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Origin of Pineapple Cultivation in Manipur

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Abstract

The Portuguese introduced pineapple cultivation in India during 1550s. Now pineapples become an important commercial fruit crop of India; and Manipur is one of the leading pineapple growing states in the country. Pineapple is widely cultivated in the adjoining areas of the valley and the mid-hills of Manipur. Besides Queen and Kew varieties of pineapple, a variant near to Queen Variety had also been found growing in the state. Origin of pineapple in the state can be traced early in the history of Manipur. The people of Manipur believed in ancestor worshiping – worshiping of the first ancestor, legendary or mythical, after which the clan was descended. Pineapple is the fruit entitled to the *Luwang* clan for offering to their ancestors and this clan merged to the Kanglei kingdom during 949s. Traditionally, only the indigenous fruits are allowed to offer to their ancestors. Thus it is apparent that pineapple was available during the time when *Luwang* clan merged to the Meitei community. It is also found that the people in the state cultivated pineapple for market during 1880s.

Keywords: Kanglei, Luwang, ancestors, Meitei kihom, Assam kihom

Introduction:

Pineapple is a herbaceous perennial fruit crop of tropical and sub-tropical regions. This plant is a leading edible member of the family bromeliaceae which embraces about 2,000 species, mostly epiphytic in nature and many of them are strikingly ornamental. The fruit is botanically known as *Ananas comosus* Merr. (syns. *A. satubus* Schult, f *Ananassa sativa* Lindl., *Bromelia ananas* L.B.comosa L.). Pineapple is called by different names in different countries – ‘pina’ by Spanish-speaking people, ‘abacaxi’ in the Portuguese tongue, ‘ananas’ by the Dutch and French and the people of former French and Dutch colonies; ‘nanas’ in southern Asia and the East Indies. In China, this fruit is known as ‘po-lo-mah’; ‘sweet pine’ in Jamaica; in Guatemala the fruit is often called as ‘pine’¹.

In India, the fruit is called by different names in different languages of the states – it is known as ‘ananaas’ in Hindi, ‘anarosh’, ‘anarash’ or ‘anarosh’ in Bengali, ‘anarôx’ in Assamese, ‘annas’ in Sanskrit, ‘ananas’ in Punjabi, Kannada, Urdu and Gujarati, ‘punchitipul’ in Kashmiri, ‘sapuri’, ‘supuri’ ‘anasianas’ in Uriya, ‘annachi pazham’ in Tamil.² In Manipur, the fruit is called ‘kihom’ or ‘kiyom’.

Pineapple is one of the most important commercial fruit crops of the world and cultivated in almost all tropical and sub-tropical regions. There are some regions where certain indigenous varieties of pineapple were being originated. Improved or hybridized varieties are widely cultivated now; fast mechanisation in cultivation happened in large plantations in view of the growing commercialisation of this fruit crop. The literatures on pineapple, so far, referred that the fruit originates from South America, most probably from the region between South Brazil and Paraguay. The earliest written references to pineapple are by Christopher Columbus, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedoy Valdés, and Sir Walter Raleigh, who found pineapple growing in the West Indies, where it was used for food and wine making. Prior to the discovery of the fruit by Christopher Columbus in November 1493 for the first time on the island of Guadeloupe and the then again in Panama in 1502, the fruit was already a stable component of the vegetative – crop complex and in the diet of native Americans in the lowland tropics.³ The Portuguese were responsible for early dissemination of this fruit crop in many counties and apparently they carried pineapple to India by about 1550, to India.⁴

¹ Morton, J. (1987): ‘Pineapple’ in ‘Fruits of Warm Climate’, Miami, pp-18-28

² (online) ><https://www.indifferentlanguages.com/words/pineapple>

³ Rohrbach, K.G. et.al. (2003): ‘History, Distribution and World Production of Pineapple’ in the Pineapple: Botany, Production and Uses (eds. D.P. Bartholomew, R.E. Paull and K.C. Rohrbach) CAB International

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/plant/pineapple>

Commercial varieties of pineapple grown in India are mostly Kew, Giant Kew, Queen, and Mauritius⁵. Sub-varieties or variants near to Queen and Kew are also found growing in Manipur and Assam. It seems interesting to study how long pineapple has been growing in these states after the Portuguese introduced the fruit in India. Thus, the present study attempts to investigate whether pineapple began to cultivate in other parts of the country, particularly in Manipur, after the Portuguese had introduced it in India, or had the fruit been growing in certain parts of the country prior to the coming of the Portuguese.

Objectives of the study:

1. The main objective of the present study is to investigate the origin of pineapple cultivation in Manipur, and
2. To trace the beginning of commercial cultivation of pineapple in the state.

Methodology:

The present study is based mainly on exploratory method of research. Secondary sources of data were also used for the study. Information was also collected from personnel interviews of resource persons in the related area of the present study.

Pineapple Growing Locations in Manipur & Varietal Distribution

Manipur is one of the leading pineapple producing states in India. Queen and Kew varieties of pineapple are grown in the state. The Queen variety is small in fruit size of around 1kg with deep rooted eyes and large crown. This variety grown in Manipur is said to have a very good quality of taste and aroma. The average weight of Kew variety of pineapple is around 2-3 kg and even attains to 4kg. Manipur ranked sixed among the pineapple producing states in India during 2010-11.

Table1:
Area and Production of Leading Pineapple Growing States in India (2010-11)
Area (000'ha); Production (000'tons); Productivity (tons/ha)

State	Area	Production	% Share of Production
West Bengal	9.90	303.70	21.5
Assam	14.00	220.70	15.6
Karnataka	3.00	186.10	13.1
Tripura	6.80	153.30	10.8
Bihar	4.90	129.40	9.1
Manipur	12.20	104.40	7.4
Meghalaya	9.70	86.00	6.1
Kerala	10.20	85.50	6.0
Nagaland	3.70	57.50	4.1
Arunachal Pradesh	10.90	34.40	2.4
Others	3.50	54.50	3.9
Total	88.70	1415.40	100.0

Source: National Horticulture Board -2011

Kew and Queen Varieties of Pineapple



Courtesy: <https://www.dreamstime.com/photos-images/pineapple-queen.html>

5. (online)> <http://nhb.gov.in/pdf/fruits/pineapple/pin013.pdf>

Pineapple is widely cultivated along the adjoining areas of the valley and the mid- hills. Main pineapple growing locations are situated at Imphal, Thoubal, Churachandpur, Chandel and Senapati Districts. The fruit is also grown at Tamenglong, Bishnupur, Tengnoupal and Ukhrul Districts. The name of the locations and the variety of pineapple grown in these locations are given below:

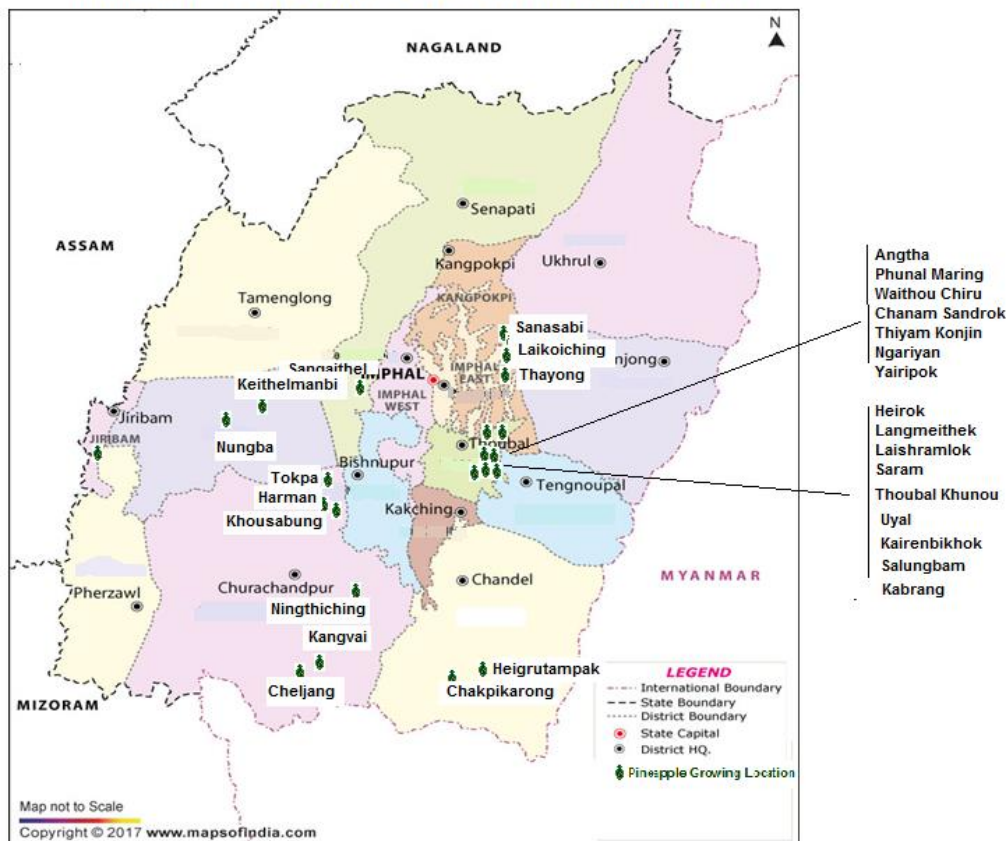
Table 2:
Major Pineapple Growing Locations in Manipur with Varietal Distribution

Name of the Villagae	Crop Variety	District
Andro Khuman	Queen	Imphal East
Yairipok	Queen is predominant	
Yairipok Muslim	Queen	
Ngariyan Muslim	Queen is predominant	
Angtha	Queen is predominant	
Thiyam Konjin	Queen is predominant	
Chanam Sandrok	Kew/Queen	
Sanasabi	Kew/Queen	
Sangaitheh	Kew/Queen	Imphal West
Keithelmanbi	Queen is predominant	
Waithou Chiru	Queen	Senapati
Thayong Khunjao	Giant Kew (Thayong Kihom)	
Thayong Khunyai	Giant Kew (Thayong Kihom)	
Thayong Khunou	Giant Kew (Thayong Kihom)/ Queen	
Laikoiching	Giant Kew (Thayong Kihom)/ Queen	
Sinam Kom	Kew is predominant	
Kom Keirap	Kew	
Phunal Maring	Queen	
Bunglon Village	Giant Kew	Churachandpur
Khousabung	Giant Kew	
Charoi Village	Giant Kew	
Ningthiching	Giant Kew	
Cheljang	Giant Kew	
Harmon	Giant Kew	
Kangvai	Giant Kew	
Tokpa	Giant Kew	
Heigrutampak	Queen/ local Var.	Chandel
Palel	Queen	
Chakpikarong	Queen	Thoubal
Thoubal Khunou	Queen/local Var.	
Sallungbam	Queen	
Laishramlok	Queen	
Kabrang	Queen	
Saram	Queen is predominant	
Heirok	Queen is predominant	
Langmeitheh	Queen is predominant	
Kairenbikhok	Queen is predominant	
Uyal	Queen is predominant	
Nungba	Queen	Tamenglong
Jiribam	Queen/Kew	Imphal East

Pineapple of the Queen variety is predominantly grown in Imphal and Thoubal Districts whereas the Kew variety is predominant in Churachandpur district. The Kew variety has two cultivars – ‘Yelhang Kihom’ and ‘Thayong Kihom’. The Kew variety grown at Thayong Village of Senapati District is known as ‘Thayong Kihom’. Similarly, the local name given to the queen variety grown in the state was ‘Meitei Kihom’; and the Queen variety brought from Assam was called ‘Assam Kihom’ and later, both are known as ‘Meitei Kihom’. But, it is most likely that they are different cultivars of the same variety. Resemblance of this local variety with the Queen variety in taste, flavour, aroma, deep-rooted eyes, etc., may be the reason for knowing the queen variety as ‘Meitei Kihom’. This local variety is smaller than the Queen variety brought from Assam, but it has more pleasant flavour and aroma that can easily be distinguished from other varieties. Small fruit size, deep-rooted eyes low yield rate may be the reasons for gradual decline in cultivation of this local variety in the state. However, this local variety is still found cultivated in small numbers at some places of Thoubal Khunou, Heigrutampak and Phunal Maring.⁶

⁶ Government of Manipur (1989) : ‘A Brief Report on Evaluation Study on Pineapple in Manipur’ : op. cit. Pp. 1-2

PINEAPPLE GROWING LOCATIONS IN MANIPUR



Origin of Pineapple Cultivation in Manipur

The origin of pineapple in Manipur is fabricated with the Manipuri mythology and can be traced in the history as early as the first century A.D. The Meitei is the union of seven clans that was consolidated by Pakhangba, the first King of Meitei, who reigned the Kanglei kingdom during 33 A.D. The unification of the seven clans takes several years. The people of Manipur believed in ancestor worshiping – worshiping of the first ancestor, legendary or mythical, after which the clan was descended. Each clan has a particular day in a year on which the worshiping of their ancestor is practised. They are to offer flower, fruit, fish, knife and other articles specifically entitled to them on this particular occasion. ‘Luwang’ is one of these seven clans merged to the Kanglei kingdom during 949 A.D. to 969 A.D. and pineapple is the fruit entitled to this clan⁷. This shows that pineapple had been a part of the life and culture of Manipur from the very beginning of the evolution of clans among Meitei.

It is mentioned in the ‘*Cheitharol Kumbaba*’, the Royal Chronicle of Manipur that the then Maharaja of Manipur visited ‘*Leimaching*’ (a location situated in southern part of the present Nongmaiching Mountain) to enjoy the taste of pineapple during the mid-September of 1732.⁸ Thus, it is certain that the fruit had been cultivated along the southern spur of Nongmaiching Mountain during the early part of eighteenth century.

E.W. Dun mentioned pineapple among the few fruit crops procurable during the 1880s in the state.⁹ It is evident that the fruit was one of the important fruit crops available in the state during the 19th century.

Pineapple has long been associated with the life of Manipur in various ways. This fruit is used to offer to the Deity ‘Thanga Ching-Ningthou’ during *Lai Haraoba* ceremony. As part of the ceremony, the youths of Thanga Village went upto Wangoo Village (where pineapple was grown) along the river by boats and explore the best of pineapples for offering to the Deity. All the youths participated in this ceremony have definite dress code. After bringing the pineapples to the ‘*Laipung*’ (place of the Deity) and after offering the three chosen ones to ‘Thanga Ching-Ningthou’, the youths celebrated themselves with the lots they brought. As a customary law, exotic fruits were not allowed to offer to the Deity; only the indigenous fruit varieties were offered.¹⁰ This shows that pineapple has long been cultured in the state and become indigenous.

The Queen variety has two cultivars having slight differences in fruit sizes and of which, the smaller one is believed to be the local variety. This local variety is also believed to have been grown at Phunal Maring village located at the southern spur of Nongmaiching Mountain since time immemorial.¹¹ It was then brought to Wangoo village, which is located at the southern part of the valley and was found cultivated there before the Second World War. The Nongmaiching Mountain ranges is, thus, the original home of the local variety of pineapple in Manipur.

⁷ Naoroibam Indramani (2019): ‘Meitei Yek-Salai’, N.I.Publications, Imphal, p-206, 225.

⁸ Singh, L. Ibungohal, and N. Khelchandra. (1989) : *Cheitharol Kumbaba* (the Royal Chronicle of Manipur), Manipur Sahitya Parishad, Imphal P. 92

⁹ Dun, E.W. 1981: Gazetteer of Manipur, Vivek Publishing House, Delhi, P-21

¹⁰ Sharma, B. Kulachandra (2007): ‘Thanga Chingningthou Haraoba’, Sangai Express Daily, 3 December 2007

¹¹ Government of Manipur (1989): ‘A Brief Report on Evaluation Study on Pineapple in Manipur’, Evaluation Report Number 6, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, P-2

The Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Manipur in its 'A Brief Report on Evaluation Study on Pineapple in Manipur'¹² reported that the Queen and the Kew varieties of pineapple were introduced in Manipur after the Second World War. It is also said that Mr. Chilwang of Lemo Village brought only five pieces of sucker of the Queen variety from Assam, which was later planted at Thoubal Khunou for the first time, and was distributed throughout the state afterwards.¹³

Mr. Lienzamang H. Gangte reported that 40 suckers of pineapple (Kew variety) was brought from Lakhipur, Cachar district of Assam in 1947 by Mr. Songpu Gangte, a native of Khousabung Village, Churachandpur district of Manipur and planted there at Khousabung village for the first time.¹⁴ But there is certainly that Kew variety of pineapple might have been cultivated at other locations of Churachandpur district much before 1947. The present Churachandpur town was once known as 'Yelhang' by Meities or 'Lamka' by Paite before 1920. South West Divisional Headquarter of Manipur was located at this township in 1920 and named as Churachandpur in honour of the then Maharaja of Manipur.¹⁵ Pineapple of Kew variety from Churachandpur is still known as 'Yelhang Kihom' and the pineapple variety brought at or cultivated in and around Yelhang township would be the 'Yelhang kihom'. On the other hand, the nearest marketplace of Khousabung Village is Moirang Bazaar, Bishupur District of Manipur. When a survey in pineapple cultivation was conducted during 2010s, it was found that the fruits are transported by means of bullock carts from Khousabung Village to this market place. There is little possibility of bringing pineapple from Khousabung to Yelhang Bazaar (Churachandpur Bazaar) and again brought to Imphal. Besides, there were no pucca roads during those days; roads were often disconnected during rainy seasons that coincide the harvesting seasons of pineapple.

Conclusion:

It is evident from the above studies that pineapple had been grown in the state early in the history of Manipur. The early written literatures mention the fruit in various periods and it is the tradition of Meitei community to worship their ancestors from the very beginning in the history. Pineapple had been an indigenous fruit of the state; otherwise the fruits would not be entitled to the *Luwang* clan. Exotic fruits were not entitled to any clan of Meitei for offering to their ancestors. It is apparent that pineapple is available in the state when *Luwang* clan merged to the Meitei kingdom during 949s.

From the accounts of E.W. Dun, growing of pineapple in Manipur for selling in the market may have begun during the 1880s. It is certain that Queen and Kew varieties of pineapple presently grown in the state were brought from Assam, before that a local variety similar to the Queen variety but smaller in fruit size were grown in the state. This local variety was called *Meitei Kihom* while the Queen variety brought from Assam was called *Assam Kihom* and later both are known as *Meitei Kihom*.

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¹² Ibid., P-2

¹³ Ibid., P-2

¹⁴ Gangte, H. Lienzamang (2008): 'A Field story – a new beginning for the farmers' in the booklet published in the State Level Manipur Pineapple Festival, 30th August 2008, Manipur Pineapple Festival Committee, Khousabung

¹⁵ Meetei, K. Toijamba (2006) : 'Churachandpur – da Khundariba Meiteishing' Toijam publications, Churachandpur, Manipur