

In the Shadow of Bamboo Flowering

Bamboo flowers in every 50-years. With mass flowering of bamboos comes Thingatam and Mautam-where sudden outbreak of rodent, rat army, devour everything they come in contact with. The rodents become bigger in size and spread plague and rabies to the locales. However gregarious bamboo flowering is symbolic to economic prosperity in many States of North Eastern Region; it transforms economic prosperity into economic disaster during 1861 and 1911-1912 in Mizoram.

Here the mautams reported 100 per cent loss in the State. So far as, 152-years have passed since Mautam reported in the region; yet the scientific community has been unable to explain the science behind the mass bamboo flowering followed by mautam. Some of the research findings have suggested that synchronised bamboo flowering was caused by triggering an internal clock in the bamboos. Mainly *Bambusa tulda* and *Melocanna baccifera* species of bamboo are reported to have been affected severely.

Bamboos are the sweet giants whose body exuberantly flashes uprightness, tenacity and hollow heart features. It is venerated for integrity, elegance and plainness by the tribal people of Mizoram. In 24 hours, the bamboo grows 100 cm or 39 inches. They occur everywhere, except continental Europe. A total of 70 genera with 1,450 species are spread across East Asia, America, Australia, West India and the Himalayas.

In northeast region of India, the bamboos are attached with people socially, culturally and medicinally. According to the locals, they impatiently wait 50-years to for the bamboos flowering, turns into nightmare when Mautam (death) follow mass bamboo flowering. Recently in 2005, the mautam struck Mizoram.

The Bamboo famine

During 2005-08, bamboo pest *Ochrophora Montana* (Distant) or Cinamon bug, locally known as 'Thangnang' by Mizos, was found to be fed massively on newly developed seeds of bamboos at least one year ahead of the bamboo famine in the vast bamboo forests of Mizoram.

Mautak or Muli bamboo (*Melocanna baccifera*) is a major species in Mizoram. Thingatam and Mautam is reported to be followed by a sudden outbreak of rodents, resulting plague, rabies and other zoonotic diseases spreading to the

locales. Due to this, 100 economic loss followed by migration in the fears of disease spread among locales became rampant.

The Outbreaks

In Mizoram's Mamit district(Sabual, Rengetelangang, Chhimlung, Kalapahar) and Saikhawthir in Kolasiv district, and Tilunganel in Aizwal district reported Nongsibags (*Stenocoris clanformis* Ahmed), grass hoppers (*Mecopda elongata* Linnaeus) ,giant African snails(*Achntina fulica* Bowditch), and leaf rolling caterpillars, other than cinamon bug.According to a proverb that was heard by researchers and journalists during Mautam that an army of rats, having size double than the normal rats, marched towards their paddy fields and devoured all the standing crops. After eating too much, the rats die off in the fields. What causes this insatiable appetite? Even when the rats' stomachs were diessedected, an string of bamboo flowers was found to be attached with the alimentary canalsof the rats proving that indigestion might have caused the sudden deathsof rats across the State.

The Insect meat

Local people prefer Thangnang a delicious food option under Mautam, and collected around 20-30 kgs .They make chutney of it. Other than Myanmar, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Assam are the only statesinthe world to have insect meat in tradtions.

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