

Manipulated Landscapes of Undivided Khurkhul Area (The Kanto, Kanto Sabal, Keingam, and Khurkhul, Villages) Imphal West District, Manipur

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the historical remains and how they have been manipulated in the Undivided Khurkhul Area. At present, it is divided into many smaller villages. They are the Khurkhul Khunjao, Kanto, Kanto Sabal, and Keingam Villages. Hence, the paper focuses on the act of monument emergence and the creation of the past in the changing conditions of a border region of this Undivided Khurkhul. The creation of values and their inscription in the past, especially in historical remains, to naturalize them belong to the main processes of building identifications in a border region. The historical structure in which we include our history helps us to understand and organize ourselves, whereas the spatial structure helps us to understand our surroundings. In that way, historical material and memory places are not indicators for existing collective identities but a medium to install values and orders of a collective identification coming into being. Landscapes are manipulated over time for various reasons, but each object or piece of land has a symbolic meaning. New landscapes indicate new developments and new conditions. Moreover, it is vital to know what happened to a landscape before one can speculate about why it changed and how people adapted to the new conditions.

Keywords: Khurkhul, Manipulated Landscapes, Environment, Societal change, Christianity, and Geoarchaeology.

Introduction

Humanity depends on nature for life support, but human activities are changing ecosystems worldwide in profound and uncertain ways. The first principle of thinking about landscape is elementary. In the past, people did not simply live, discard items, and build on sites but interacted with the landscape beyond. Landscape archaeology, then, is about what lies beyond the site. Landscapes yield signals, information, and indications concerning the condition of our society and the roles that various persons play. Landscapes also encompass places we leave behind in the constructed or cultivated environment and are, therefore, also a reflection of this environment and the social world- in our minds. Landscapes are associated with roles that we consciously and unconsciously influence. Landscapes are, therefore, manipulated by various factors. In literate societies, but in preliterate societies, commemorative cultures developed that implanted themselves into the landscape and ritualized the functioning of the particular society as a whole.

As every object and every piece of land has its specific symbolic meanings, the destruction of landscape images is accompanied by the collapse of societies. It is linked with social and societal change. New landscapes indicate new developments and new conditions. Moreover, it is vital to know what happened to a landscape before one can speculate about why it changed and how people adapted to the new conditions.

Manipulated landscapes are reaction patterns to intentional or unintentional mobility, the exchange of ideas and goods, and the necessity to pass on knowledge. In this process, they become a medium for knowledge transfer. Biographies of places and objects can be traced and are vehicles for reconstructing communication patterns and experiencing living landscapes. The mobility of humans, animals, and ideas affected space design, and exchanging goods and ideas enabled new media to promote landscape manipulation. Landscapes also always express the relationship between humans and the environment. Public space must be assigned and is, in turn, assigned. The landscape is inherently public, whether access to all or only to parts of a community. Paths, roads, and gathering places are significant. In larger social areas, it is precisely their social topography that symbolizes dominance. Landscapes are important because they contribute significantly to our well-being and quality of life. They provide the broader context within which we live our lives. Residing within an aesthetically pleasing and culturally meaningful landscape enhances our well-being. We are looking for changes in social space that are visible in landscapes. Landscape, as the interplay of social space and environment, requires corresponding changes, both in the economy and in thinking.

The early Settlement pattern of the Undivided Khurkhul Area:

Changing landscape through time

There are many changes in the landscape, particularly the structure of the settlement pattern of this study area. According to my informant, Mr. Doren, there was a society known as AMMCA (All Manipur Merchants Cooperative Association) to establish an industrial area. After 1946-47, the natural landscape of this area was destroyed by a society called the AMMCA. Before that, the Piedmont bushy area was known as Engoullok, in the name of the Engoullok stream. The same terminology also happens to the existing deity Engoullok. The association established a new 'Ching-tam Engoullok Bazar' marketplace from such a bushy area by distributing their respective plots. The said informer was also present while discussing the matter. They distributed the plot from 125 acres of the settlement area, and each family received an area of about 1950 square feet (65ft x 30ft in length and breadth). People started their livelihood from the market by settling there (the new place). During that time, there was a conflict between the two communities, the Kuki and the Naga groups. The majority of the people belonged to the so-called Kuki fold. Now, the foothill region is occupied by different tribal people while the Meiteis occupy the plain area. Earlier, this piedmont portion (the Engoullok Hill) was included in the map of Undivided Khurkhul village. So, most of the villagers of the plain area wish to protect their traditional forest from alienation by the tribal.

So, they tried their best to safeguard these forested foothills by planting more trees. Many changes have also taken place at the foothills, such as the establishment of Army Cantonment Areas, the establishment of Central and private schools and Police Stations, Hospital Primary Health Centre Sub-centres, the installation of an electric Power Project Plant, the commencement of the Sports University, the Rajiv Gandhi Tribal University, the implantation of Heavy Fuels Project Plants, etc., may be mentioned. Besides, many activists have also seen the development of the upcoming small playgrounds as an example. These dispersed settlements have encroached along the roadsides in the hilly area, and megalithic structures are seen along them. The population at the foothill and the plain areas increased more and more in comparison with the earlier days, resulting in the change of settlement patterns from a very scattered settlement to a crowded settlement pattern.

Subsistence pattern

During the early times, the people's economic base depended on the natural resources available in the nearby hills, notably Engoullok Hill. It was mainly based on agriculture,

masonry, and food gathering (that is, living with the process of gathering or collecting wild plants and foods like vegetables, fruits, spices, and small and big games). Nowadays, some people also work in the Army Camp at Leimakhong, serving the company on different levels as employees or laborers. People from various places also settle in the hilly areas for their livelihood. People living in the hills pursued agriculture or other primary activities, but agriculture was still practiced, and staple foods, such as rice, maize, etc., were planted for survival. People have started practicing jhum cultivation, which led to deforestation. From an early age, they found it challenging to climb high, hilly areas. After jhum cultivation, they again modified it to terrace cultivation. They have developed a new idea and started planting trees and other fruit-bearing trees with the help of the Director of Horticulture. The main difference between the hilly areas and the plain area of this Undivided Khurkhul Area is that in hilly areas, the main occupation of the people is related to primary occupations like agriculture, animal farming, and sericulture. In contrast, in the plain areas, most people are brewing rice beer, piggery, poultry, apiculture, sericulture, etc., as a secondary or tertiary occupation. Still, agriculture is common in both the hilly and the plain areas. Nowadays, most of them are also engaged in white-collar jobs.

Daily life embedded in the landscape

Whether people lived as a household or family unit at some distance from their neighbors or next door to them, the house itself was the center of the web of movements that people undertook as they went about daily life. We saw that there are clear indications that a structured landscape of fields and woodland was used for various purposes around at least some of these settlements. There would also have been the use of specialized sites on a seasonal basis. People have utilized four introduced domesticated animals: cattle, pigs, sheep, and goats. As reported by the informants, domestic dogs have been in the area since the early period. Pigs are the most dominant animals of the faunal assemblage. This clarifies that they should not assume that animals would have been viewed in simple economic terms. This community has deployed particular members of their society into adolescents to carry out activities such as seasonal grazing. Again, it would be in keeping with the practice in small-scale traditional societies that such activities were tied in with the social web by being linked with the passage from childhood to adulthood and the passing on of knowledge about the landscape and the community. It indicates an extensive utilization of the whole of the local landscape. This includes the exploitation of trees, the location of what appear to be the primary settlement foci in strategic, low-lying areas in the valleys, and the occurrence of sites on the uplands. Also, part of this social landscape was the megalithic structure upslope at the hill.

Monumentality and Rites

A large number of people, if not all, led a life not only for themselves but also wanted to extend something good for the community they lived in. People in individual capacities or groups are organized to dig ponds and plant trees for the village or their habitat. According to our informant, megalithic structures were established to occupy the land after the conflict between the two communities (the Kuki and the Naga groups). They erect large stones in the hilly areas to perform socio-religious functions with rites and rituals and to make a particular event, occasion, or period. This tradition is continued among the Undivided Khurkhul village, although there is change and modification in the erection of megaliths due to embracing Christianity and modernization. There is also a concentration of standing stones in the study area. There are six deities located at different localities of the Engoulok Hill and its foothills such as Tolen lai, Engoulok Mahadeva/ Chingu Panganba, Salairen Sidaba and Sidabi, and Panthoibi. In contrast, the Goddess Tamairembi is located inside the Keingam village (foothill region). There are also different versions regarding the names of the deities worshiped there, as the people at that place call out various names of the same deity. Those who follow Hinduism call one of the deities Engoulok Mahadeva, whereas those who prefer to revive Meiteism call the same deity Chingu Panganba. So, this deity has no definite name as it possesses a double name. Many people come to pray at this place, having different religions. This gives us a sense of wonder and makes us curious to know about the history connected with it. It is in the form of an idol (made of huge blocks of dressed stone with human figures) and as a symbol thereof as it attributes to the prevailing situation of revivalism (from Hinduism to Meiteism) and consciousness of a specific historical and social condition. The monumental structures were placed in a restricted space. This indicates that the concept of making an area specially meant to form a sacred complex to be worshiped by any community as Hinduism; they call one deity Engoulok Mahadeva, whereas the people who preferred to revive Meiteism call the same deity Chingu Panganba. So, this deity has no definite name as it possesses a double name. Many people come to pray at this place, having different religions. People have perceived places that, in the foreground most of the time, would have been concerned about everyday social life while the structures stood in the background, representing the past, the ancestors, and a sense of permanence. On certain occasions, the focus would have changed, and the more idealized social world involving ceremonies outside and inside the structures may have become the nub of social life. These ideas of tension between foreground and background also help to remind us of the landscape as a process, constantly changing through human actions and perspectives.

Movements

The people inhabiting the foothill create a path for pedestrians and the two-wheelers for their movements. It has expanded into something more for their daily use. The path may be a symbol not only of interconnectedness and social relations but of movement through life. First, the points linked by paths share common elements- sacred stones, trees, artifact depositions, names, and titles referred to in myths and stories and related to the activities of ancestors who stopped on the journey that created the path. Second, linked places on paths are understood in sequential precedence, a hierarchy of ancestral origin points from which paths radiate to others. Paths are essential for routing social relations and connecting spatial impressions with temporal inscribed memories.

Hydrography

The main sources of water in the area are streams and spring water located at the higher altitude of the hill. Tap water is also supplied at the foothill portion.

The early Settlement pattern of the Kanto village:

Changing landscape through time

According to Phuritsabam Muhindro, the place was covered with paddy fields during the early times. Laishram Tanjou first established it from Thangmeib and Lourung Pural Leikai, who was then in charge of the paddy fields of Sir Churachand Maharaj, situated at the Ningthem Loukol (a group of paddy fields belonging to the royal family, particularly to the then princes). The place is about 111 years old and is mainly occupied by workers and laborers who have arrived here while searching for their day-to-day work. This place comes under the jurisdiction of the Undivided Khurkhul village. The installation of a transformer and other activities like playing in the playground have occurred. This shows that man has manipulated so far that the past structures have changed according to times. The area is mostly occupied by the Meiteis.

The plain areas have increased more and more in comparison with the earlier days, which resulted in the change of settlement patterns from a very scarce settlement to a compact settlement.

Subsistence pattern

During the early times, the people's economic base depended on the natural resources

available in the nearby hills, particularly Engoulok Hill. But now, the way of economic resources has changed as most of the tribal and other communities settled on this hill are restricted from the flow of resources, making it difficult for the people to earn their food resources. Agriculture undoubtedly plays a key role in native food production. Affluent farmers have recently introduced the use of tractors and motor machines. People live there plant staple foods such as rice, maize, etc., for survival.

Daily life embedded in the landscape

Most of the lands are used for agricultural purposes. These are used for the cultivation of vegetables and other household materials. Grazing land of animals is mostly done in open fields. The primary subsistence of the village includes cultivation and animal husbandry. Apart from agriculture, they gather wild foods because of the vast varieties of flora and fauna in which they live. Thus, they have not only relied upon the provision of nature to meet their daily needs, but at the same time, they have also modified the environment to suit their needs for subsistence better.

Monumentality and Rites

The placement of monument structures can also be seen in the open fields. It does not have a specific deity to pray to. They worship according to their belief. Sometimes, the villagers climb the hills and pray to Engoulok Mahadeva with flowers and fruits.

Movements

During the early times, roads were not properly maintained. It was meant only for cow walks. The said village was not exemplary. People found it difficult to manage their walk on the road. But now the government has taken some measures, and it has been about 20 years that the road has come to a good situation. Various changes have taken place, like installing a transformer and developing a playground at the roadside. The village receives modern technology by building small bridges for their convenience. Engines now replace animal-driven technology. This indicates that land has been manipulated so that each person in the village tries to live in a modern form of lifestyle.

Hydrography

There is no change in the sources of water compared to the early days. Three wells and the Kanto River feed the village. No tap water is available till now, and hand pumps are used mainly by the people inhabiting the area.

The early Settlement pattern of the Kanto Sabal village:

Changing landscape through time

The surrounding landscapes influenced the shapes of early settlements. Patterns of the settlement have changed as the population increases. Settlement has become more compact than in the early days. The places were covered with paddy fields in the earlier days. All the changes have taken place according to their benefits and advantages for livelihood. Besides, many activities like the construction of schools, playgrounds, community halls, etc., may be mentioned. Water is the leading cause of the changes in settlement patterns from hilly areas to plain areas. Water was insufficient for their agricultural purposes since agriculture was the main occupation, leading to the movement from hilly to plain areas. Some houses are constructed after filling up rivers as the population increases. Most of the houses are built near the roadside, and the houses are made so they are very close to each other.

Subsistence pattern

Most of the food supplies were from the nearby hills during the ancient days, but due to the inhabitation of the land by the tribal communities on the hillside, the food supply is now from the market. They also practiced agricultural practices and other staple foods for their survival.

Daily life embedded in the landscape

The arable lands are used for agricultural purposes. At present, the lands are reduced, and the available lands are used for green vegetation, mainly for horticultural purposes. Some are used to construct public places like burial and school buildings and for economic purposes like furniture, woodland, etc.

Monumentality and Rites

The people inhabiting the area prayed to the deities on the hillsides, which has continued till now. The placement of monuments cannot be seen in the open fields. They have prayed to the deities in the hilly areas since prehistoric times immemorial.

Movements

People moved from place to place in the past, either by foot or bullock carts. Still, nowadays, due to the advancement of technology, many vehicles, such as two-wheelers, cars, jeeps, trucks, auto-rickshaws, etc., are used as a means of transport. Roads are mainly constructed for their convenience. They have regular auto services that can reach the Leimakhong Bazar, Pheidingga, or Koirengei areas.

Hydrography

At first, the villagers used water from the Leimakhong River. Still, due to the manipulation of land, some parts of the river and its tributaries are dumped up for settlement purposes, resulting in a change in the river's course that affects the hydrography. Tap water has been available in the area from the Leimakhong water supply since 1982.

The early Settlement pattern of the Keingam village:

Changing landscape through time

The settlement pattern of Keingam village was found at the Army camp in the Leimakhong area. Some villagers reported that the Army camp was established in their village land, and hence, they were shifted to another location (that belongs to the Kanto Sabal village) from their original place. As mentioned above, two villages (the Keingam village and the Kanto Sabal village) occupy the same area as Kanto Sabal village. In the past, the place was occupied by paddy fields, and now it has become the settlement of many people for their livelihood. Many activities that led to changes in their settlement pattern, like the brick field, stone crusher, construction of community hall, schools, etc., have taken place. Most of the houses were built at the roadside close to each other. It shows a significant change compared to the early times.

Subsistence pattern

The economic base of the people residing there depends upon the available resources of the hill during the early times. Now, they primarily depend on the available food resources grown on the arable lands and bought from the market. They grow crops and other staple foods depending on seasonal vegetables. Kitchen gardening is common to all people residing in plain areas.

Daily life embedded in the landscape

People used the lands for agricultural purposes. Next to it is a vast area of land, which was used as grazing ground. The resources were extracted from the land during the early days. Cattle are still seen in most houses, including cows, pigs, dogs, hens, ducks, etc.

Kitchen gardening is quite common in each household. Constructions of many buildings or structures for economic purposes, like furniture houses, brickfields, etc., are also seen in this village.

Monumentality and Rites

The placement of monuments can be seen in the open fields to date. The deity's name is Tamairembi, located in Keingam village. The villagers still worship it. They also worship the deities in the hilly areas according to their months and days. People from different communities come to pray with their offerings to the deity.

Movements

The movement of the place was either by foot or bullock carts. Due to the advancement of technology, villagers use vehicles such as auto-rickshaws, jeeps, cars, etc.

Hydrography

At first, the villagers used water from the Leimakhong River. Still, due to the manipulation of land, the rivers and tributaries are dumped for settlement purposes, resulting in a changing scenario, particularly in the river's course, which affects the hydrography. Tap water has been available in the area from the Leimakhong water supply since 1982.

The early Settlement pattern of the Khurkhul village:

Changing landscape through time

The settlement pattern was surrounded by paddy fields from all directions over the area during the earlier times. Due to the population increase, people started constructing their houses by filling up rivers. Each household occupied more land for different purposes, including a kitchen garden, cattle rearing, etc. Construction of many public activities like playgrounds, schools, mills, primary health centers, etc., has taken place. Houses were built somewhat closer to one another. This results from the increasing network of settlement patterns due to the scarcity of settlement areas, which finally led to an overcrowded settlement landscape.

Subsistence pattern

The forests of the study area were under the community's traditional control and played a significant role in meeting the resource needs of the community during the earlier days. Forest resources played an important role in the economy without mass production in agriculture and industry.

The primary subsistence of the Khurkhul village includes cultivation, horticulture, brewing, distilling, and selling of rice-beer and country liquor, rearing of the silkworm, and spinning of silk yarns from the cocoons that they have harvested, collection of stone and sand from the Leimakhong River, supply of wood, etc. Apart from agriculture, they also have practiced diverse food-gathering techniques. They hunted big and small games frequently in the past, but nowadays, the occupants of this area do not practice hunting on a large scale. They continue to trap fish, catch different varieties of mollusks, oysters, and snails, gather wild plant foods because of the vast flora and fauna they live in, and sell them to the market.

Food is supplemented chiefly from their fields in rice or vegetables, whereas they collect fishes, oysters, mollusks, and other edible insects from the wetlands. If some people want excess food, food is supplemented from the nearby markets in the spinning mill area and Leimakhong.

Thus, they have not only relied upon the provision of nature to meet their daily needs, but at the same time, they have also modified the environment to better suit their needs for subsistence.

Daily life embedded in the landscape

Most of the arable lands are used for agricultural purposes. Arable lands for homes are used to cultivate vegetables and other household materials. In addition to pigs, chickens, fowl, and cattle are the other domesticated animals they keep. Similarly, chickens are also bred and used as sacrificial items in numerous rituals. For their protection, tiny houses are made with composite tools. As the population increases, the available land is reduced, and lands are utilized for their daily use.

Monumentality and Rites

The placement of monuments is rarely seen in this village. The people of this village worship the deity located in the hilly areas, i.e., Engoullok Mahadeva. One rare structure is the picture of monuments installed to create the same face in the deceased person's memory. It can be seen in the village.

Movements

The village roads were first used for the bullock carts and pedestrians. As time passed, the means of the movement were changed for the convenience of the villagers. The roads were not properly constructed. With the development of science and technology, the villagers use vehicles such as cars, two-wheelers, auto-rickshaws, etc.

Hydrography

The village is fed by the river flowing through it. Currently, the village is fed not only by the river water but also by wells dug by the villagers and even by the water supplies department (PHED, Leimakhong section).

Discussion

The landscape is the fundamental reference system in which individual consciousness of the world and social identities are anchored. Emotional ties with the land are related to economic dependencies, the difficulties of gathering and hunting, and the people who create and sustain the fertility of the land. Major ritual sites correspond closely to paths of movement. Landscapes are thus related to past generations and are a means of establishing a community with the past. The landscape is continually

encultured, bringing things into meaning as part of a symbolic process by which human consciousness transforms the natural environment's physical reality into an intelligent and socialized form. Landscape images' destruction is accompanied by societies' collapse and is linked with social and societal change. Landscapes are important because they contribute significantly to our well-being and quality of life. We are looking for changes in social space that are visible in landscapes. Geography, as the interplay of social space and environment, requires corresponding changes, both in the economy and in thinking.

Conclusion

By studying the landscapes in the village, it can be concluded that the Meitei community inhabits the area. The flow of movement is a flow of the mind. The distribution pattern of sites and settlements across a landscape can tell us much about the interaction between people and the environment and the nature of the social organization. The ancestral connections between living populations and the past were embodied in the being of the landscape, and an emotional attachment to place that had a generalized power and significance in relation to human activity as a series of known, named, and significant places linked by paths of movement to which populations repeatedly returned during their seasonal activity rounds. The relationship between people and the landscape became restructured and took a different form. The ancestral powers and meanings in the landscape now became activities appropriated by individuals and groups through the construction and use of megalithic structures on Engoulok Hill. These monuments served to make permanent, fixed, and visually draw out the perception of the connections between people and the land for the first time.

The leading economy of the people is agriculture. Most of the people who are engaged in agriculture grow rice. Other types of crops are also developed. Some villagers hold government posts or employees, but very few. The influence of modernization on material culture, social life, food habits, and personal habits could be seen. The advancement in education and communication has accelerated the various changes in people's lives and cultures. The Undivided Khurkhul village (even though divided into four villages) still has some households that still follow the traditional religion. So, the people are still preserving their ancient, conventional religion.

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