

2. 2ND DISPLACEMENT OF THE INHABITANTS OF MANIPUR DURING THE WORLD WAR II

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This paper is extracted from a project that records the memories of men and women in Manipur, who witnessed the Nupi Lan (1939) and Second World War (1942 – 1945). The project is funded by University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi, India

Abstract:

The Second World War reached India with the Japanese bombing of Imphal, the capital of Manipur on 10th May 1942. This changed the life of the denizens of Imphal and also that of the people living in the far flung region of Manipur. The people of Imphal immediately fled their home after the bombing. After some months, some of them returned to their home and start settling down. In their locality they saw many soldiers. Some even find the soldiers staying in their house. As the Japanese invasion of Manipur becomes a possibility day by day, more and more soldiers were sent into Imphal and other parts where the Japanese are likely to pass through. To enable the soldier to stay, in those strategic places and also for the safety of the local populaces they were once again left their homes. This time, they were asked by the government to vacate their house. Hence, this paper is name as the 2nd Displacement of the Inhabitants of Manipur.

Unlike the traditional sources, the primary sources for this paper are collected from Manipuri who are above 75 years and who witnessed the incidents related to the Second World War (by visually recording their statements). All interviews have been video recorded. The interviewees include persons from all walks of life – from the member of the royal family of Manipur (Maharaj Kumari Mangisana Devi, the then king's sister – in – law) to the daughter – in – law of the Durbar member of Manipur to the common masses. As such, most of the sources in this paper are based on the records of the interview of those who experienced the Second World War.

Keywords:

Nupi Lan (1939); Second World War (1942 – 1945); Displacement of the inhabitants of Manipur during the world war - 2

I

After the Japanese Japanese of bombing of Imphal on 10th and 16th May 1942, the inhabitants of Imphal left from their house. They fled to the outskirts of Imphal like Khurkhul, Senjam Chirang, ¹ Patsoi, ² Langjing, Tabungkhok, ³ Yurembam, Patsoi, Leitong west of Imphal, ⁴ Basikhong ⁵ and Angom Lawai (Kangla Sangom shang) east of Imphal ⁶ and Meijrao south of Imphal ⁷. All these places lie in a radius of about 8 to 10 km from the heart of capital. Even the deities were also shifted to places where they deemed it safe. For instance, on 11th May, i.e. the next day after the first bombing of Imphal by Japanese planes, Shri Govindaji, was shifted from the residence of Aribam Anou Pujari to Uchekon.⁸

The main target of the Japanese planes in their bombing of Imphal on 10th and 16th May 1942 were the residencies of the British Political Agent and the Superintendent of the durbar (British official), public works department, petrol pumps, 4th Assam Rifles, etc. They were all station in Greater Imphal. After the first bombing the main reason for their fleeing their home seems to be to escape from the Japanese bombing. Thus, most of them fled about 3-7 km from their home.

The main concerns of the people of Imphal residing near these places were to flee from these areas to avoid the casualty in Japanese bombing.

II

Some stayed at the residence of their near ones. ⁹ While others takes shelter at at the houses of unknown stranger. ¹⁰ M. Borekeshore of Khongman says that his sister and her in-laws came to his house and stayed till the end of the war. ¹¹ RK Tamphasana says that her family went to her husband aunt house. ¹² W. Amubi also says that the house that they fled belong to an acquaintance of his grandfather, W. Yumjao (an officer of Manipur at that time). ¹³ S. Haladahar, *says that his family went to the house of his aunt at Patsoi.* ¹⁴ M. Sorojini, who fled to Uchekon, Th.Bidhu and RK. Sanajaobi, sister of RK Jhalajit, an eminent historian of Manipur who fled to Yurembam also says that they parents knew the owners of the houses. ¹⁵ While other like Ch. Maipaksana, S. Ibemhal, says that they stay at the house of a stranger. They says that they just enter the house and stay at a places wherever they can. ¹⁶

As most all the inhabitants of Imphal fled at once, it was difficult for the owner of the house to accommodate all of them. Some lucky ones stayed in the house of the owner. ¹⁷ Some took shelter at the verandah of the house. ¹⁸ S. Ibemhal says that at Basikhong around ten members of her family stay at the Verandah of the house. ¹⁹ Some took shelter in the the shanggoi (Shanggoi is an outhouse of the Manipuri. Every Manipuri have an outhouse) ²⁰ and some took shelter at the cowshed. ²¹ Around five to ten families took shelter in a shangoi. ²² The shangois of some affluent ones could accommodate up to 100 persons. ²³ RK Tamphasana says that the Shangoi, that they took shelter was very big. About 100 people took shelter in two shangoi. ²⁴

As many displaced came unprepared, they slept on the ground with a piece of cloth above the ground. ²⁵ They made partition by cloth, mat or any other available material. ²⁶ Ch Maipaksana says that at Bamon Kampu where her family took shelter many families also stay there. There was not a comfortable place to sleep. We at times sit in the corner of the shangoi and often sleep in available places. ²⁷

Some well to do ones, to offset the difficulties of sharing the **shangoi** (outhouse) bought a piece of land and stayed during the entire period of their flight from home. W. Amubi says that his grandfather W. Yumjao Singh bought a piece of land from Bokul Singh of Langjing with the agreement that W. Yumjao Singh will be the owner of the land till the end of the war. ²⁸ When some, like W. Yumjao, buys a plot of land however small it maybe, it can be inferred that some like W. Yumjao, seems to were aware of the gravity of the situation. Hence, he planed to stay for long till the danger is over.

III

The displaced persons though living together under one roof in a shangoi or shed, cooked separately. ²⁹ One of the interviewees mentions of many kitchens. ³⁰ RK Tamphasana says that as Bokul's wife (the owner of the house where they took shelter) was her husband aunt her family was allowed to have kitchen within Bokul's home. This seems to be one of the privileges enjoyed by her family. ³¹ Ch. Maipaksana Says that her family at Bamon Kampu drove away the cattle from the cowshed and cooked their food. She also says that it was very filthy and they found it very difficult to eat. ³²

They ate whatever food that was available to them. S. Ibemhal says that her family ate Tumai paddy (a kind of coarse rice), vegetable like phunil grown on paddy field, heiyen mana, heibong mana, etc. which they did not ate before their displacement. They carried out fishing at paddy field. Some also said that they ate ngari (fermented dry fish, an essential ingredient of Manipuri meals).³³ Ch. Maipaksana says that she saw many collecting vegetables like pulei, loklei, etc., plants grown in wild on the bank of the Iril River.³⁴ Salt was not easily available. In its place, the people ate sambhor which was easily available near the military camp. As such people often came from a long distance to get it,³⁵ at times soldiers gave them freely.³⁶

As most of the people fled their home immediately after the bombing, they did not carry anything with them. Some of the owner of the house where the displaced person settled says that they shared their foods like paddy with the family who came to seek refuge to their house. M. Borekeshore of Khongman says that many families came to stay in his house. His family shares their paddy from their barn with them.³⁷

While M. Borekeshore family shares paddy with those who seek refuge in his house, other owners were not so benevolent. For, there were also some household who were reluctant to shares their food stock like paddy with those who fled to their house after the first bombing. S. Ibemhal says that the house owner where her family took shelter covered their paddy by hay at their shed.³⁸ The owner of the house might have apprehension that their stock may ran out and this might have left them high and dry. This can be known from the statement of M. Borekeshore who says that his family shared their paddy with those who came to their home. M. Borekeshore says that though, they had a good stock of paddy. It was exhausted after some time after they shared their paddy with those who came to stay in their house. To help his family he worked part time job working for the British forces. One of his duty was to record the stocks entry of the goods supplied by the contractors.³⁹

Thus, many interviewers often say that despite staying away from their house they often came to their house to collect goods like paddy, etc. As most of the persons fled about 3-7 kms from their home, it was not difficult to them to go to their house and bring foods like paddy to the place where they fled. For instance, S. Ibemhal says that she came from Basikhong, (the place where she and her family settled) to her house in Singjamei (about 2 km) to get paddy and firewood.⁴⁰ W. Ibemhal of Sagolband Moirang Leirak says that after the bombing her family went to Langjing (about 6km west of Imphal). She says that her

husband often go to their house to bring goods like paddy. One day when he went to their house to collect paddy he find some persons of her locality trying to carry away their paddy from the barn.⁴¹

IV

This sudden change in residences within very short time has its impact on many of the displaced persons. Many of the displaced persons were lost at sea after suddenly leaving the comfort of their house out of a sudden and struggling to find a space where they can stay. RK Tamphasana despite staying in the house of her husband's aunt finds it difficult to stay in the **shangoi** (outhouse) along with others for long. Ch. Tampaksana says that they did know the owner of the house that they stay at Bamon Kampu. They just enter a house and stay put there. We drove away their cow from the cowshed and cook our food there. It was very filthy and we found it very difficult to eat food. There was not a comfortable place to sleep. She says that at times they sit in the corner of the shangoi and often sleep in available places. At the gate of the house where they take shelter they cried longing for our house.⁴² S. Haladhara also says that he was unable to eat properly and also had difficulty in sleeping.⁴³

These instances must have a great bearing on the mind of those who fled their home immediately after the bombing. Thus, RK Tamphasana, says that one of her relatives Dr. Gopal and his family, went back very soon after the first bombing. She says that her family went back in September (Langban).⁴⁴ Ch. Maipaksana also says that her grandfather and uncles decided that it was not feasible to stay longer in Bamon Kampu. Her family came back in our aunty husband vehicle. Some 3-4 families stay back.⁴⁵ Like RK Tamphasana and Ch. Maipaksana many other families came back to their houses after some months.

V

Many of the interviewees states that when they came back they found allied soldiers living in their houses. RK Tamphasana of Tera Sapam Leirak (west Imphal) says that when her family came to their house in December 1942 they found the British soldiers living in her house. Ch. Maipaksana also says that when they returned from Ningomthongjao (about 4km south of Imphal) they found the Gora staying in their house. Gora were also staying in her neighbourers house. In the northern portion of her house stay Indian soldiers.⁴⁶ RK Sanajaobi of Kwakeithel, (who live with her parents at Yaiskul during the war time) after

the first bombing, first fled to Khumbong (10 km west of Imphal) then to Oinam Thingel (southern part of Greater Iphal), the maternal house of her elder step-mother for a few months. When her family came back to their house they find soldiers staying in most of the houses of Yaiskul. The soldiers, however, did not stay in her house. She finds soldiers staying in her neighbourer houses who live to the northern side of her house which was also adjacent to the road. ⁴⁷

Ch. Maipaksana also states a fond relationship that she shared with the soldiers who live near her house. Her grandfather and uncle told the soldiers (Mayang) that they were working for Govindaji Temple and they cannot stay far away from Govindaji Temple. The soldiers allowed her family to stay in their house.⁴⁸ She also says that her family did not face the difficulty of getting foods. Among the food gave by the soldiers was biscuit. The soldiers also gave them kerosene when they needed it. When they were about to go to the battle front to faces the Japanese the Gora soldiers cried a lot and caress the young children tenderly. They also bowed to her grandfather, grandmother and uncles with tears in their eyes. This makes them love the soldiers. ⁴⁹

VI

The inhabitants of Imphal were not able to stay in their home for long. By the end of 1942 the inhabitants of Imphal were again ordered to vacate their home. Unlike their first displacement, where they vacate their home for the fears of Japanese planes coming again to bomb their house this time they were asked to vacate their home to accommodate the soldiers who were coming to Imphal. RK Tamphasana says that in December (Wakching) **pamphlet** were distributed by one British officer who smoke **cigar** while driving the vehicle. It asked the locals of her localities who were staying in their houses to vacate them by the 8th day after the distribution of the pamphlets. She says that before the 8th days of the distribution of pamphlets they left their house. Her family went to a vacant house at Kurou Makhong of Sayang. They stayed there for about three months from Wakching to Purnima (15th day of the month of Manipuri calendar) of Sajibu. While staying there her brother – in – law married a woman of Kwakeithel. ⁵⁰ After the marriage, her family went to Sorok Keithen at Lamshang (10 km west of Imphal).

Like RK Tamphasana, S. Ibemhal also says that after returning from Basikhong she stays at Singjamei for a year. With the stationing of soldier in Singjamei her family once again left their house for Irom Meijrao, (about 10 km south of Imphal) south of Imphal. She

left her home early in the morning for Meijrao (about 8-9 km) and reach there at 10 am. ⁵¹ S. Ibemhal also says that at Irom Meijrao, (the place where she went) she met relatives some of the prominent officials of Manipur. One of them was the mother of the mother of Thambal Member of Khagempalli. She mentions of Thambal mother's supplying to her raw silk and collected the goods made by women like her. ⁵² M. Borekeshore also says that many from people from Sigjamei Thokchom Leikai (about 2 km from his home) came to his locality. They were asked to leave their house to accommodate the soldiers in their houses. ⁵³ RK Sanajaobi says that as no soldiers stay in her house her family, they continue to stay in their house. However, for her neighbours like Ngangbam Nimai, who lives adjacent to the road, the soldiers stay in their houses till the end of the war. ⁵⁴

From the statement of R.K. Sanajaobi it can be inferred that the soldiers did not stay in all the houses of Imphal. They seem to stay in the selected houses. The others were allowed to stay in their own houses. This is also mention by Th. Bidhu Singh of Sagolband Moirag Leirak. He says that when he came back to his house along with his father he found soldiers in the houses of his neighbours. He and his father were allowed by the soldiers to stay in their house. S Haladhara says that after the 1st bombing many soldiers came to Imphal. They were put up in the houses of different localities in Imphal. He says that in Sagolband, some important officers were put up at big houses. For instance, Mekong Saheb stayed at the residence of Mutum Ibohal of Meino Leirak and in the residence of Wahengbam Yumjao Singh, (an important officers of Manipur at that time) Gora officers resided. ⁵⁵ His statement is also corroborated by Th. Bidhu Singh of Sagolband Meino Leirak. He says that many soldiers (Indians) occupied houses adjacent to his house. To the house of his western neighbour (of Wahengbam), it was occupied by British officers. ⁵⁶

M. Borekeshore also mention about a Major of Pathan Battalion staying in the house of Sougajam Ibocha of Sougajam Leikai, Imphal (Greater Imphal). He says that the Major was called **Ayub Khan. Ayub Khan** was always given companion by S. Ibocha. Borekeshore says that Ibocha often joke to him that one day he will go to with Ayub Khan. ⁵⁷ Here, it is deem imperative that a further study on the biography of Genral Ayub Khan of Pakistan is needed to determine if he is this Major that Borekeshore is talking about. For, it is also said that he fought the World War II in the Burma front.

During the Wolrd War II Airfield were constructed in different places of Manipur in places like Koirengei (about 8 Km the north of Imphal), Angom Lawai

about 5 Km north - east of Imphal, Kakching about 40 km south east of Imphal, etc. people who were living near the airfields were also told to vacate the places.

M. Amarjit of Kakching says that **for the construction of airfield in Kakching and the stationing of the soldiers around it the people of the Kakching were evacuated.** The inhabitants of Kakching living near the airfield were asked to move southward by the British forces. His family also moved to Kakching Part II till the end of the years. The people were paid for the occupation of their houses by the soldiers. ⁵⁸

L. Rabei of Luwangsangbam living adjacent to the Koirengai airfield was living about a few km north of the airfield during the World War II. He says that that airfield and the area around it were heavily fortified and no one was allowed to trespass it without permission. The people living near the airfield were asked by the government during the war to vacate their home. ⁵⁹ M. Tombiyaima of Heirok also mention of the construction of the helipads near their house. ⁶⁰

VI

In other instances, the interviewees mention that the inhabitants of a particular area were asked to vacate their place of residence because of the impending battles between the allied forces and the Japanese. **It is more so because there were reports of sighting Japanese soldiers within the periphery of Imphal.**

L. Rabei of Luwangsangbam, for instance, says that he saw a lone Japanese soldier when he went to collect firewood from the Chanbirok hillock which lies to the north of Tingri hill. The Japanese soldier in non-verbal language called him and made sign if he can get some cigarette for him. Rabei gave his nod and in the next morning brought some 5-6 pack of cigarette for the Japanese soldiers. This made the Japanese soldiers happy. He offer some money to Rabei which was refuse by Rabei. Then L. Rabei says went up the hill. ⁶¹

Ch. Madhumangol says that he and his family went from their home at Nogmeibung (in Imphal East District) to Keibi Loushang Khong (about 9-10 km). His father had a paddy field at Keibi Loushang Khong. He says that they were told that the Japanese were approaching near Loushang Khong. After hearing the news of the coming of the Japanese they were **driven off Keibi Lousang khong.** He says that their family did come to their

house because it was **occupied by the British forces**. So his family went to his sister-in-law house at Lairikyengbam Leikai. As the place was congested, they shifted to his aunty (his father's sister) house at Nahrup a junction of Yonglan Leirak and Kongba River in the east Imphal. They stay at his aunty house till the end of the river. ⁶²

The local populaces living in the southern part of Manipur along the Tiddim road also mentions their displacement. In Maibam Lopka Ching (Hillock) about **15 km** south of Imphal, a decisive battle was fought between the Japanese and the Allied Soldiers. This battle was also known as the Battle of Red Hill. One of the important battle fields was the Maibam Lopka Ching (Hillock) about **15 km** south of Imphal. The battle of which was known as the Battle of Red Hill. In this battle, the Japanese, forces coming from Tiddim, from the southeastern side Manipur suffered their first reverse. After this battle the Japanese gradually withdrew from Manipur. Khomdram Amar of Nambol who live nearby the battle when the battle broke out also says that before the battle the British force asked the inhabitants living on the stretch from Moirang to Nambul to vacate their houses. Because of this instruction a good numbers of people living between this stretch of land move northward to escape the crossfire between the two side. ⁶³

L. Bidur who fled to Pourabi with his family also mentions about the fighting between the Allied and the Japanese forces. He says that he saw a good number of soldiers going towards a hill in the north. After two to three hours he heard the sound of canon gun firing. After sometime he saw the Allied soldiers coming with many of them injured. Very soon after this incident his family along with others who stay in Pourabi were asked to vacate Pourabi. ⁶⁴

Thus apart from the stationing of the allied soldiers in the localities of Imphal the impending battle with the Japanese also led to the dispersal of the inhabitants from their abode. This added the difficulties and instability to the life of the people which also meant that they had to start their life afresh again.

References:

1. Mr Gimson, the Political Agent recalls that when the siren from 4 Assam Rifles sounded around 9.30 am on May 10th, he said to his assistant: 'I must remember to tell Hurell (CO 4 AR) to stop these silly signals.' An hour later the Siren wailed again. 'Damn!' exclaimed Gimson on his verandah. 'I forgot to tell Hurell.' These were almost famous last words). *Lt Col(Retd) M Ranjit Singh*
2. There were for the British in Imphal
No A-A guns airfield nor aircraft men
Jap reconnaissance planes came in April
Almost daily with loud and shrill
S. Gourahari Singh's "*Manipur and World War II*," Self, Imphal, 1983, 1374, p.81
3. *S. Ibemhal.*
4. *W.Ibemhal Devi,*
5. *R.K.Tamphasana Devi*
6. A second raid on May 16 did take place
One bomb demolished main gate of jail
And criminal slipped away in its trail
And indulged in many a bad dacoity case.
Manipur and World War II, 1384, p.82
7. Twenty five bombs fell in Residency garden
Manipur and World War II, 1385, p.82
8. Singh. L. Ibungohal and Singh N Khelchandra, *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, Imphal, 1989, p. 641.
9. The bomb set ablaze at Keishampat side
A number of houses at that noon-tide;
On the Nambul river near Keishampat bridge
Were killed a great many poor refugees
Manipur and World War II 1386, p.82
10. There was break-down of administration
The absent officials met with suspension:
With loyalty they were pardoned later
And they served Govt. In a matter better.
Manipur and World War II 1381, p.82
11. M.Borekeshore, Khongman Moirang Pandit leikai
12. R.K.Tamphasana, Tera Sapam Leirak
13. W. Amubi Singh, Moirang Leirak
14. S. Haladhara, Moirang Leirak
15. M.Sorojini, Thangjam leirak, Th. Bidhu Meino Leirak, Rk. Sanajaobi, Kwakeithel

16. Ch. Maipaksana, Kwakeithel hokchom Leikai
17. Nganmba Amrita Singh, Thangmeiband
18. W.Amubi, Sagolband Moirang Leirak
19. S. Ibemhal , Singjamei .
20. R.K. Tamphasana says that her family first fled to Patsoi and then to Leitong, West Imphal where her brother – in – law is cultivating a paddy field.
R.K.Tamphasana Devi
21. S. Ibemhal says that she and her family fled to Bashikhong, East Imphal.
S. Ibemhal
22. Ch. Merajao says that his family fled to Angom lawai, , East Imphal.
Chongtham Merajao, Thangmeiband
23. S. Ibemhal says that later on she and her family fled to Meijrao.
S. Ibemhal
24. R.K.Tamphasana, Tera Sapam Leirak
25. Singh. L. Ibungohal and Singh N. Khelchandra, *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, Imphal, 1989, p. 641;
MK Mangisana, Buddhacahndra's sister – in – law and wife of Khedasana, Buddhachandra's brother.
26. S Haladhara says that his family went to Langjing as his sister – in – law is from Langjing.
S Haladhara, Sagolband moirang Leirak.
R.K.Tamphasana says that the owner of the house is the husband of her husband
aunty. R.K.Tamphasana
27. Ch. Maipaksana
28. W. Amubi Singh, Sagolband Moirang Leirak, grandson of W. Yumjao Singh.
29. S Haladhara; S. Ibemhal
30. R.K.Tamphasana Devi says that the house they took shelter belongs to one of her relatives who was a well to do ones. The shangoi (outhouse) of her relatives was so big that it accommodates around 100 persons.
R.K.Tamphasana
31. R.K.Tamphasana
32. Ch. Maipaksana
33. S. Ibemhal says that her family stay at the verandah of a stranger Basikhong.
34. Ch. Maipaksana
35. Nganmba Amrita Singh; S Haladhara; R.K.Tamphasana Devi
36. Nganmba Amrita Singh; Ch. Maipaksana says that her family cooked at the cowshed of a stranger in Bamon Lampu.she says that it was very filthy and we found it very difficult to eat food.
Ch. Maipaksana
37. M. Borekeshore, Khongman Moirang Pandit Leikai.

38. S. Ibemhal
39. M. Borekeshore
40. S. Ibemhal
41. W. Ibemhal Devi, Sagolband
42. Ch. Maipaksana
43. S. Haladhara
44. Ch. Maipaksana
45. W. Ibemhal Devi
46. S. Ibotombi, Yurembam
47. W. Ibemhal Devi
48. W. Ibemhal Devi
49. W. Ibemhal Devi
50. R.K.Tamphasana
51. S. Ibemhal
52. S. Ibemhal
53. M. Borekeshore
54. R.K. Sanajaobi
55. S. Haladhara
56. Th. Biddhu, Sagolband Meino Leirak
57. M. Borekeshore
58. M. Amarjit , Kakching
59. L. Rabei, Luwangsangbam
60. M. Tombiyaima, Heirok
61. L. Rabei
62. Chakpram Madhumangol, Nongmeibung
63. Khomdram Amar, Nambol
64. L. Bidur, Lairikyengbam Leikai.