



# NAMBUL WATERWAY

**E**VEN THOUGH, Manipur's Nambul is a small river, it is a very important river, in the context of the valley historically, geographically and sociologically, that, the river empties itself into the Loktak lake—the largest fresh water lake in North East India also makes its importance in maintaining ecological balance all that more important.

Originating from Litan Waiphei at the Kangchup hill range at the confluence of the Imphal West, Senapati and Tamenglong districts of Manipur, the Nambul River passes through two important districts — Imphal West and Bishnupur — through its 54 kilometre long journey to the Loktak Lake. The journey includes the thickly populated Imphal city covering an area of over 10 kilometers.

This important tiny river serves as the main flood-water channel for Imphal city and its adjoining areas, flows down from west to east with fresh water till Iroishemba village near the Manipur Zoological Garden, 2.5 km west of the main city.

The urbanization race has just about

begun in Imphal, however it has started showing its fangs — the most palpable being the pollution of the Nambul River running through the city.

Nambul river has now become not only the most polluted river in the state but also a model river of pollution in the region. Even the National Rivers Conservation Plant under Union Ministry of Environment and Forest had listed it among the country's polluted rivers.

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However surprisingly residents on either side of the river still continues fishing. The river becomes polluted as it starts entering main market area. Thus the most polluted part of the river in its 10 kilometre stretch in Imphal city begins from Hump Bridge till it reaches Keishamthong bridge — a distance of hardly 1.5 km.

During the wet season, solid wastes are being carried down by the current of the river from Imphal city. Besides, every year in the beginning of rainy season, lumps of water hyacinth, Kabaw Kang in Manipuri, are carried down to the Loktak Lake by the current of the water. This process threatens the life span of the lake. So in short one may come to the conclusion that to save Nambul River is to save Loktak Lake.

It is high time to save Nambul from becoming a nulla for dumping solid waste and garbage. Till the late sixties from time immemorial, this river served as a good waterway from various towns including Sugnu to Imphal, the capital of the State. Sugnu, around 70 km south of Imphal, is small town in Thoubal district. It was navigable by boats for com-

mercial purposes.

Ningthoukhongjam Tombiraj, son of Padmashree Khelchandra who wrote Manipur's Royal Chronicle informed that local traders brought in items like reed, weed, earthen pots etc. at Khwairamband Keithel, the main market site in Imphal by using their traditional boats along the Nambul waterway.

Regarding the use of Nambul waterway in transporting the earthen pots, Shanti who is now following her mother Noyon's footstep in the pottery trade along with twenty other retailers informed that though places like Thongjao, a pottery village in Thoubal district have better road and communication facilities, villages like Chairen, another popular pottery village is yet to have better transport facilities. But in the past the earthen pots of Chairen were transported to Imphal using the Nambul waterway.

In May 1991, Manipur's legendary painter late Rajkumar Chirajitsana popularly known as RKCS had reconstructed the business activities that took place along Nambul waterway through one of his painting which is presently kept at RKCS art gallery.

In the past, arrival of the loaded boats in Imphal area is like arrival of modern days outstation vehicles. "It was so exciting to see the arrival of boats loaded with pots near our home" recalls a 60 years old tribal lady who owns a vendor in Imphal's Kakhulong village. Kakhulong is a small kabui community located on the eastern side of the river in between Hump bridge to Keishamthong bridge.

During those days, the Nambul water was so clear and people used it for various purposes. Interestingly most of the villagers used Nambul water as detergent in washing their white clothes, she recalls but now, everything is beyond our expectation. The use of a small boat by the state officials recently for the river survey along the Nambul course reminds me the past episodes, the lady felt.

Echoing a similar sentiment, 48 year old R K Budhi, a resident of Keishamthong Top Leikai, a village on



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the western side of the river said, "It was only recently, maybe in the late seventies, that one could watch Kabui damsels on the eastern side fetching Nambul water."

But nowadays, as the population of Imphal city has immensely increased (2.5 lakhs in Imphal Municipal area as per 2001 census), the homestead area has become congested and the size of individual holding is becoming smaller by the day. One even cannot afford space to dump their wastes. In such a way every family unit have started dumping the waste wrapped in plastic bags into the river.

Subsequently the charm of Nambul river has gone now as the people started to avoid using Nambul water. The rise of the population as well as urbanization movement in Imphal city and it's adjoining areas forced the river to become a nullah for dumping solid waste and garbage.

But there's no synchronization at all. When public want to throw the gar-

bage, government should make it's alternative arrangement, feels a youth N Amarjeet, a resident of Uripok, a village on the northern bank of the river.

Till late sixties and early seventies, traditionally every households in Imphal area has its own garbage dumping place (Lukhak-Kom in local tongue) within their respective courtyard as they've enough land. They keep shifting their garbage dumping place from one site to another when it gets full. While the decomposed garbage were latter used as manure.

Similarly every household also used their backyards for the sanitary purposes. During those days, no one was aware of plastic bags not to speak of using it. Most of the people used naturally available degradable materials like banana leaf, lotus leaf etc.

Khomeiton Golmei, a resident of Keishamthong kabui village is also still remembering those olden days wherein the traders unloaded their goods at their doorstep. "I think it was in the 60s, traders come in their boats to deliver their trade items to our village through a canal at a very cheap rate" says this 56 year old businessman who presently sells firewood. But with the population explosion and urbanization, everything has changed. Even the canal which was once used as an important jetty connecting the Nambul river has become a small nullah of the village.

**-Sobhapati Samom**