

PART – IV

CHAPTER IX: CONCLUDING REMARKS

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Conclusions

The nature of caste system is less prominent in Manipur in comparison to the other parts of the country. In the earliest Meitei society of Manipur, caste system was non-existent. All the Meiteis in Manipur belong to the seven divisions of clans namely; Angom, Ningthouja, Moirang, Khuman, Khaba-Nganba and Chenglei. It is believed that all these clans had their own status, dignity and prestige in the society which somehow depicts a not very clear picture of class system.

Both the Loi community and Yaithibi community practiced the nuclear, extended and joint family system. Being a patriarchal society the eldest male member in the family has all the authority but the female members are equally responsible and respected in the family and in society at large. Marriage at a young age is frequently noticed and is at voluntary will but the rule of clan exogamy and caste endogamy is maintained. In any religious affair their *yek* (clan name) plays a vital role than the *gotra*. It is noticed that intercaste marriage is socially acceptable. Intercaste marriage between a Loi and a Hindu Meitei takes place but not frequently while intercaste marriage with Loi and Brahman or with any caste and Yaithibi is almost absent. Intermarriages between them have occurred no doubt, but these cases take place on considerations mainly of the educational attainments and sound economic standings of the individual Lois and those too mostly when they are settled in Imphal town.

Although there is no definite stratification among the Manipuris, the Brahman and Hindu Meitei are considered as higher castes. Those Lois and Hindu Meiteis who are aware of the Yaithibi consider them as even more degrading and polluting otherwise the majority of Lois have no knowledge of Yaithibi. This indicates the sheer lack of interaction among them due to poor transport and communication and most importantly the age old belief of Yaithibis to be of illicit origin for which even the Lois

have distanced themselves. The older generation has experienced ill-treatments like not being allowed in their friend's home, not being invited in family functions etc. In all these matters the Yaithibis are more unfortunate and suffered more harsh treatments. The earlier concepts of pollution, restrictions and orthodoxy on the basis of caste are almost non-existent. The younger generation hardly believes or experiences earlier orthodoxy. However, the feeling of social stigma of being a Scheduled Caste always lingers in the thoughts of the Scheduled Castes and the Hindu Meiteis also.

In the case of Lois the basis of stratification is their insistence on their indigenous religion and its associated cultural practices and their occupation of brewing, silk rearing, piggery etc. They are the keepers of traditional Meitei religion and culture. They were degraded because during native rule they defied the order of the king to follow Hinduism. Hence, in a sense they were courageous people. But due to long period of subjection, they remain backward in most respects.

The Yaithibis in all matters of life are Hindu Meiteis and thus differ remarkably from the Lois. Among the Yaithibis the incidence of Laishram Thambalnambi is a factor which forced them to practice incest or clan endogamy for some time. Being totally excommunicated from the society they had no other caste / clan to marry but the practice was soon restricted and later on terminated.

If the basis of stratification for lower caste are for defying Hindu religion and continuing economic activities like brewing, silk rearing with cultural practices like using of yu (wine) and meat in religious ceremony then, the reasons are not appropriate for the Lois of Kakching, Thongjao and Yaithibis of Thoubal Khunou in Thoubal district and Panathokpa group in Andro of Imphal East and of Khurkhul in Imphal West. But some of the suggestive reasons can be their settlement in the periphery and foothills of the villages,

their dialect which has a different tone as spoken by the core Hindu Meitei, mannerism, other backwardness and the prejudiced concept of the Hindu Meitei towards them.

The Lois and Yaithibis are not encountering ill-treatments and discrimination which their older generations have faced before. The notion of purity and pollution once held strongly against them is no more prevalent except by some orthodox Hindu Meitei and Brahman in particular. However, the feeling of superiority by the Hindu Meitei culturally and socially still exist though not manifested in any form. Such feelings are even more profound from the Brahman side. Again, the Hindu Meiteis and the Brahmans residing in the villages or nearby to their villages hold an even more rigid notion of pollution against the Lois and Yaithibis as compared to the Hindu Meiteis and Brahman in Imphal town. This difference in attitude is naturally because of the difference in the amount of exposure to modernization and the extent of interaction with different people.

It will be right to conclude that the Lois have preserved the pure tradition and the culture of the Meitei. The indigenous God and Goddess of Meitei are 'Sanamahi', 'Leimaren Sidabi', and 'Apokpa'. The Lois believe the indigenous Gods and also follow the aboriginal practices of early time. The believers of Sanamahi Cult / Sanamahism worship the indigenous Gods but with the absence of practices like employing of wine and meat in religious rituals. Maiba is the main officiator in all the rituals of both Sanamahi and indigenous religions. The Hindu Meitei and Brahman profess these indigenous Gods along with the idolization of Hindu Gods. Here, Brahman officiates in every ritual and also hires Maiba (priest) at certain rituals.

Many of them are not aware of panathokpa or its procedure as it is no more in prevalence. Even among the Lois slight variation in the performance of rites de passage

also prevails between the Loi villages. Some of them have adopted to Hinduism and sanskritized their ways of life so that they can freely intermingle with the Hindu Meiteis.

In these Scheduled Caste communities the consciousness of social ranking in accordance with one's economic status and occupational position is inevitable. But this has neither resulted in rigid ranking of high class or low class, nor shaking the norm of respecting and serving the elders by the youngster irrespective of one's status in any social function.

Agriculture is still one of the major sources of survival for both the Lois and the Yaithibi community. Though their occupation is not caste based and there is no restriction on any followings one chooses to profess, only a small number of them have successfully achieved a post in the government sector. This employed as well as remaining bulk of unemployed population continues on their varied activities of brewing, silk rearing, weaving, animal husbandry etc. Since majority of them have small agricultural land holdings they need to involve in other activities also in order to meet their ends. Especially, those who are employed have to adjust their timings for both office and agricultural work. Most of them use simple traditional techniques of cultivation leading to low production. There are also no proper trading and business centres in the Scheduled Caste areas except in Sekmai and Kakching. Hence lack of cultivable land lead to low production and lack of proper trading centres resulted in severe financial problems.

There is shortage of good schools except for some government schools. Due to this reason they have to look outside their respective places which are affordable only for some among them. It is clearly visible that many of them have realized the importance of education as a significant means of upward mobility. Still, all of them are not fortunate to afford their children's education in good English private schools. Economic problems, inadequate transport and communication, lack of academic

environment, agricultural works etc. disturb the education of these children leading to discontinuation after primary education and increase in school dropouts.

Except in few places like Sekmai and Kakching even the basic infrastructure like roads, transport and communication, private or public schools, health centers etc. are not adequately available. Such backwardness is one important factor attributing to the disparity between Scheduled Caste villages. The improper roads and transport connecting inter-villages as well as to the capital town creates a vast hiatus between them. The living conditions, housing, sanitation are also poorly maintained with exception of some families who are economically sound. They are deprived of tap water even for drinking purpose and have to depend on pond, river or well water for their daily requirements.

The introduction of the statutory Panchayat system has reduced the Khullakpa into just a titular heads. Their functions are now confined to religious activities of the villages. The existing Pradhan / Councilor is concerned in all the matters of the village / municipal development programme. In the position of political representative everyone of them want someone from their respective village / municipal area irrespective of his / her political party. This is because of the question of accessibility or someone reachable as well as the concept that political members are biased and shows preferential treatment to their respective areas.

They lack political awareness. Due to inadequate knowledge and exposure many of them are not able to properly avail the benefits given for them. The earlier political representative like late Kh. Chaoba from Sekmai have struggled much for the upliftment of the Scheduled Caste as a whole. The Scheduled Caste political representatives after him have also been working but not up to the expectation of their fellowmen. Sometimes they are more interested in building confidence in their respective

village / municipal area rather than consolidating all the Scheduled Castes for the upliftment of all.

They have no knowledge of various laws safeguarding the Scheduled Castes. Their lack of awareness of such protective laws is the reason that they face no atrocities like the Scheduled Castes in other parts of India does. Hence, they are ignorant of such laws yet, are very much aware of the various grants provided by the state government. Only some of them are availing the different provisions of government depriving the vast majority. This is because of the lack of awareness among the beneficiary or the preferential treatment by the political agent to their near ones. So, the more aware and privileged ones among them are getting everything and befitted while many of them do not even have the knowledge of the procedure to avail the facilities. This has again created a gap among them.

Certain amount of change and mobility has occurred among these Scheduled Castes over a span of time. Such change and mobility in religious, educational, economic and political spheres has been regarded as channels utilized by the Scheduled Castes to raise their status. Higher amount of internal migration mainly from rural to rural area is observed in search to get of piece of land for themselves. Temporary geographical shifting to town and to other states for studies is frequently observed. This indicates the aspiration among the students for better education and a pursuit for a stable occupational position. Such kind of temporary migration to town areas for various economic purposes also occurs and is higher in degree than permanent shifting. Not many are positive about permanently shifting to town area as they prefer to commute from their villages. They have a feeling that they would not be able to adapt to the environs of the town and most importantly it requires land, and a sufficient post with good income to survive there. Quite unlikely to town, in village survival factor is easy as even without proper income anyone

can survive by just involving in other unskilled activities of brewing, fishing, cultivating etc. Those whoever have shifted have improved socio-economically and their bonding with their other family members back in the village are still well maintained.

Achieving higher educational level and occupational position as compared to their father indicates some amount of intergenerational mobility. Though the literacy rate among the males is higher but it is females who have outshone the males by achieving more number of PhD degrees. Except for this small group among them who have succeeded in enhancing their socio-economic condition the bulk of them are still very backward in almost all aspects. The mobile ones among them are equally respected by their members and by the Hindu Meiteis as well. But such differences in the status do not create status incongruence between them.

The study reveals that education has been recognized repeatedly in sociological discussions of modern social mobility as a great equalizer. Universalistic, scientific education penetrates all castes and communities of a society with new technical skills and an ideology that disposes access to modern occupation and their tangible and intangible rewards regardless of past condition (Harold Gould 1988).

Conversion to Christianity to avoid social stigma is not relevant among the Scheduled Castes of Manipur. Though it is done strongly for the faith in the religion but benefits in some form can also be availed by the converts. Some of them follow their traditional religious practice at times out of compulsion to fulfill their parent's desire in certain occasion or it can be an adjustment to keep themselves into the mainstream. It is believed that adoption to Hindu Meitei religion is completely an individual choice and has no relation with one's socio-economic status. But in most of the cases it is the socio-economic mobile ones among them who have more interaction and intermingling with the Hindu Meiteis.

Women in these communities play an important role by contributing half the family income. They are the ones involved in brewing, weaving, pottery, silk rearing, cultivating etc. They are not less preferred than the male child. Taking the help of modern education some have also achieved educational and occupational mobility to an extent. The reserved seat for women in the Nagar Panchayat has also enhanced their political status.

In spite of all legislative measures not much significant change has occurred among the Scheduled Castes. This is due to lack of proper implementation by the political agent and lack of consciousness among the Scheduled Castes. Being a vastly agriculturist society, agricultural grants prove to be helpful. Other grants like housing, weaving, sewing schemes are beneficial. Educational facilities like post-matric scholarship, reservation in educational institutions and reservation in public and private sectors have accelerated the rate of enrolment of students in educational institutions. All these facilities are equally important to all but some of the mobile ones among them has a greater inclination for facilities like more reservation in medical institutions and other important educational institutions. Reservation in different sector of services and institutions has helped many in getting stable income and has inspired many for better educational and occupational achievement. Though all of them have not succeeded in significantly improving their socio-economic status, their status is certainly better than that of the Scheduled Castes as a whole.

It is true that the Scheduled Castes' representatives are in a better position to represent Scheduled Caste interests and promote their uplift, but as it exists the present system has not worked in the manner it should to achieve the desired objectives. The Pradhan or the councilor has the power to recommend and to select the beneficiary for the state grants. Sometimes his preferential treatment to particular individuals leads to the

deprivation of the neediest beneficiary. The more advanced and developed ones among them have a greater chance of getting the benefits in the name of the less aware ones. Such faulty implementation has helped in corruption and in misusing of the facilities. An honest and efficient local informer who will inform about the available provisions and the procedure to avail will reduce the burden of many who are not properly aware.

They have no knowledge regarding the Dalit organization or Dalit literature. Though there is historical literature about the Lois and Yaithibis, they have never been presented or popularized as Dalit literature highlighting the different issues like in other States. There has been a movement by the Scheduled Castes against the state government to protest a forge use of Scheduled Caste certificate by a Hindu Meitei. Presently there is some disagreement relating to the issue of not accepting the Kakching Lois as Scheduled Castes by the other Scheduled Castes of the state. The absence of any form of movement either by the Hindu Meitei or by the Scheduled Caste can be a result of lack of exposure or due to the normal relationship between them. No governmental organization or non-governmental organization is working for the upliftment of the Scheduled Caste as a whole. The issue of Scheduled Caste is dealt by the "All Manipur Scheduled Caste Student's Union" and "All Manipur Loi Association". And Kakching Lois has their "Representative of Lois" to take care of all the matters related to them.

No doubt the caste system has not brought about community conflict or caste conflict among the Scheduled castes themselves or between them and the Hindu Meitei. But the thought of belonging to a high caste or low caste has played an important factor in producing superior and inferior status among these people. This has created a distance hindering cooperation in the upward mobility of the people as a whole. The other forces restraining mobility among the Lois and the Yaithibis are their illiteracy and

ignorance, low-economic condition, lack of proper awareness and leadership, improper transport and communication, poor implementation of the government policies etc.

The Hindu Meiteis influence the Lois and the Yaithibis in all the spheres of their life. The Hindu Meiteis being the dominant caste are being emulated by the Scheduled Castes in most of the cultural and social matters. In religious occasions, the indigenous followers among the Lois have started hiring Brahman when Hindu Meiteis are invited. Various changes and adaptation especially in the marriage ceremony not only between Lois and the Hindu Meitei but among the Loi marriages are also visible very frequently. But among the indigenous followers their indigenous ritual is of utmost importance and are performed whatever the occasion may be prior to any other ritual. Interdinning and intermarriages take place between Hindu Meiteis and Lois but the cases of interdinning or intermarriages with Yaithibis are negligible. They are not segregated in any public or private places and are allowed to enter temples like any other Hindu Meiteis. The relation shared between the Hindu Meitei, Lois and Yaithibis are normal. They invite each other in certain social ceremonies provided the hosting Lois make arrangements like hiring of Brahman for the feast and absence of meat and wine etc. So far the changes brought by the Lois and the Yaithibis in socio-economic and educational field have been considered with indifference by the Hindu Meiteis which is because they feel that their position is not threatened by the Lois or Yaithibis.

In the present situation with the increasing trends of their association with the Hindu Meities, some changes are visible in their religious behavior. People of the younger generation are freely mixing and dining with the Lois. Inter-caste marriages between the Lois and the Meites are practicing to some extent. All these socio-religious changes may be taking the Scheduled Castes a step towards the Hindu Meites. But, economically and politically they are still lagging behind.

There have been some attempts by a section of Loi to attain the status of Hindu Meitei. They engage Brahman priest during the rites connected with child birth, marriage etc. The Brahmins have also started extending their services. This section of Lois are a disillusioned lot today. Their Hindu Meitei neighbors still know them as Lois and avoid close alliance like marriage with them unless circumstances compel them to do so. It must be remembered that the Hindu Meiteis always share the feeling of superiority vis-a-vis the Lois. This feeling of superiority may not be so pronounced in every field of activity, but there is always a notion of ritual purity.

Considering the present situation of the Scheduled Castes it can be suggested that some of the urgent developmental activities required are the intra-village and inter-village transport and communication facilities. There is also an urgent need for proper educational facilities starting from primary to higher level at cost free or at nominal charges. Improvements in basic requirements like supply of pure drinking water, sanitation, well equipped health center etc. are a must.

Different schemes will benefit the Scheduled Castes with proper implementation. Agricultural schemes with sufficient irrigation facilities, provision of tractor and fertilizer at subsidized rate and well equipped grants-in aids like animal husbandry, brewing, weaving, sericulture, pottery etc. for generating income will be much beneficial to them.

The overall situation demands that it is hightime to make the Scheduled Castes socially conscious. Their political awareness is required to be improved. There is also an urgent need to properly inform them about the welfare schemes, beneficiary grants and aids. In addition to the knowledge of all these available schemes, the Scheduled Castes are also enlightened about the procedures to avail these schemes in order to grab their claims.

On net balance, the social mobility and change among the Scheduled Castes is far from satisfactory. Relative to their condition a decade ago, their socio-economic status has improved, but still lags behind when compared to other castes. As Yogendra Singh (1974) rightly pointed out the Scheduled Castes have not been able to take full advantage of the reservations allotted to them in different fields. But the experience of reservations has not always been easy for its beneficiaries the appropriateness and fairness of the programs are matters of increasing controversy. One persistent criticism is that benefit of public employment is monopolized by a small, prosperous and self-perpetuating 'Harijan Elite' (Sachidananda 1977). This view has often been put by high caste critics, but on number of occasion the Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Tribes has complained that the benefits are insufficiently delivered to the weaker sections among the untouchables. The untouchable occupants of bureaucrat positions have been entirely self-directed and have not used their influence for the benefit of untouchables as a whole (Meldelsohn & Vicziany 2000).

As K.L.Sharma (2006) rightly pointed out the institution of untouchability is functioning selectively, but quite effectively, in certain arenas of our social relations. It has eroded in regard to its pollutional aspects to a large extent, but it does not show encouraging trend of decline in regard to its social and economic dimensions. Such a situation demands an analysis of structural factors which have brought about mobility, migration and awareness among the Harijans of today.

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