

Second World War, The Battle Of Imphal: Japanese-INA Relation With The Hill People

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Abstract: *The Second World War in Manipur occurred in 1944, between British army and Japanese-INA. At the eve of war in 1943 and early parts of 1944, the Japanese army and INA organized an Intelligent network amongst the native hill people, Kukis and Nagas, to collect British information also as guide on the way to offensive. For this Nishi Kikan and Hikari Kikan were setup to employed hill people. Many joined these organization and after India got independence they got freedom fighters' monthly pension. The main source for this article is primary base on Archive and secondary material. It focus on forgotten contribution by the hill people towards freedom movement of India.*

Keywords: *Hikari-Kikan, Nishi-Kikan, Kukis, Nagas*

I. INTRODUCTION

This article intended to focus on the role taken by hill people of Manipur in response to the called of Netaji during Imphal Campaign. The Kukis and Meiteis were the main components who response to the called. This article deals with the hill people, mainly Kukis. Many of them joined Japanese-INA's intelligent organization called Hikari Kikan and Nishi Kikan. On the other side many people also joined British "V" Force. Data collected for this article is mainly base on primary sources and secondary as well with empirical methods. This article focus on forgotten contribution of many people of Manipur, who assisted INA and to highlight their contribution in this article.

II. BACKGROUND

The women's upheaval of 1939-40 in Imphal because of rice exportation in the midst of scarcity of rice in the state, heavy tax impose upon the hill people, force labour contribution for road cutting and construction works apart from Netaji called for help to INA. The Kuki revolt against the then authority 1917-1920 because of force labour contribution were the causes of discontentment. At this condition at the eve

of Imphal campaign in 1943, the Japanese - INA came in contact with the hill people of Manipur from Burma to convince them to joined Hikari Kikan and Nishi Kikan. Hikari Kikan was an intelligence organisation composed mainly of Indian FIC (INA's). Its main duty was to conduct secret warfare in India by using Indians as agents. Nishi Kikan was of the same organisation composed mainly of the native hill people of the region under the command of Japanese officers. The native Nishi Kikan members were Japanese, Burmese, Nagas and Kukis. The hill people were instrumental for spying network against the British army. On the other side many native people joined British "V" Force, the same spying network against the Japanese-INA. Many Kukis joined Nishi Kikan and Hikari Kikan as response called from Netaji. The word "NISHI" means western and hence implies for the western part of Burma, it means the hill people of Manipur.

Nishi Kikan employed Chins, Kumis, Nagas and Kukis for the intelligence activities. Personnel of this organisation wore an arm band with a red letter "N" on a yellow white background. The aim of the Nishi Kikan was to collect enemy's information and to screen on British troop movement with the aim of strengthening and protecting the flanks of the Japanese division. They tried to convince civil population in the hill area to assist Japanese army and INA on Imphal campaign of 1944.

III. RELATION

The first contact with the hill people was found in the eastern parts of Ukhrul along Chindwin river vale near Homalin. The Kuki chiefs were contacted first to convince them. Amongst the Kuki chiefs, Tongkthothang chief of Chahsat village was convinced to organize volunteers to help Japanese army and INA. In the south-eastern and southern parts of Manipur, Kukis assisted the Japanese-INA intelligence sector, mainly as guide, information network and some parts in labour contribution. The ASI at Mombi (Lonpi) reported on 30-10-44 that a Lambu of Saibom (Saivom), south of Shuganu told him that, there had been a meeting at Khengpi (Lonpi) village, in the month of July, 1944. The leading men of the meeting were some Jap. Officer, one Manipuri Officer, and Lamkthothang Kuki of Vajang village. He gives a list of some eight headmen and others who were amongst those present. These villagers were all in the south east of the State close to the Burma border.

IV. SUPPORT

It was Paokhomang Haokip (Kuki) of Sakoh village who had first contacted the Japanese during the same time and was largely instrumental in getting Tongkthothang, the Haokip chief of Chassad, to visit the Japanese in Burma in November 1943. E.T.D. Lambert, a Central Intelligence Officer (Assam), reported to C. Gimson, the Political Agent of Manipur about this early visit. He reported that the Kukis first contacted the Japanese in and around the area in the Chindwin bend, south of Homalin, in the Somra Tract and Kabaw valley in 1943. He said that, Tongkthothang Haokip, chief of Chassad, son of Lhukhomang (Pache), one of the leaders of 1917 rebellion, have crossed Chidwin river in November 1943 to contact the Japanese and have asked for 400 rifles to fight against the British. This early contact was also noted by the Japanese intelligence report (captured and translated in English). It was reported that:

In Homalin zone, populated by many border minority tribes which is not the responsibility of the Indians, we are doing our best to pacify and win over Shans and Chin-Kukis. The number of Chin-Kukis contacts are increased and was about 60 in thirty villages in middle of October, 1943. The Kuki Chins living east of a front line company of enemy outpost in Ukhrul area are co-operative with us, including with the Headman. We can expect every co-operation when we advance as these people are helping our agents by concealing them and assisting in their infiltration at risk to themselves. Recently some of Kukis have actually been making use of "V" Force personnel against enemy have been engaged directly undermining the loyalty of Gorkha troops and upsetting the enemy moral. Our agents find it easier to travel through the district 25 kms, wide along the west bank of the Chindwin river, where the majority of the natives are of the Kuki tribes.

E.T.D. Lambert, Central Intelligence Officer, Assam, for instance, give five names who joined the Japanese intelligence organisation: Pakhai alias Lhunkhokhai of Lakhon Village (SF 0565), Yangdong of Jangmol Village (S 0565), Yamkhongam of Maku Village (RK 9089) not Yangkhongam (corrected by

Pu Jangkhoisei Haokip), Letkthothang of Yangmol Village, and Tongkthothang chief of Chahsat (RK 9963). In one of the branches of the *Nishi Kikan* a Japanese intelligence organization operating in Burma and among the Indo-Burma tribes, stationed in Homalin, have noted that there were twenty Kukis serving under Capt. Izumiya. Under this organization the same report had recorded about 8 Indians (INA), 25

Burmeses and 25 Kukis. Their operational areas were in Layshi, Lahurari and Kohima areas. Further, we will see a statements of K.R. Palta, Intelligence Officer of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose:

Pretty English speaking Kuki girls were forced by the British military authorities to work as spies for them against the INA. But these girls occasionally approached our commanders with all the British military secrets.

K.R. Palta further state that the local population on the borders of India on the whole, wholeheartedly welcomed and helped the INA. He also mentioned how the Kuki people had at the risk of their lives assisted INA wholeheartedly. The INA had nothing to pay back for such support, he said, except 'Thank you' and 'Jai Hind.' Helkhokhai also states that, when the Japanese and INA sepoys were at Chahmol it was at the time of Chon (Traditional festival of the Kukis). They dance with us, eat Gaur meat with us and respect the self-worth of women and girls. In the south east of the State close to the Burma border. The A.S.I. at Mombi (Lonpi), who himself is a Kuki, list the following as having helped the Japanese:

- ✓ Thongkhojam of Headman of Toitung village
- ✓ (Intelligence),
- ✓ Helkthothang of Toitung village(Intelligence),
- ✓ Pakang of Toitung village (Jap. V. Force),
- ✓ Jangkhoisei of Changpol village (Headman),
- ✓ Jangpao of Lonpi, (Intelligent)
- ✓ Lhunkhokai of Lonpi, (Intelligent)
- ✓ Lamkthothang of Vajang (Appointed captain by Japs.)
- ✓ Haokhojam of Khengjoi (Interpreter),
- ✓ Helson of Khengjoi village, (Interpreter),
- ✓ Hellhun of Khengjoi village. (Intelligence)

C. Gimson also reported the cases of some Kukis in this area:

- ✓ Lamkthothang of Vajang (his case was already noted above).
- ✓ Palet Mate of Lamjang Tombi. He was said to have acted as a scot for the JIFS and planted land mines on the road to Sita, as a result of which some Jeeps were lost. Not found now. Reported to have gone with the Japs on their retreat.
- ✓ Jamshei Mate of Lamjang Tombi. He acted with Palet noted above. He too went away with the Japs.

Helkhokhai Haokip recounted that Lamkthothang Haokip (Doungul)'s father Nohhao was arrested and torture by the

British force because of joining meeting convened by the Japanese force at Chahmol village just after harvesting season. This infuriated Lamkthothang who finally left his service of Assam Regiment and joined INA. Lamkthothang Haokip after having a baby son remained under holiday and did not returned to British camp. He remained with the Japanese and INA. After some time he was promoted to civil organizer and facilitator. Later he joined combat force with INA in Khengjoi area. He also said that there was another meeting of the Chiefs

at Lonpi village. Lunngam Lungdim was also active to joined meeting as he was assistant to the Chief of Vajang village.

Uncle Tongkhair Touthang of Moreh recounted that, Palet Mate of Lamjangtombi village, Lunngam Lungdim of Vajang village, Jamshei Mate of Lamjang Tombi and Thongam Baite of Keiphom were used by Japanese-INA as spying and organizing the people. They also used as informer in the area. An A.S.I. further states most interesting report concerning Kukis in this area having been sent by headmen for training with the Japanese and states that almost the whole village of Khengjoi is pro-Japanese and anti-British.

V. CONCLUSION

During and at the eve of Imphal Campaign of Japanese-INA, most of the hill people of Manipur eastern parts were cooperative with Japanese and INA. But with the establishment of "V" Forces, most of the Nagas shifted to British V-Force and Kukis and Meiteis were with the Japanese-INA. Therefore, after India got independence more than hundred aged people enjoyed Freedom Fighters' monthly pension from the Government of India, but up till now their contribution remained away from historical recognition.

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- [7] Ibid, File No. R-1/S-D/144,
- [8] NAI, File No.18/INA
- [9] ASA File No. 140-C/44
- [10] ASA, File No. 140-C/44, p.5
- [11] Sakoh Kuki village is located at the border of Burma and India, the village itself is located justinside Burma side, I visited in 1990.
- [12] Guite, 'Local participation in INA-Japanese Imphal Campaign, p. 292.
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- [19] Pu Helkhokhai Haokio (Dongul) 97 years old from Vajang village, oral source collected from him on 27-9-2012 (Thu) at Mantripukhri residence. During World War-II, he stayed at Vajang village, near Burma border today.
- [20] ASA, File No. 140-C/44, p.5
- [21] File No.140-C/44 Confidential, 1944, P-11, D.O. 5566-GA, Imphal the 29 Gimson to Godfray, secretary to the Governor of Assam.
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- [23] Pu Tongkhair Touthang, age 86 settled at Samukom (Sammakhong) Village near Sita during War time, now reside at Moreh. Collected oral source on Friday, 9-3-2012, at Langol Housing Complex, D-7/111 at the quarter of his son.
- [24] File No.140-C/44, p. 5