

Nambul as a waterway in it's past life

Even though, Manipur's Nambul river 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 largest fresh water lake in North East India. The journey includes the thickly populated Imphal city covering an area of over 10 kilometres.

This important tiny river serves as 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, the capital city of Manipur in India's northeastern region, 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.

Residents on either side of the river still continues fishing till district court complex at Uripok few metres ahead of joining point with Naga river popularly known as Naga nullah at Thong-Nambonbi (Hump Bridge). The river becomes polluted from this point as it start entering main market area. Thus 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 in

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terms of tons of toxic materials are being carried down by the current of the river from the Imphal city. Besides, every year in the beginning of rainy season, lumps of water hyacinth, in Manipuri Kabow Kang, which was brought by a prince of Manipur in appreciation of its flower from the then Kabow valley (now in Myanmar), are carried down to the Loktak Lake by the current of the water. Sum total of this process is to threaten 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. Therefore, the new slogan is perfectly correct.

It is high time to save Nambul from becoming a nullah 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 commercial purposes.

"It was so exciting to see the arrival of boats loaded with pots near our home" recalls a 60 years old tribal lady of Imphal's Kakhulong village, "I forgot the year, but it occurs when I was around 12/13 years old". Kakhulong is a small tribal pocket 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 for various purposes. Interestingly most of us washed our white clothes with Nambul water as the result is fantastic, she recalls.

Echoing a similar sentiment, 48 year old R K Budhi, a resident of Keishamthong Top Leikai, a village on the western side of the river on said, "it was only recently, may be in the late seventies many young ones 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. As a result, the charm of the river water is no more now. Later on, people slowly and slowly started to avoid using Nambul water.

There's no synchronisation. When public want to throw the garbage, government should made it's alternative arrangement, feels a youth N. Amarjeet, a resident of Uripok Ningthoukhongjam Leikai, a village on the northern bank of the river.

Till late sixties and early seventies, traditionally every households in Imphal area have their own garbage dumping place (Lukkhak-Kom in local tongue) within their respective courtyard as they've enough land. Similarly every household also used their backyards for the sanitary purposes. During those days, no one is aware if plastic bags not to speak of using it. Most of the people used naturally available degradable materials like banana leaf, lotus leaf etc.

Ningthoukhongjam Tombiraj, son of Padmashree Khelchandra who wrote Manipur's Royal Chronicle informed that some of the indigenous fishes which were commonly found in Nambul river like Sareng, Sareng Khoibi, Ngatup, Nganoi, Ngaten, Nganap, Ngasep have been extinct now due to the pollution of river water.

According to Dr Kh Ibohal of Central Agriculture University, Iroishemba, river pollution will not only give an impact to the ecology of the region but it will also hit the life of the aquatic animals like fishes and finally to the humans beings. "If water body is not healthy, it will give direct impact on our lives" Dr Ibohal said, "abnormality rate will high, and automatically our future will be in dark".

So saving Nambul and hence saving Loktak will mean saving the ecology of Manipur in the long run. This will also mean preserving the historical importance of Loktak Lake of which there can be no dispute. One should remember Loktak lake is dying like those extinct wetlands of the Imphal valley. The dead wetlands are Lamhelpat, Takyelpat, Porompat, Akampat, Keishampat, Yaral Pat etc .