

## Zeliangrong Today: A Naga Tribe of Manipur

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**ABSTRACT** The article portrays the entire perspective of Zeliangrong, the Naga tribe of Manipur. It indicates all their cultural customs, tradition, living system, occupation, marriage system, and their physical features etc. They have a good number of population ranking third among the tribal group of Manipur. It has lots of variation and difference from hills to valley as well as among the Christian and Non Christian. The present study was conducted in different villages from where more accurate information was expected. The data was collected from aged people as well as well educated that are the executive member of the Zeliangrong union of Manipur. Here it is found that due to lack of written records and documents some of the informations were collected in addition to the fieldwork applying the recall method and secondary sources available. This information and opinion collected were cross-checked by for less error, proper justification and accurate results.

### INTRODUCTION

The Latin root word *tribe* has got a lot of definitions from different perspectives and studies point of view. Anthropologically, a tribe is a social group the member of which live in a common territory, have common dialect, uniform social organization and possess cultural homogeneity, having a common ancestor, political organization and religious patterns. It would be very difficult to find many tribal groups in India who possess all these characteristics. But since all the tribal and analogous social formation are not considered as scheduled tribe and when tribal population is considered, it always refers to scheduled tribal population which is recognized by the government (Chaudhuri, 1992).

Tribal concentrations are densely found in few regional distributions while in some other state it is found sparsely distributed. They inhabit widely in a varying ecological and geo-climatic condition in hill, forest desert and plain region. According to the census of India (1991) there are 573 notified scheduled tribes in India with 74 primitive tribal communities for which special governmental development programmes are certainly needed. They constitute 8.08 per cent or 67.76 million population (excluding the state of Jammu & Kashmir) where Mizoram (94.75%) and Lakshadweep (93.55%) are the highest tribal concentrated state and Union Territory respectively whereas in Manipur 34.41 % are tribal which is broadly divided into Naga and Kuki chin.

Out of the total schedule tribe population,

22.73%, 10.80% and 10.38% live in Madhya Pradesh, Maharastra and Orissa respectively. In Manipur whole of the tribal communities constitute 0.97% only. This small hilly state called Manipur at the extreme corner of north eastern part of India is placed centrally in the eastern arm of Himalaya between the latitude and longitude of 23° 50'N to 25° 41'N and 93° 2'E to 94°47'E respectively. It is surrounded by hill ranges on all sides and bounded by Nagaland in north, Assam on west, Mizoram on the east and southeast with effective physical and administrative functional barrier (Vedaja, 1998).

This state has a total area of 22,327 sqkm. In which 92% and 8% areas are hills and valleys respectively. It has altogether nine districts, five in the hills and four in the Central Valley that have been divided into 37 subdivisions and 38-community tribal development blocks. It has a total population of 23, 88,635 where SC and ST population are 37, 105 and 6, 32, 173 respectively (Census, Manipur state, 2001).

The state has in the middle, a beautiful valley surrounded by blue Green Mountain, which in reality is a plateau. A demographic contrast between hills and valleys in relation to social and economic development is quite apparent. It shows economic backwardness and lack of even basic social facilities in hills and its surroundings, where as in valley it is comparatively better. It has a pluralistic society, which presents a picture of transparent homogeneity and heterogeneity within multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-lingual bases of civilization culture. It is

aesthetically described by many scholars, invaders, religious preachers traders etc. as “*A Little Paradise on Earth*”; “*Switzerland of India*” by Lord Irwin; “*A Flower on lofty highs*” by the Japanese; “*A Pretty land more beautiful than any of the Snow plains in the world*” by Grim Wood and “*Jewels of India*” by (L) Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. The state has been known by twenty-two nomenclatures for her beauties from all dimensions (Naorem, 1995). Different studies have been conducted in historical, geological, geographical, archeological, anthropological and in philosophical aspects etc. in order to have complete information about the state. Unfortunately due to lack of reliable sources of information/data in most of the aspects these studies lie incomplete or end up with a controversial opinion. But to further strengthen the research work and to find out better results different study methods and best efforts are used.

The state has different ethnic groups that form a background of unity in diversity. Some of the ethnic groups are the Meiteis who inhabit mainly in valley. The Nagas and Kukis live in most part of the hilly areas. Racially and linguistically this tri-ethnos groups belong to the Tibeto-Burman group of the southern Mongoloid, though they are sub divided into different linguistic division (Kabui, 1991). The Naga tribes are found inhabiting not only in Manipur but also in different other part of North Eastern States like, Assam, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh etc.

There are 32 recognized schedule tribes in Manipur with many more unscheduled tribal groups. The schedule tribes are namely Aimol, Anal, Angami, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Kabui, Kacha Naga, Kharam, Koirao, Koireng, Kom, Lamgang, Mizo (Lusai), Maram, Maring Mao, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Poumei, Purum, Ralte, Sema, Simte, Salte (Sukte), Tangkhul, Tarao, Thadou, Vaiphei, Zou. They have a very simple and distinct cultural heritage with lots of variation among the sub tribes. Because of rich cultural heritage, people from different parts of the world gradually started recognizing the Naga tribe of North Eastern State of India. According to (Kabui, 1991) it is not very clear how the name Naga was derived. Several attempts have been made by different scholars from different disciplines to trace out the origin of this word. Yet as Robinson (1969) pointed out that the derivation of the word is still obscure. Even three decades after Elwin made many observations the problem still remains

unsolved. Different scholars in support as well as in counter views gave various opinions about the origin of the term, but it is still in the condition of dark obscurity to establish the real origin of the term (Gonmei, 1994). But according to Jayaseelan (1996,p.9) “*whoever first called the Nagas by that name and whatever the word may mean, the Nagas themselves knew each other by the name of the tribe to which they belonged*” like Angami Zeliangrong, Ao, Tangkhul etc. From historical point of view, it seems to have been coined most probably by the British administrators during their spread of colonial rule with the policy of identifying and classifying the tribal groups of Manipur.

Today, it is a well-known fact that Zeliangrong are the most widely inhabited tribe of Manipur. The name Zeliangrong was formed by the combination name of kindred tribes such as Zeme, Liangmei and Rongmei. It has been formed by stitching the first three syllables together out of the three sub tribes’ names. This composite name came into being with the formation of the Zeliangrong Naga Council for the first time on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1947 at Keishamthong Imphal with the objective of closer affinity and stronger unity of Naga and for furthering the economic, socio-cultural, educational and political achievement of their tribes. This formation is strictly based on different accepted folklore and legend of their tribes. It was formed with the consent of all the leaders and intellectuals of the sub tribes of Zeliangrong. Despite all the effort to register among the Schedule Tribes of India since the formation of the Zeliangrong council, so far they are known and recognised under the tribe name of Kabui and Kacha Naga of Manipur which they consider it as wrongly quoted by the British administrator, where no word has an exact meaning to their tribe. Zeliangrong can be categorized mainly into two groups based on their religious belief namely Christians and non-Christians (traditional practitioner) who live both in hills and valley where most of the Christian people live in hilly area. As not much work has been conducted so far on Zeliangrongs, the present study is an attempt to highlight their ethnographic account with special reference to their health status.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is the outcome of pilot

survey. The data was collected from different villages both from that of Christian and non-Christian, hills and valleys. In-depth household surveys with interview and group discussions were conducted. Many individuals of different age groups both male and female were interviewed to have a complete and a clear picture of the ethnographic profile. The data so obtained was categorized in the following sub heading based on their socio cultural practices and their economic conditions. Secondary sources were also closely looked into for the changes occurred and to have better comparative analysis.

### TOPOGRAPHY AND CLIMATIC CONDITION

Uniquely distinct geographical location is the main factors for different types of climatic condition in Manipur. The valley of Manipur infact is considered as a plateau having an altitude of more than 2,500 ft. –3,000 ft. above the sea level. It is called valley only in relation to the hills rising high above it. It occupies about 700 sq. miles which is 1/10 of the entire areas. It varies in its topography, climatic condition from place to place due to different impact of terrain-diversity, altitudinal variation and different other regime, etc. The seasons can be broadly divided annually into 4-parts i.e. summer season (March to mid May). Rainy season (mid May to end of September), post monsoon or retreating monsoon (October and November), and winter season (December to end of February). It has generally dry winter, rainy summer season and retreating moist and wet season. January being the coldest, and fogiest month, temperature goes down nearly to freezing point in some areas whereas at the end of July and beginning of September temperature raises up to 36.7 to 38°C, associated with humidity that makes the situation intolerable. It varies in the degree of minimum and maximum temperature from hills to valley. Generally hills are colder than valleys due to many factors like – differences in altitude, less density of population, more forest cover area etc. The fog is also more in valley than hilly areas. The annual rainfall varies from hills to valley, i.e. 108.5 cm to 143.4 cm in central valley and 125.9 to 246.1cm in hilly areas (Census, 2001). Though the quantity of rainfall varies, it is distributed almost equally in all area of valleys and hills in summer and winter. That is of great economic and agricultural importance and

for rich forest productions. So far the highest rainfall of 235 mm in 24 hour was recorded on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1934 at Tamenglong district in Manipur.

### FLORA AND FAUNA

The favorable climatic condition and equally distributed rainfall in both time and space make the hilly area covered with rich flora and fauna. Referring from the historical point of view it is said that in early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, richness of the Manipur forest product was amazing, for which Pemberton (1835,p.11) writes “*I know no spot in India in which the products of the forests are so varied and magnificent but their utility is entirely local, as the nature of the country precludes the possibility of transporting to foreign markets...*”. Geographically forestland covers nearly 9/10 of the total area where only 32.5% of the land are lived by the total population of the state. Though it has large forest areas, flora and fauna are found equally in good varieties. Some rare floras other than all commonly available are – teak on the Burmese border, the *agar* which is one of the international trade commodities, wild tea plant, *siroilily (lilium macklennia)* named after the maiden name of the wife of its discoverer (Kingdom F. Ward) etc. are found. The forests have good varieties of bamboos, and oak trees. There are also found different varieties of wild plants that bear very costly and delicious fruits and leaves etc. Still today different types of flora are extensively helping the economy of the villagers not only by providing wood, fruits, leaves etc. but conserving soil, providing thatch for the roof of the house etc.

In case of fauna some of the very rare species found are – the Indian Hornbill, Brow Antlered Deer known as the *Sangai* are worth mentioning. Since the jhum cultivation was known, people continuously destroy flora and fauna mainly for their food and for other cultivation purposes. But slowly and gradually through different awareness programmes and government policies, flora and fauna are being conserved. In the valley area, fauna and flora are less as compared to the hilly area.

### PHYSICAL FEATURES

To speak about the accurate physical features of Zeliangrong without complete data would be a very difficult task. A general impression of these people lies on the wide spread opinion that they

possess Mongoloid features and cultural traits. By and large they have short to medium stature, golden brown to dark brown complexion, cheek bones are often prominent, shape of the eyes is not very marked with epicanthic fold, straight hair outnumbers wavy hair, and negrito frizzy types are almost absent with scanty body hair and moustache. They have mostly flat noses, well-shaped slender figures and less muscular development are commonly found. They are well fitted for all forms of outdoor and indoor labour that require both skill and strength through proper direction and guidance. Women are much shorter than the males. They possess good-looking feature with handsome figure, tingling colour in their cheeks and long straight hair. The habits of suckling children, until they are four years old or even more along with heavy day to day activities and cultivation work, carrying heavy loads, etc. soon destroys the soft fullness of their beauty. By the age of thirty they appear to be haggard, worn out and wrinkled. The hill people have very strong body with less fat and are darker in skin colour as compared to people from plain who have relatively sedentary work. To have a proper classification based on their physical features, in-depth anthropological studies including physiological studies, measurements are much needed.

### POLITY

Every Zeliangrong village is ruled by the chief with the assistance of the village council members and the elders of the village which is the sign of political independence. Each village has a chief whom they consider as the highest authority of the village according to their tradition and customary law. Each and every event is discussed in the house of the chief, which they consider the court of the village. They also have inter-village, district and inter state court where all complicated problems are discussed strictly based on their customary law. Succession through hereditary system was strictly observed in the past. Chief is the sole authority for each of the village affairs. According to their tradition and their customs, the founder of the village was bound to become the chief, even when there is a doubt concerning his eligibility, potentiality and efficiency to be the chief of the village. But today in some of the villages, chief is elected based on the majority. He is the sole authority for each of

the village affairs. It is found quite contradictory among the Christian and non Christian that, the chief serves only secular functions among the Christians whereas religious functions are totally served by the pastor of the village. But among the non-Christians the chief of the village looks after both the secular and religious functions.

### MARRIAGE SYSTEM

The human group considers marriage as one of the universal social institutions. It varies from society to society in its purpose, function and form. There are various types of marriages among different communities but whatever may be the type, the rules regarding "*who should marry whom*" always govern the system (Rao, 1999).

Among the Zeliangzongs, marriages are strictly based on clan exogamy by the customary law. Marriage in same clan is also not completely absent. Though it is rarely found, a compulsory capital punishment is experienced in both the Christian and non-Christian society according to their respective religious customs. If it happened among the non christians, the villagers are bound to take the following actions: - (1) burn all the clothes of the concerned person at the gate of the village as a sign of purification, (2) A huge penalty will be charged, (3) they will not be allowed to live in the same village, (4) they lose the right to become social leaders any more, (6) they will be treated unholy in whole of their life, (7) no social status/ position will be assigned to them, [8) even their entry to someone's house and mixing with other people will be treated as unclean. Among the Christians, (1) their name in the holy book of God will be cancelled, (2) they cannot be leaders of the church any more, (3) they are bound to serve the work of God in order to forgive their sins, (4) socially they are considered 'unholy' people.

The most practiced form of marriage among the Zeliangrong tribe of Manipur is love marriage by elopement and arranged marriage through the consent of both the families and the persons concerned. Another forms of marriage like marriage by capture are also not completely negligible. Monogamy is the rule, which is traditionally and socially accepted by the people. Where polygamy though very rare, it is also found in the present society. However, polyandry is strictly prohibited. In spite of all the rules applied, man and woman can remarry after divorce

if that is accepted by society, or when one of the spouses dies and the family needs wife or husband to bring up the children. So far very rare case of levirate and surrogate are in practice unless the condition demands. No dowry system is practiced among the Zeliangrong tribe. Although not compulsory, the brides' family can contribute in cash or kind for the welfare of the couple according to their prevailing economic conditions. Based on the respective traditional religion, both Christians and non-Christians have slightly different customary rules for elopement, arranged marriages and capture etc. System of Zeliangrong marriage can be considered less expensive or extravagant depending on the economic condition of the family concerned.

### INHERITANCE PATTERNS

Inheritance is understood to be transmission of property from person to person at death or before death. It is practiced separately according to the type of the society i.e. patrilineal, matrilineal or bilateral. It also varies among the Naga tribes of Manipur depending on the social customs. Most of the Naga societies of Manipur are patrilocal, patrilineal, favoring paternal inheritance system.

In the context of Zeliangrong society, youngest son has the full right to inherit all the lion share of his father's properties, both movable and immovable. He is also responsible to repay all the debts of his father. All other brothers have a very less share. Daughters have no role in the inheritance even in absence of male child of the family. In such instances male member of the relative will inherit all the properties as well as the right to look after the daughters until they all get matured. Presently the rules are slowly changing. People have started recognizing their rights through better educational knowledge and awareness. Therefore among the Zeliangrong tribe, female members start claiming for the equal property right by applying to the Indian law of inheritance and succession from the village court in case there is no male child in the family. As far as customary laws are concerned divorced women are also given immovable properties like land and house for their sustenance.

Among the Zeliangrong the succession of the village chief is based on specific clan system that is considered hereditary. *Kullakpa* (controller of the village) – by Kamei clan and *Khunboo* (owner

of the village) – by Gangmei clan are considered chieftain of the village in Zeliangrong society. Normally *Khunboo* is elder than *Khullakpa*. In exceptional case this law is not applicable to some of the villages, where numbers of household are less than ten to fifteen, and no specific clan is found. It is proposed that clan based hereditary system of chieftain should not be practiced. Alternative to that, every well educated and qualified man above forty-five year of age should be given a chance through the majority of peoples' consent to have more efficient and powerful ruling of the village in both the community land or the traditional chieftain land system of society.

### RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

The beginning of all religion is unknown and dateless and is not a phenomenon of recent emergence. The institution of religion is universal which is found in all the societies from past and present. Though not uniform among different communities, it is the earliest and the deepest interest of the human beings. Man does not only have his biological, economic and social needs but also has religious needs that makes him restless even beyond the satisfaction of his basic physical needs (Rao, 1990).

The religion systems of tribal community are very complex and are said to be polytheistic. They do not practice Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam and Christianity as their traditional religion. They worship different deities, and many more living and non-living objects like – sun, moon, sky, stars, rocks, mountains, river stream, earth, fire, etc. which they believe of having both benevolent and malevolent power. They also classify God and Goddess according to their belief. They have very strong cultural practices of offering efficacious things like egg, fowl, in some cases giblets, spirituous liquor, pig, cattle, mithun, cloth, pieces of iron etc., in case of sickness, mania, ill luck, and variety of other calamities for which they are sometimes called devil worshipers. There are also other ritual ceremonies, prayers, incantations, taboos, gennas performed by the Zeliangrong to have a religious moral and philosophical wish to prolong life, to ward off evil, to obtain children and to destroy or harass sworn enemies. Among the Zeliangrongs worship of different deities are found. Out of all gods, they acknowledge the existence of supreme god who created all the

present form of life and all power to heal and to protect our life. Their whole life is centered on the feeling of religions.

According to Panmei and Kahmei (1995) Zeliangrong religion is completely unrelated to animism and idolatry. From the past no image of temple or idols are found. This statement can be supported by Asoso (1974,p.24) saying that “*the Nagas have no established temples and images like the Hindu or Buddhists or mosques like the Muslims for the simple reason that God sees everything and every happening on earth*”. In contrast to above saying, in some villages of Imphal valley, most of the households establish their temple and worship the idols occasionally. Different rituals are performed, it must be due to the influence of Hinduism in Manipur mainly in central valley of Imphal. The traditional worshipers also establish a huge-temple as a common worshipping place at Chingmeirong 2-3 km away from Imphal. There, all the worshippers come together once in every month on the full moon day to sing songs and worship their god called “*Tingkao Ragwong*” or ‘*Tingong*’ (means God of Heaven or the heavenly god). He is considered as the creator of the universe, gods and men, all-powerful, all knowing, omniscient, omnipresent (Conference on Zeliangrong religion, 1994). It has rightly been pointed out by Brown (1975) that these people (Nagas) believe in awesome supreme deity whose nature is benevolent. This deity is the creator of all the things.

Great variations in religion are found among the Zeliangrong tribe as well as within the sub-tribes. Despite the influence of different religions, at present mainly two types of religious practices are found among them i.e. traditional religion and Christianity, where Christian religion outnumbers the tradition religion by 85%. Among them everybody has the freedom of religion, provided it does not interfere with other religions. It is true that different crises have occurred because of changing or conversion to Christianity from traditional religion, like turning them out from the village. Onslaught and burning up their houses. Snatching all the properties, harassment both physical and mental in different form by the traditional practitioner, which lead them to knock the door of the legal court, where it provides a clear verdict that, everybody has the right to choose and practice his or her own religion. In fact, it also cannot be ignored that after

conversion to Christianity, people has almost forgotten all their traditional customs, their dance and music, dress system and their folk songs etc. which could be an important factor for the prevailing identity crisis. However slowly and gradually with more awareness and enlightenment through education and globalization of cultural needs, people are realizing an importance and need of cultural items to overcome the problems.

### CULTURAL PATTERNS

It is well known fact that the study of human society immediately and necessarily leads us to a proper understanding of the culture of that society. It is a well-known fact that cultures are not uniform. They differ from society to society with regards to elements like customs, traditions, ideas values, belief, practices etc. It provides knowledge which is essential for the physical, social and intellectual existence of man. It also conditions and determines what we eat, drink, wear, work, worship as well as ones career, whether we should be politician, doctors, soldiers, farmers, religious leaders, magicians etc. It almost moulds and shapes the characteristics and behavior of individuals living in a particular cultural group. Nagas of Manipur and other North Eastern part of India are very fond of their rich cultural heritage. They are considered to be one of the aboriginal cultural originators and preserver of the past society, when most of cultural patterns are changing day by day in search of modernization and westernization.

Zeliangrong people have cultural practices for every events of life from the stage of pregnancy to birth marriage and death. Among this sub-tribe lots of variations are found, even though their ideas center on one specific objective. Their rich cultural patterns/system are expressed through the medium of song, dance, dress, ornament (costume) religious belief, art and craft, customary celebration and prohibition, food and drink etc. According to the elders, most of the Zeliangrong dances are developed by observing graceful movements of animals, insects and many other living and nonliving objects. Some of the examples are: *Khoiguna laam* (Bee dance); *Rang laam* (hornbills dance); *Talam laam* – (Butterfly dance) performed both by males and females together. Many more separate dances of male and females, youngs and olds are also listed below

like *Tareng laam* (spinning dances); *Hoi laam* (male folk dance with voice) of invocation; *Pazei laam* (swing dance of one male – one female by sitting or by standing), *Tuna laam* (young girls dance) and *Gaan laam* (young boys dance) etc. Different costumes are required for different dances based on types of dances and sex of the dancers. Men use spear and shield of hexagonal shape in war dance, headgear with hornbills' tail and pigtails, whereas females use earring, armband, bracelet, necklaces, *pickhim* (lady decorated head-gear), *pidong* (head crown) etc.

### MUSIC AND DANCE

All dances are accompanied with beating of drums in a particular rhythm. Chou and Mongding (Gonmei, 1994) invented it along with beating of Semmu – a circular gong with prominent semi ball in the center for striking to produce thrilling sound. It is also associated with beating of cymbal, a pair of round brass plates, which produces clanging sound by striking together. Many other instruments like *Rah* (traditional violin) etc are also use in support of the main instrument. Their songs have many classes depending on the purposes and seasons like: *Raa Kalum Lu* (Hymn or worshipping songs); *Rih Lu* (War song); *Lujam* (Common folk songs); *Lam Lon Lu* (Friends love fork); *Mangui Lu* (love song) etc. Today Zeliangrong dances are considered to be one of the most popular dances of Naga tribe of Manipur.

### FOOD HABITS

Food habits of a society are naturally restricted to the availability of resources. Among the Zeliangrongs, mixed types of food habits are found with lots of variation depending on the locations, availability and affordability. Most of their food items are found naturally in the forest, as well as in markets. Their staple food consists of rice, all type of non vegetable like fish chicken, beef, pork, etc. which is supplemented by agricultural products of pumpkin, yam, different types of beans, bananas, pea, potatoes, tomatoes and different other green vegetables. They are very fond of food like bamboo shoot, tree bean, and fermented fish that they consider very special items. They are also very fond of spicy food. Based on the availability of the resources, cooking system and their sources of cooking that vary from one another. In hilly region less

households' use Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) for their cooking as compared to valley where no burning woods are available free. In case of hilly areas lots of firewood are obtained from the forest without any cost. So far in valley irrespective of their economic condition ninety- percent use LPG whereas in hilly areas inspite of abundance fire wood available, around fifteen percent of households with good economic condition use LPG as their cooking fuel.

Slight variations are found among the Zeliangrong in valleys and hills. Dependency on forest and agricultural products are more in hilly people where as the market products are the main sources for valley people. The non-Christians drink rice beer that they consider as the nourishing drink. It is prepared in large quantity and served liberally in all the festivals, ceremonies, social gathering and in entertaining guests. This is strictly prohibited among the Christian society. It is clearly observed that average timing of lunch and dinner are quite different between hills and valleys people i.e. 6.50 am and 5.45 pm; 10.30 am and 7.30 pm respectively because of different occupational practices. Breakfast is very rare in hills as compared to valley people. Milk is not consumed by most of the people which may be because of economic problems or unawareness about its nutritional value. Less restriction in food habits are found. They abstain from specific food in very rare incidents like, pregnancy, after delivery, and health related problem. No customary or traditional system of restriction was observed but they are given simply boil and bland food with dry meat or fish during illness. Till date they practice taboo system of restricted clans' food items, thinking that it may cause serious health problems.

### OCCUPATION

Agriculture is the main occupation of Zeliangrong people. They practice both jhum and terrace cultivation along with different other supplementary occupations like, animal rearing, weaving, farming domestication, carpentry work, day labor, small scale business, plantation of tea, cotton, chilies etc. Hunting, fishing and collecting different products from forest are also practiced. The Zeliangrong people are very much fond of their traditional weaving system producing numbers of splendid cloths that are very popular throughout India. Slowly and gradually many people started getting employment in different

department of government as well as NGO, irrespective of sex. Business of wine brewing is also considered one of the important supplementary occupations of Non-Christian.

In the valley, wet field agricultural cultivation along with day labour, small business along with the chicken, pig and fishery farms etc are the main occupations. In hilly area, both jhum and terrace type of cultivation with much more supplementary occupations are practiced. The hill people are found more engaged in physical labour as compared to valley people. Both males and females work all day long except on Sundays. All women are responsible for maintaining household works like cleaning, cooking, washing along with rearing animals, weaving etc. Males mostly work outside, ploughing, cutting, digging, collecting etc. As soon as agricultural season is over, hilly people look out for alternative occupations like cutting and gathering logs, bamboo (lumbering) collecting different types of leaves and fruits etc., which are sold in the market to supplement their income. Limited agricultural land banned on jhum cultivation and no alternatives provided, Zeliangrong people always face miserable economic problems.

### TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION

Manipur always suffer from lack of transport facilities, as roads are the only means of transportation in all the parts of Manipur. The entire road system has been officially classified into – national highway, state highway, major district road, other district road and inter village road. They are again classified into metalled road, unmetalled and cart track, food path and hills trail (Ansari, 1976). So far no railway lines or waterway of transportation system are found. In 1990, according to government policy, Manipur was included in the Indian railway map. First station of Manipur being Jiribam railway station connects with Silchar railway station. It is also known that on 17-11-1998 another important railway line foundation stone had been laid by railway minister to connect Karong in Senapati district of Manipur and Diphu in Assam through Dhansiri between inter state or country but the project has a long way to go. The only alternative to road transportation is airway, which provides quick service and comfortable despite of its huge expenditure.

The state has two very important National Highways i.e. NH-53 and NH-39 from Imphal to Silchar and Imphal to Guwahati respectively. NH-

39 is also called “*life line*” of Manipur or Indo-Burma/Dimarpur road. It is considered as one of the most important Highways of Manipur. It has a total length of 215 km, crossing Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, where as NH-53 cross Assam and Manipur through Imphal with Jirighat in Cachar district of Assam. It has a total length of 224 kms. The Government is planning to have NH-150 of 523 km long, connecting – Jessami, Ukhrul, and Imphal, Chura –Chandpur – Tipaimukh with Aizawl of Mizoram.

In Manipur 80% Zeliangrong people live in Hilly area where a transportation facility needs lots of improvement. National Highway passes through only few villages. There are many more villages where even two-wheeler cannot reach, as they are not connected through metalled road other then footpaths

## LIVING CONDITION

### 1. Toilet System

Toilets are considered an indicator of the social status and the economic background of the society. Proper toilet facilities are very important health factors as most of the diseases are borne from open field or kachcha type of toilets. The Zeliangrong tribe of Manipur has different types of toilet from open fields to septic flush types depending on the economic condition of the household as well as the space available. In urban areas of Imphal valley, most of the households have more septic toilets as compared to kachcha toilets. About 10% households are without toilets because of poor economic condition and limited space.

In rural areas, it is opposite of urban setting. Most of the toilets are of kachcha/semi cover type, very few flush or septic toilet systems. They mostly use open fields. It helps in saving money for other important tasks. But people are becoming more and more aware about the necessity of a septic toilet as well as the use of toilet soap, chemical etc. regularly.

### 2. House Type

Manipur is a state where different communities live together both in hills and valleys. They construct different types of houses, depending on their cultural believes and traditional customs and economic condition. Variations are seen between hills and valleys house type. In the hilly villages most of the houses are made of wood



and bamboo with roof covered by C.I sheet (corrugated iron/galvanize corrugate tines) and thatch. Their walls are fenced by split bamboo and plastered with mud. In some houses roofs are still covered by thatch, which in reality indicates traditional old customary type. As a sign of improved economic condition with better educational knowledge, people start making completely modern type of houses with imported building materials and bricks. The houses are also divided into many rooms like, reading room, common room, bedroom, kitchen etc. with the consultation of engineers for proper ventilation and aesthetic sense. In Imphal valley due to over population and limited space many people have constructed double or triple storeyed houses.

Most of the Zeliangrong houses have a main door facing East Side i.e. in sunrise direction. In a traditional house of a hill people, the walls of the houses are decorated with heads of the animal like wild pig, buffaloes, tigers, etc. and of beautiful birds' feather, which indicate the degree of expertness and brevity in hunting animal. In valleys, houses are decorated with beautiful objects or woodcraft in most of the rooms. They always have separate kitchen, separate shed for domestic animals. In hilly villages few houses were found where the domesticated animals still live in the same house as was in the case of their fore fathers days. In the traditional practices the roofs of the houses are slanting downward with less number of windows making it so steep that rainwater easily falls down. In hills and valley, every household with agricultural land has one storeroom attached to main house. Constructing house is not very expensive in hilly areas in comparison to valley, as all the materials are found in the forest that requires only physical labour. They are also very fond of constructing traditional types of small hut whenever needed and wherever they go, for cultivation or in any farming area to take rest, eat and sleep whenever necessary in order to be protected from sun, rain, cold and wild animals etc. Most of the Zeliangrong people so far prefer to live in small traditional hut type of houses even if they can make an expensive house, due to communal problem which discourages elaborate permanent settlements. They are often compelled to change houses from one village to other in search of security of life.

### 3. Source of Drinking Water

Water is one of the basic needs of our life. It

constitutes – 79% of blood, 80% of brain and muscles and 10% of bones i.e. two third of the total weight of body is water. Every person requires about 30 gallons (136.3% liters) of water per day for all purposes (Bedi, 1970). Besides drinking, water is required virtually for all tasks like cleaning, washing, cooking etc.

The availability of water varies from village to village depending on geographical location and developmental status. Since Zeliangrong people are widely distributed in hills and valley, rural as well as urban settings, their needs and requirement also varies. In some of the villages at Imphal due to limitation of the inhabited areas, people have filled up the entire pond, small lakes etc. to construct their houses. It compels them to depend on tape water for all the different purposes, which leads to a problem of water scarcity. The ponds are very rare in Imphal valleys and are at long distances from their villages. People are forced to buy water @ Rs.2 for 50 liter including labour charges. In the rural villages, more number of ponds is found along with small lakes nearby. But tap or pipe water supply is non-existent. They conserve the pond water in hygienic condition by making fence around, putting soda or lime to kill all the microbes, prohibiting any washing or bathing. Valley people also depend on the hand pump water for all domestic use, which are provided by the state government according to the population size and their needs. Most of the Zeliangrong people drink boiled water. In Christian village tealeaf is added in the boiled water without sugar. It is served regularly to the entire guests and family members after lunch and dinner.

In Hills, people totally depend on the river and spring water. This water is carried through the pipe or canal system toward the village area, where they usually have a big tank to store. Hill people face less problems of water as compared to valley people as they have Perennial River. In rainy season, due to poor quality of water, it is stored for at least 3-4 days so that all the impurities would settle down in the bottom of the container, then the water is used for drinking and cooking.

### POSITION OF WOMEN

Zeliangrong society is patrilineal, where father is the main authority and decent is traced through male line. But women also equally contribute to the society except in some of the social customs.

In fact women are more active in both outside house as well as internal household chores from morning to evening. They also contribute in cultivation, collecting firewood, cleaning up farms, plantation, digging, fishing, weaving, cutting etc. Generally they are not allowed to plough, hunt animal and do carpentry work and all ritual worship but exceptions to these are also found. They are given freedom to talk, vote, study, work in NGOs, in govt. sectors, and are free to join any political party if they are eligible and are interested. Here we can quote the examples of Rani Gaidinlu, a great freedom fighter of Zeliangrong who also won a Padma Bhushan in recognition of her contribution to the society. She was born on 26 January 1915 at *Longkao* and has created a new history of unforgettable epoch among the Zeliangrong people that will continue to inspire all the men and women of the Naga in NorthEastern region. It will remain as a great example of women's courage and ability among the Naga society.

Despite their valuable contributions women are not paid back with right of inheritance, authority, leadership, no equal wage etc. To quote a few, they can be divorced at any time with some flimsy reasons by giving them fine of one pig in the customary court, no remarriage is allowed without a proper reason. Women cannot take a final decision and are considered second in the education system whereas all the male children are given first preference in all the customary as well as social development deals. However the situation is slowly and gradually changing with more women getting engaged in all types of work. Different women organizations are established in village as well as at state level in order to protect their well being from ill treatment in the society. With advancement in the education and awareness level, Zeliangrong women start realizing their rights and are being engaged in different tasks like adult education, Anganwadi, Nurse, Dai, Teachers, weaving and religious preacher etc. Above all Zeliangrong women are known for their simplicity, energetic disposition, faithfulness, stalwartness and hospitality etc.

### **MEDICAL FACILITIES**

Health is a conscious factor among Zeliangrong tribe of Manipur. In earlier days people suffered from all types of communicable disease like small pox, cholera, chicken pox, diarrhoea,

dysentery etc. It took a heavy toll of human life in the villages as no proper medical facilities or vaccines were easily available. The situation is changing slowly. Most of the people are becoming aware of modern medicine and available health facilities. However there are still many villages where no PHC or dispensary is available. In order to help people in such remote villages, government, NGOs and Christianity plays a very important role by abstaining from the use of drugs, alcohol and making them aware of the hygienic programme etc, introducing many other alternatives to support their life. Government provide them one PHC or sub center for each 1,000 person and medicines at the rate of Rs. 12,000 per PHC in a year and Rs. 2,000 per sub center along with many awareness camps, distributing poster, pamphlet etc, and making them aware of their health right. It varies from valleys and hills. The valley people have better medical facilities as compared to hilly area where few numbers of PHC and hospitals are available. To them a person is considered sick when he/she cannot move out of bed because of disease and physical weakness. Usually for any problem they are habituated to buy medicine as per their own idea without any prescription from doctors or trained health workers. If they find no improvement, then only they consult Doctor or traditional practitioner.

Non-Christians depend on all types of modern medicine as well as traditional practices whereas, Christian people depend only on modern type of medicine. They are very fond of using herbal medicines for all type of diseases. They believe that a sick person should not be taken directly to a hospital as long as they are traditionally/ customarily confirmed for the presence of ghost spirit/supernatural power from the pulse count. It can cause to death of the person if the patient is given injection or medicine in the presence of the spirit. They are the people who refrain from visiting hospitals or doctors as much as possible, mostly due to superstitious belief, economic problems and less awareness of the modern medical facilities.

The distance and transportation problem along with unavailability of doctors and medicines and high charges of private doctors' cause them to avoid visiting hospitals and doctors. In very serious cases they do visit the Regional Institute of Medical Science [RIMS] at Imphal. With all the efforts to improve the health status of

Zeliangrongs, there still prevails a burden of communicable disease along with constitutional diseases like high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, cancer etc.

Among the Zeliangrongs, no customary restriction is found in visiting hospitals or doctors for both male and female at any time. Imphal valley people always visit government hospital and private doctors depending on their economic condition and availability of doctors. Hilly people depend solely on PHC, Dispensary and private doctors (Licensed Medical Practitioner-LMP, Registered Medical Practitioner-RMP) of the village with the supplement of herbal medicines made by elder or traditional healers. The Christian people are also very fond of worshiping system by the elders of the church whereas among non-Christian, different animals are offered/sacrificed to their god and goddess so as to protect them from the evil spirit responsible for causing ill health and many other problems. Most of the Zeliangrong people seek help from the elder people at village having first aid knowledge for minor ailments.

### CONCLUSION

From the present study conducted it has been clearly known that Zeliangrong tribe of Manipur is the combination of three sub tribes. They are the most enterprising and advancing Naga tribe who inhabited most widely in all the district of Manipur as well as in many other north eastern states of Assam, Nagaland etc. They are popularly known for their rich cultural items, which are associated with each and every activities/ functions/events of life. They are found inhabited both in hill and valley, follows both Christian and non-Christians (traditional) religion where Christians live mainly in hilly area and non-Christians in valley. Slight variations are always found in their cultural practices, ritual performance, religious practices, marriage system, polity, occupation, socio-economic system etc. which must be because of so many factors like difference in religious system i.e. (85% christian outnumber non Christian). Widely inhabited practices and constant shifting from one place to another because of communal onslaught, religion differences, etc. that makes them unable to settle permanently are some of the main causes. They have poor economic condition, low quality educational level, poor health status and many

other negative factors affecting their activities of life.

Being in far flung villages in different districts of Manipur, Zeliangrong people are still bearing all the pain, hardness and critical situation of life without electricity, no proper transportation and communication, complete lack of modern medical facilities, no proper alternatives were provided despite the imposition of banned in jhum cultivation etc. In spite of all the drawbacks the emergence of Christianity has removed most of the odd and ill practices almost completely, instead growth of education and awareness programme increases that make them assign in the present scenario. It is ironical that when many societies are so developed and striving for luxuries of life some societies are still in need of basic facilities. So it is the purpose of the researchers to find out the necessary requirements of the people to highlight and bring under the notification of the authority to look into the matter so that in near future no inequality among the society should be found.

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