economic aspects of the village. They are consultative body of the village administration. The decision of the Village Council is final and binding to each and every individual of the village.

The fundamental principle of Zeliangrong traditional land tenure system is that it vests all land in the Nampou (village owner). This principle is indeed a sound one, since it is a forceful recognition that land is the most important natural resource for the welfare of the nation, present and future. As in all traditional systems, there is no individual ownership of land. Authorities allocate an arable land to one to cater for his/her family's subsistence but he/she has exclusive rights only to crops and the land reverts to communal use after harvesting. The traditional land tenure system allocates powers to the chiefs (Nampou), who, in Zeliangrong, have a strong hierarchical structure. The chiefs had absolute power in land allocation and land administration. The laws of Nampou, which spelt out the traditions and customs of the Zeliangrong, specified that a chief had the power to revoke an allocation where, in his opinion, an allotted had more land than was required for his family's subsistence.

V. Types of land ownership

In Zeliangrong community, broadly, three types of land ownership system are prevalent. They are (a) Communal ownership, (b) clan ownership and (c) individual ownership. Individual land ownership is in vogue in larger areas of the district. In some parts of the south, there exists communal land ownership and no private land therein.

5.1 Communal ownership

This system is prevalent in Nungba head Quarters and its surrounding villages. In these villages, be it village sites, forest, cultivating land, horticultural or other land, the whole land of the village belongs to the community and there is no individual land as such. Whereas in the North, mostly thick and inaccessible forests are owned by the community. In some villages in the North, arable lands are owned by the community but in a very limited scale. The concerned village council is responsible for the administration and protection of village land against external attack and encroachment of the land by neighbouring villages, etc. in return, individual land owners pay nominal rent to the village council after every harvest.

5.2 Clan ownership

The clan land includes village sites, forest and arable land. Generally, there are two or more clans in any Zeliangrong village. And most of the clans have lands for common uses. This system of land is more prevalent in the North of the District.

5.3 Individual ownership

This type of ownership occupies greater areas of the district. Comparatively, much larger jhum land of a village is owned by few individuals. About Eighty percent of the total arable land belongs to this category in the North including Tamenglong, Tousem and Tamei Sub-divisions. Individual land includes home-stead, forest, terraced field, wet field, jhumming land and horticultural land. Especially, in the North, a single individual owns such as very big land that every household of the concerned village cultivates within his compact land in a particular year. The size of this land may be of 630 acres which is sufficient enough for the cultivation of more than 100 households of a village. And patta system is prevalent in Khoupum valley in Nungba sub-division of the district.

VI. Land use Pattern of the Zeliangrong

There is no uniform classification of land uses adopted by different organisations or individuals in different parts of the world. This is mainly due to the marked difference in the land use in different regions. It also attributes difficulties in mapping various land uses and the purpose for which they are mapped as well. The major land use pattern in Tamenglong district of Manipur may be categorised as settlement, agriculture, forest and scrub [6]. The absence of uniformity in the land use categories is but natural. This is due to the lack of all requisite data for different land use categories, non-uniform distribution of land under various categories and individual differences [7].

6.1 Settlement Land Use

Settlement land use is known as 'Kailong Ram'. This land lies between two gates of a village. Every Zeliangrong village has two gates; the first, entrance gate and the second, mainly for exit. Settlement land covers areas under residential, educational, administrative, recreational, open spaces, places of worship, granaries, and 'Duikhunram' (area of pool). In the olden days, the founder of a village chose a strategic geographical location, more preferably, the top of the hill for a village site viewing menacing intrusion of enemies or wild animals. And they examined such as physiographic of the land, direction of wind, water, defence site, etc. besides, settlement at a particular land is subject to the observation of dreams and omens. Decision regarding immigrant settlement at the village is taken by village council. But practically decision goes in favour of 'Nampou' will. It is then the duty of the chairman of the village to see that new settler has a plot of land to live in and a land to be tilled every year. The chairman looks into the welfare of his subjects and in return, his subjects maintained a good relation for as long as they live in the village. Any government help or facility reaches to a household through the 'Nampou'. But when the 'Nampou' is displeased with any policy or action of his subjects, sometimes he even ousts his subjects from the village. This stern action is taken against those villagers on the strength of his ownership and sole control over the settlement land.

In the recent years, problems of land ownership and land use are closely linked with that of election, church and village administration. But very often the root cause happens to be differences at the time of election. The differences go deeper and deeper as time goes by; there appears infighting on any issue of the village and consequently they can no longer live together. Sometimes a clash takes place on the issue of leadership in the church in which one group with no settlement land would be compelled to leave the village and settle in another land which is owned by one of this ousted members. The owner of the land Known as 'Rampou' will become 'Nampou' of the new founded village. The problem has become common features in the Tamenglong district. The same problem occurred recently in Khongjaron and Akhui villages of Tamenglong District in 2010. Sudden change of settlement creates untold miseries to the people, construction of many houses within few days at the time or season of work causes serious problems among them. Horticultural lands at the adjoining area of residence are abandoned. Shifting of domestic animals to new village also gives a burden for them as such; they are sold even at very low prices. This new village still faces hardship in demanding separate patta which cannot be granted by the government since number of household is less than requirement as per government rule.

The exercise of Adult Franchise of a village is also controlled by a 'Nampou'. The villagers are expected to vote in favour of the candidates whom the chairman supports. Thus, it may be said that these elected MLAs, MPs, MDCs etc are not representatives of the people but the representatives of the Nampou who own lands and rule over the landless subjects. A case may be cited on the recent incidence that had happened in the 2010 MDC election and 2012 Assembly Election in Khongjaron village of Tamenglong District. Some families of Khongjaron village in 53 Assembly constituencies exercised their franchise at their own and did not vote in favour of the candidate to whom the Nampou extended support. In retaliation, the Nampou threatened these so called disloyal villagers to discontinue tilling the land and to move out from the village. As a result some villagers in order to win back the confidence of the Nampou begged his pardon with a promise to shun their unwanted manner. So, the Nampou was considerate enough that he affectionately pardoned them and allowed them to continue using the land. However, those villagers who did not surrender were chucked out from the

village. Thus, the villagers are insecure even to live in the village in which they have been living together for centuries.

6.2 Agricultural Land Use

There are three categories of land ownership in the district, namely; community, clan and private land ownership. This big land in size is sub divided into field plots which are held by different households of the concerned village. The mode of production includes jhumming, wet rice cultivation and terrace cultivation. Of these, jhumming is more widely practised mainly due to the very topography of the District. Paddy, being the main crop, occupies a larger area and next is maize. Local produces are for household consumption and not for sale. Provision of proper transport facilities is thus needed for increasing area under horticultural crops as well as assessing reasonable prices to the producer-seller.

Land use and productivity of agriculture depend upon three important factors: patterns of human behaviour, nature of land, climatic condition and location with trading centre. Human behaviour is rather complex one and it is influenced by degree of modernisation, dietary habits, and willingness to innovate and political pressure. Most of the farmers in the hill region are traditional in their outlook and many of them appear to be not in a position to modernise agriculture. By nature tribal are non-vegetarian and it can be said that non-vegetarian diet is very common among the people of this region. Thus, rearing of pigs, cattle and poultry are preferred to growing of certain crops. Political influence also plays a role in moulding the nature of agriculture. There are four types of ownership of land under shifting cultivation viz., community, clan, Morung and individual ownership. Land uses system of community, clan and Morung causes relatively much less problems to the cultivators since the concerned land is owned and shared among them. No question of rent arises. Once a co-member has developed a land into permanent field, he automatically owns it individually. Land owning size by individual may be up to 700 or more hectares. This type of land encourages jhumming simply because cultivators are not owner of the land which they are jhumming.

Again it may be pointed out that, out of the notable evils that have been brought about by this system is litigation. We know that there are lands in the hands of only few individuals and these land owners are not always at ease with each other. Their desire to acquire more and more lands causes quarrels and confusions in the village and most of the times it is seen that these problems cannot be solved by village council. Therefore, unnecessary expenditure has to be incurred by them to go to the court. Once the matter has been taken up by the court it takes long time to settle. Even for few years, litigation involves heavy expenditure. When land ownership is under confusion no cultivation is undertaken. Thus, there is low production on the one hand and extra expenditure on the other due to litigation which result in indebtedness. A case happening in Tamenglong may be cited in this regard. The case is always between two 'Rampou' (landowner) owning large plots of agricultural land. The infighting started during the harvest season which becomes so intense because of the involvement of local politics and church. And villagers who were cultivating in this land do not know who the rightful owner is which indeed is accelerating the problem of paying rent. The case that resulted in this area still remains unsolved but for how will it go? Will the state government along with the traditional head intervene?

6.3 forest land

The records indicate that increase in human population has brought about proportionally increased forest destruction. Population in hill district of Tamenglong according to 2011 census is 1,40,143 which has great impact on the forest land. In this area, claim for agriculture and other purposes are stronger than forestry and forest lands are easily converted into agricultural land and the like. Due to growth of population, quantity demanded of timber, firewood, grazing and other products have increased tremendously and the forest can no longer meet these rapid increase requirements on sustained basis. Therefore, forests in hill region of Manipur have degraded considerably. The main factor responsible for the degradation of forest and impacts on socio-economic development are given below; Ownership of forest, shifting cultivation, forest fires etc.

Forest is intricately linked with life, tradition and culture of tribals of Manipur. For them, it is their home, a source of life, employment and abode for the spirits and local gods. Their sustenance is basically dependent on the forest. Forest meets almost all the basic needs of life: food, housing materials, fuel, light, warmth and fodder. Forest occupies a very important position in hill economy. Subsistence of tribal people with a reasonable standard of health and abode is mainly due to forest resources- food, water, shelter, cloths, medicines and employment. By nature, tribals are sentimentally attached to forest. But in the present scenario, forests are privatised making the life of the people miserable. Any member of the village cannot fully enjoy the natural products as forests have been controlled by Rampou on one hand and Government on the other. So, the previously enjoyed freedom of collecting firewood and other natural resources is prohibited. Extracting drinking water from the water resources (spring) one has to seek prior permission from the Rampou and Nampou. This case is seen in the village of Khongjaron. The village authority of this village recently took the permission from the particular Rampou whose land has water resources in it. But, it happens that the Nampou did not consent to

it since they do not seek his permission. So, here is the conflict of ownership that arises between the Nampou (Village Owner) and Rampou (Land owner). If a case like this has to continue where will the landless villagers go? Where will they get safe drinking water? Should the landless villagers stop surviving? Or will the government lend their deaf ears towards this deprived section of people?

VII. Process of Privatisation of Land

To understand how traditional land started to emerge as private land, one has to look at the traditional land tenure system. But before delving into the causes of the privatisation of community land, it would be fitting to understand the notion of private property in tribal societies. The notion of private property and private ownership of both movable and immovable items is not a concept that has been induced by outside forces. Private property as a practice is not new or alien to the Zeliangrong.

In the past, land is distributed amongst themselves or on clan wise. But with the passage of time, new land owners have emerged under the following conditions or circumstances.

- i. Zeliangrong were believers of the existence of God and Goddesses and super power on their land. They strictly observed different gennas and taboos. In every ritual practice, animals are used for sacrificing and are offered by someone from amongst the villagers and in exchange of the animal, Nampou has to carve out a portion of his land and give it to the person who offers the sacrificial animal. The curve out one may be land or cultivating plot depending on the size of the animal offered. The same process repeats every year. Under these traditional practices, individual land owners as well as plot holders came into existence.
- ii. Another way of acquiring land is presentation or gift. Sometime, rich parents offer land as a gift at the time of their daughter's marriage. In such cases, the ownership of land is transferred to the groom's family.
- iii. Land is also used as bride price. Here too, ownership of land is transferred to the bride's parents.
- iv. Land is transferred a fine for grave crimes committed such as homicide, adultery, etc. when land is transferred as a fine for homicide, the land so acquired by the relatives of the deceased is known in Rongmei as 'Meirungram'.
- v. When a person is sick, the oracle of the priest of the village is usually sought. The priest will prescribe a propitiatory animal to be sacrificed to heal the sick. If the animal prescribed by the priest is not in possession of the patient's family, they have to sell their land and purchase the sacrificial animal or their land will be exchanged for the animal.
- vi. If a land owner shifts from his original village and settle down to another place, his land is transferred to his nearest relatives. In case of having no relatives, the land becomes the village land.
- vii. When land owner dies without any descendants, his land is transferred to his nearest kin.
- viii. Land can also be acquired by purchase. With the passage of time and introduction of money economy subsequent to commercial exchange relation, there emerges a tendency of commercialisation and privatisation of land. A land owner may sell his land to other villagers of the same village. In such cases though ownership changes, plot holders remain unchanged. When land is sold to a person of the other villages, land ownership as well as plot holders transfer. While land is transferable, land owner is obliged to sell his land to any plot holder who has plot within his land. If these plot holders are not willing to buy it, next obligation is to sell it to any villager of the same village. If they are also not desirous to purchase or cannot afford to buy, the land owner can sell out land to any person of other villages. In Zeliangrong society, the parent's property is inherited by the youngest son.

There is no fixed price of land in Zeliangrong community. The price varies from village to village. Traditional way of payment for a land is in terms of necklace or animal or chilli or salt. Money was very rarely paid as a price for land. However, with the introduction of rural development schemes in the district by the government communal land practices of the Zeliangrong are being undermined. More and more communal lands are being acquired and occupied by state governments or central governments. The setting up of district or civil subdivisions or military stations has led to large-scale loss of communal lands. Whether the people benefit from such projects is difficult to assess.

The process of privatisation of communal lands as it is happening in Tamenglong district is giving rise to social differentiation and inequality between those who have managed to acquire and convert community lands to private ownership and those who could not. The incidence of landlessness is already emerging as a social problem and as a source of conflict. This new development of private land has resulted from the high market value and for exploiting resources from the land.

In addition to the influence of market economy, government policies, developmental programmes and other policies are responsible for the emergence of private land in the district. Looking into the theoretical perspective, the Zeliangrong do not permit the conversion of community land into private land but practically, plots given for residential purposes or economic activities get converted over generations into the private

property of families or individuals that make permanent improvements on them. As a result families enjoy the right to sell off the converted land to another owner on which improvements have been made.

The control over communal land is with the village councils or tribal political bodies. However, many such bodies and their leaders are weak and do not exercise their authority as they should. The Autonomous District Councils of Tamenglong District do not have the power of issuing pattas to users of communal land. The autonomous district councils is a de jure document. Because of this, the rate of conversion of community land into private ownership has been rapid.

VIII. The challenges on the customary land tenure systems

The Zeliangrong traditional land tenure systems are organised around communitarian, clan and individual notions of ownership. In the clan ownership land, all members who belong to a common ancestry own and share a piece of land obtained through early settlement. All members of the society have some access to the land resources for carving out their livelihoods.

The defective system of land tenure and land use in India has resulted in low agricultural productivity which gives rise to poverty amidst plenty and retardation of speedy economic development in major part of rural India. Likewise, in Tamenglong region of Manipur too the system of land ownership and land use has brought about many evils such as low production, poverty, illiteracy among the masses and most of all, the almost stagnation of the socio-economic development of the region.

However, stratification assigns roles of control to some select individuals i.e., Nampou who is the entitled holders while other members of society access land by invoking a range of claims based on their lineage. Equal access to land is however constrained as Zeliangrong society is a patrilineal society. Thus, there is an argument that women marry out of the family and would therefore enjoy the husband's allocations while the husband's clan also deny women based on the fact that they do not belong to their lineage. Moreover, in the present society the basis for the rejection of customary land tenure systems is based on the idea that common property leads to unsound economic and environmental practices and also conflict among the kinsman.

With the evolution of land privatisation and state intervention there are frequent disputes on land and customary authority has broken down. Privatisation of lands has restricted the amount of land for cultivation by the village households and it has created a way for infringement. Thus, there is high level of anxiety on traditional land because it has limited investments too.

IX. Conclusion

It is evident that customary land tenure system of Zeliangrong in Tamenglong district is undergoing a tremendous transformation in the sphere of ownership, access control and mode of operation. This has given way to the development of private land challenging the existing traditional authority. A potential vibrant policy on market economy of tribal lands and type of developmental schemes being pursued by the government has weakened the traditional political bodies and the customary practices contributing to the mushrooming of privatisation of communal lands in the district. There is dynamism of land tenure system and land use pattern system among the Zeliangrong. Regarding the traditional land setting for agricultural purposes, the customary tenure system seems to be crumbling slowly due administration and management problem. And moreover the Zeliangrong people are very much attached to traditional belief and culture and confine themselves within the jurisdiction of the village which limits the horizon of developmental activities outside the village which could serve as incentives for them, are out of sight. There develops hardly any kind of motivation, incentive and urge for socio-economic development under the traditional land use system as a consequence confronting with a new system of individualism that goes against the collective. The main factors responsible for the changing nature of customary systems vary in accordance with the nature of location of the community. Therefore, a reciprocal relationship between the traditional and state institutions is necessary to manage the evolving land tenure situation in this district. The failure of the Nampou in the transformation of customary tenure system is an important emerging issue that needs urgent attention.

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