

a Dossier



# Corporatising TOURISM *in* MANIPUR

Indigenous Perspectives

EQUATIONS

# *Corporatising Tourism in Manipur*

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# *Corporatising Tourism in Manipur*

## *Preface*

Tourism is not as innocent and benign as is largely perceived. Like any other developmental issue there are serious ramifications and implications for local economies, social and cultural fabric of the places promoted as tourism destinations, on the environment and biodiversity and on power relations.

The Government of Manipur in its endeavour to provide job opportunities and overall progress in the State, has been pushing tourism industry as the key source of economic growth. In the process, infrastructure development has been given prime attention. In order to facilitate the boost of tourism, the Manipur Tourism Policy 2014 which claims that Manipur with its inherent tourism potential, rich cultural heritage and vibrant pool of youth, with excellent grip over english language is an ideal place for promotion of Tourism as its main industry and sector to generate employment substantially. The Mission of the 'Policy' is "to promote sustainable tourism as a means of economic growth, social integration and to promote the image of Manipur as a State with a glorious past, a vibrant present and a bright future". Policies to achieve this will be evolved around six broad areas such as Welcome, Information, Facilitation, Safety, Cooperation and Infrastructure Development. Conservation of heritage, natural environment and development and promotion of tourism products would also be given importance. The policy gave over emphasis on building world class infrastructure with public private partnership (PPP) framework where government provides land and subsidies to private corporations/parties to lead tourism activity and this in turn helps trickles benefits to the general public. This policy was finalized without any public consultation and has not therefore been able to capture experiences of local people already affected by tourism and also the many perspectives that are being conceived by entrepreneurs and small tourism enterprises.

Indigenous Perspectives with EQUATIONS has conducted research on 'Capturing Tourism Process in Manipur' by way of monitoring and documentation of tourism trends; field visits of three destination sites (Thanga, Shirui, and Nongmaiching), and interviews of tourism stakeholders of Manipur. The research was focused on understanding current tourism developmental trends in Manipur, and its brunt of consequences on communities living around project areas.

The thrust of the research conducted over the period 2014 – 2015, were:

- *Identification of ongoing tourism projects, key tourism destinations, and potential tourism destinations for conducting assessments, and establishing contacts with key stakeholders of destination sites*
- *Understand the current tourism scenario in the State of Manipur*

- *Mapping tourism destinations and projects as resource for further studies*
- *Mapping potential tourism sites to develop Community Tourism*
- *Compilation of a comprehensive report on Manipur tourism.*

The team conducted series of community level interactions, and interactive group discussions at Thanga, Shirui and Nongmaiching to understand current tourism scenario and the progress of development. During this period, we found that majority of the communities had conflicting views with the Government concerning benefits, participation, acquisition of land and the idea of tourism itself. Our findings indicate that communities have very little or no idea on upcoming projects in their areas, and their interests are sidelined in the process of tourism development while at same time they do not see how they can take part and benefit from the project. While people are not averse to the idea of promoting tourism, they wanted more transparency and would like to be party to the initiatives.

While the research concluded in 2015, Indigenous Perspectives has been continuously engaged in and supporting the struggle of the people of Loktak against tourism projects which have caused and continue to cause evictions of people and detrimental impacts on the water body itself.

Based on the research and subsequent work, Indigenous Perspectives and EQUATIONS presents a Dossier on Tourism in Manipur with the objective of contributing to the debate and discourse of tourism in the State.

*Indigenous Perspectives & EQUATIONS*

# *Contents*

CHAPTERS	PAGES
<i>Tourism Trends in Manipur</i>	1
<i>Corporatising Tourism: A Critique of the Manipur Tourism Policy 2014</i>	17
<i>Who's Lake, Who's Tourism?</i>	32
<i>Golf tourism at Nongmaiching: Eco-tourism as they say it!</i>	37
<i>Tourism and Human Rights: Manipur Perspective</i>	42
<i>Ecotourism Society of India and Government of Manipur's conclave on tourism in Manipur: A Perspective</i>	46
<i>Home Stays: The only viable option for Shirui tourism</i>	48

# 1

## Tourism Trends in Manipur

Tourism is considered by certain sections of the society as a suitable industry to flourish in Manipur. Tourism is promoted as an industry that can bring socio-economic growth, for the otherwise considered, economically backward State. The industry is projected as a catalyst for employment generation and for the overall development of the State. Tourism is also developed in view of the supposed significant multiplier effect. Manipur is promoted as the gateway to South-east Asia, preferred destination for Adventure and sports tourism, Ecotourism, War tourism and Medical tourism. Manipur is experiencing 'hasty' development in the field of tourism for over a decade. The Central Government has been providing assistance to promote tourism in the North-eastern States in terms of grant in aid. The joint effort of the State and the Centre to develop tourism in Manipur has succeeded, with the recent attention that the tourism sector has received. Government's tourism development initiative requires a careful look so as to understand the kind of development that is unfolding.

### I. REPORT

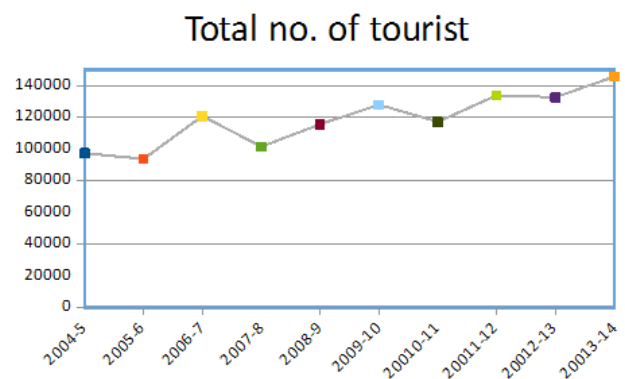
#### *Tourist data*

There is significant rise in total number of tourist arrival in the last 10 years. As per official records, Domestic Tourist visits (DTVs) grew from 97,054 in 2004-05 to 1,43,059 in 2013-14 while Foreign Tourist Visits (FTVs) grew from 248 in 2004-05 to 2588 in 2013-14. Among the eight North-eastern states, highest growth in FTVs during 2013 over 2012 was observed in Manipur (154.7%) followed by Arunachal

Pradesh (111.2%), Tripura (51.2%), Nagaland (32.7%), Meghalaya (27.5%), Sikkim (19.7%), Mizoram (7.5%) and Assam (0.5%).

Table 1: Number of Tourists visiting Manipur (2004-2014)

Year	DTVs	FTVs	Total
2004-05	97,054	248	97,302
2005-06	93,333	348	93,681
2006-07	1,20,472	263	1,20,735
2007-08	1,01,000	460	1,01,460
2008-09	1,15,300	271	1,15,571
2009-10	1,27,524	405	1,27,929
2010-11	1,16,652	431	1,17,083
2011-12	1,33,224	602	1,33,826
2012-13	1,31,803	768	1,32,571
2013-14	1,43,059	2588	1,45,647



#### *Attraction*

Manipur has been given promotional tag lines such as 'Jeweled Land', 'Gateway to South-east Asia', etc. to attract tourists. The prime reason for tourists to visit Manipur are many. The

State is promoted for its natural beauty, cultural diversity, its strategic location to neighbouring Myanmar and its significance to 2<sup>nd</sup> World War sites. Medical and Polo are emerging forms of tourism. The current law and order situation as well as conflict state of Manipur, also contributes to tourists' arrivals. Due to this, the State receives both domestic and foreign tourists in the form of interns, researchers and scholars, human rights activists, movie makers, journalists and writers.

Several tourism projects are taken up by the State as a way to attract more tourists. Government identifies sites and conceptualises them as projects for tourism development. Tourism Secretary of Union Ministry of Tourism, Parvez Dewan, during his visit to the State in March 2014 to inspect the Lake, had announced that the Union Government had resolved to direct 56% of the total tourism budget of the country to the North-East States and Manipur would get 9% of the total budget for tourism in India, which is the highest among the North-East States. Government has taken up a series of infrastructural development works as a part of tourism development projects. They include Mega Tourism Projects, Destination development projects, Celebration of Fairs & Festivals and, Integrated Development of Tourism Circuits.

Some of the government identified tourism sites where tourism development projects are being undertaken are:

Loktak, Thanga, Karang, Takmu, Sendra, Sadu-Chiru/ Leimaram waterfall, various spots in Ukhrol like Shirui hills and Kangkhui caves, Mao as hill stations, Zeilad lake and Barak waterfalls, Tharon caves in Tamenglong district, Nongmaiching foothills, the Adventure and Leadership park located at Lamdan, Khuga, Singda, Andro, Moreh, and Ima-Keithel.

Cultural and Heritage: Kangla fort, INA Memorial at Moirang, Khongjom war memorial, Commonwealth war cemetery, Shree Shree Govindajee temple, Mutua museum, Kaina, Shaheed

minar, Nupilal memorial complex, Bhagyachandra Open Air Theatre, and Red Hill (Maibam-LokpaChing).

A number of recreational parks have also come up in the last few years. To name a few are the Kombirei garden at Yaralpat, Rose Garden, Selloy also known as EECO Park, Kakching garden at UyokChing, Santhei park at Andro, Shilheipung Ecotourism and Crafts Village, Millennium Garden, among several others. The private owned parks are identified and made a part of the Integrated Tourism Development projects taken-up by the government under which the park developers receive aid from the government.

For the 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (01.04.2002 to 31.03.2012), 27 major projects have been taken up with an estimated cost of Rs 12,036.27 lakhs in Manipur. The up-coming project includes Cable-car and Ropeway project at Sendra Hill connecting Thanga and Karang islands at Loktak Lake, under the Large Revenue Generating Scheme and, a 18-hole golf course at Nongmaiching foothills, as part of the Destination development project.

#### *Accommodation*

Accommodation sector in Manipur is projected as one of the main deterrent towards tourism growth in the State. There were very few private run hotels, one State run full-fledged hotel and Government owned accommodation units at few tourist destinations. Majority of the Government owned accommodation units were not open to public as they were either occupied by the armed forces or lying defunct for years. The few private hotels had limited facilities and room capacity was very less. The State faced accommodation constraints on various occasions. As such, there was a need to increase room capacity with the growth in tourism. Among the various types of accommodation that can cater to tourists, the Government emphasised on developing star category hotels at tourism destinations without



much consideration on its suitability with the destination nor its impacts on the local communities. Hence, infrastructure development of star category hotels in line with development of tourism projects is given prime attention. To this end, even the State Tourism Policy, 2014 gave undue emphasis on star category hotels that are of 'international' standards.

The hotel industry, received a major boost within a short span of time. The first privately owned 3-star category hotel 'The Classic Hotel' was constructed in November 2009. Since then, a few 3-star category hotels have come up and more are on the way. Hotel Yaiphaba, Hotel Lanchenba, Hotel Classic Grande were inaugurated in 2014. A star category hotel on one of the islands of Loktak Lake is under construction. 'Hotel Imphal' a government entity got privatised in November 2013. Several tourism accommodation units under the Directorate of Tourism have been announced for privatisation while some are already privatised like the one at Sendra Hill and Hotel Imphal. Accommodation units in the unorganised sector have come up in Imphal, Ukhrul, near Loktak, Moreh, Churachandpur, Tamenglong, which are popularly visited by tourists. A resort is being constructed at Sendra Hill, near Loktak.

Homes are also being opened up to accommodate tourists. As a first of its kind, foreign and national tourists are beginning to stay at one Maipakchao Home Stay at Ithing village, Loktak. The success of this homestay is beginning to encourage others in surrounding areas to take up such an initiative. In the long run, local and state support and regulations will be critical.

#### *Travel agency and Tour operators*

Travel agencies and tour operators are at a nascent stage even if they form an inseparable link between the tourism sites and the tourist. Seven Sisters Holidays is one such pioneer tour operator who has been conducting tours of Manipur for the past 15 years.

Manipur Mountaineering and Trekking Association (MMTA) is equally a pioneer in adventure tour operation in Manipur. MMTA started as a Mountaineering Institute and they now also offer adventure tour packages to various corners of Manipur, where others have failed to reach. They have introduced adventure sports activities such as water rafting and hang gliding in Manipur. They can be termed as the only organisation that has successfully continued adventure sports activities linked to tourism in the State. They were the adventure sports and tour partner of the Tourism department during the 10 days State Tourism festival. Manipur Mountaineering Institute adventure campus at Lamdan by MMTA is the first of its kind in North-east India.

Other smaller operators are beginning to set up their offices. Few tour operators have really done well in coming up with niche tourism attractions. Eastern Heritage Trails organises 'The Battle of Imphal 1944 Tours' wherein the significant 2<sup>nd</sup> World War sites in Manipur are visited. 2<sup>nd</sup> World War Imphal Campaign Foundation is another organization that started with a group of people engaged in voluntary research pertaining to the battles of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War fought in Manipur, also known as the Battle of Imphal. Now they are the leading group that promotes War Tourism in Manipur. Other tour operators mainly take tourists to places in and around Imphal, Moreh, Loktak and to a few other places that are abundant in natural beauty.

#### *Tourism events*

The 11<sup>th</sup> National Conference of Indian Tourism Congress, jointly organised by Manipur University and Imphal College was held at Manipur. The 2-day conference was on 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2014 and was attended by around 150 delegates from different parts of the country. The theme of the conference was "Strategic Interventions in Tourism: Role in Regional Development". The

sub-themes were:

- Tourism Education & Innovative Research: Sustainable Tourism Theory & Practices.
- Heritage & Cultural Tourism: Historical Valued Destinations.
- Marketing & Branding Tourism.
- Promoting North East as Tourism Destination.
- Community & Tourism.
- Tourism Business Interaction.

Manipur's first Ecotourism Conclave was held on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2014 under the banner "Manipur Tourism Conclave" which was jointly organized by the Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) and Department of Tourism, Manipur. The Governor of Manipur, was the Chief Guest of the event. Other dignitaries included prominent individuals and experts from the 'tourism sector' as panelists. While speakers who hailed from outside the State shared some models of ecotourism and 'responsible' community based tourism related practices, they also highlighted certain negative impacts of unplanned and uncontrolled tourism development so that necessary mitigation measures could be taken up well in advance by our State Tourism planners. The speakers also cautioned of the likely problem areas with reference to some destinations which witnessed major failures in tourism development. Some of the suggestions by the speakers were on active community participation (suggested two models to encourage community entrepreneurship), responsible tourism approach, voluntary participation of tourist in the day-to-day activities of the place they are staying, One Village One Product model in Thailand, authentic product, heritage conservation, walk tourism, home-stays, careful study of carrying capacity, formulation of code of conduct for service providers, Public Private Community Partnership (PPCP) model instead of Public Private Partnership (PPP) model and, wildlife preservation. Speakers from Manipur presented based on the popular understanding of how tourism should be - on opportunities for tourism in Manipur,

various tourism products of the State, tourism marketing while mentioning that tourism can bring economic gain, employment opportunities and peace to the economically backward and conflict state.

Indigenous Perspectives and EQUATIONS circulated a note critically looking at the way tourism has been pushed in the state and seeking a wider consultation before finalizing the Draft Manipur Tourism Policy. As the paper raises critical and tough issues, which often do not want to be even acknowledged, it was not well received by most participants including ESOI and Tourism Department of Manipur.

2<sup>nd</sup> World War Imphal Campaign Foundation and the Manipur Tourism Forum (MTF) organised the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of the Battle of Imphal from March to June 2014. The International Guild of Battlefield Guide recently recognised Manipur as an 'International War Tourism Destination'.

MTF have been closely associated with the Tourism Department in organising events on World Tourism Day (WTD). In 2013, WTD was celebrated in Loktak and in 2014 at Andro village. The Manipur Tourism Development Society has also been organising events on World Tourism Day every year. They celebrated the 2015 WTD at G. M. Hall.

India Tourism (Ministry of Tourism) organised a one day workshop on Bed & Breakfast scheme of Incredible India in 2014.

Polo is believed to have originated from Manipur. In an attempt to promote polo tourism in its birth place, the Manipur Horse Riding and Polo Association organises international level polo events annually.

The Manipur tourism festival is celebrated annually by the Government of Manipur, spearheaded by Department of Tourism. The festival is celebrated for 10 days in the month of November since 2006. Other festivals that are developed recently to promote tourism and their respective

area are the Shirui Lily festival, Pineapple festival, Loktak festival and, Orange festival.

Loktak Eco-Tourism Development Organisation in association with HELP tourism, Siliguri organised a workshop on Ecotourism for four days in September 2014 at Thanga.

#### *Human Resource Development*

Short term courses on Front Office, Ticketing, Indian sweet making, hospitality and spa, are sponsored by North-East Council (NEC) or Ministry for the Development of the North-Eastern Region (DoNER) every year. MTF organised a 7-day tourist guide training program in November, 2012. After a gap of a year, the weeklong training program was re-initiated in November, 2014. The training program is sponsored by the Tourism Department, Government of Manipur.

#### *Tourism Policy*

The first State Tourism Policy was approved by the Cabinet in June, 2014 without any public consultation. Indigenous Perspectives and EQUATIONS, have written a critique of the Policy

#### *Marketing, Publicity & Promotional activities*

Marketing tools such as CDs, short documentaries, and hoardings, are utilised to market Manipur. The publicity & promotional initiatives with support from the Union Ministry such as participation in international and domestic travel fairs and exhibitions, publicity in national and regional magazines, media coverage, has left many people wanting to travel and explore Manipur. Manipur tourism was awarded the 'Most Promising New Destination Award' twice in 2011 and 2013 at the Travel and Tourism Fair. The Tourism Department boast of good connectivity with people through an interactive website of their department and attractive tourism promotional materials like brochures, tourist pocket

maps and pamphlets. Tourism resources of Manipur receive exposure and coverage through travel writers, photographers, photo journalists, travellers, academicians, researchers, tourism service providers and media. The increase use of IT has helped publicise Manipur tourism through social networking sites and internet.

#### *Accessibility*

There has been an increase in the number of flights from key cities of India to Imphal. The first chartered international flight of Golden Myanmar, was tried in November 2013 and then again in 2014. Regular operation of international flights to and from Manipur has not been currently launched. The North-eastern Frontier Railways is working on reaching Manipur through Silchar in Assam, however construction through the highly mountainous region will take time. With a push to implement the Look East Policy, which is now the Act East Policy, the railways will likely connect to Myanmar. There is a hope that this infrastructure will bring in more tourists to Manipur from its eastern neighbors apart from the other purposes of economic exchanges.

The Permit Area regime is being relaxed on yearly basis since January 2011. Protected Area Permit (PAP)<sup>1</sup>, which applies to foreigners who wants to visit the state has been relaxed so as to facilitate foreign tourist arrivals. This could be one of the reasons why there is a visible increase in FTAs.

Dr. Kh. Palin of Shija Hospital and Research Institute, Langol claims that many people from the North-eastern states and from the neighbouring country Myanmar, visit Manipur for medical reasons. He further states that this existing phenomenon opens-up the avenue for medical tourism to prosper in the State if promoted. In a bid to promote Medical tourism, the system

<sup>1</sup> Read more on RAP/PAP on Ministry of Home Affairs website: <http://mha1.nic.in/pdfs/ForeignD-FAQs-onPAPandRAP.pdf>

for issuing of Visa on arrival (VoA) for Myanmar patients was proposed by the State Government with the Ministry of Home Affairs duly approving of it. The VoA office infrastructure has been set-up at Moreh town (border town to Myanmar). VoA proposal awaits approval from the Ministry of External Affairs, after which the system is expected to roll-out soon.

## II. TOURISM TREND – CASE STUDIES

### 1. Loktak

Loktak Lake of Manipur is the largest fresh water lake in north-east India. It is located 40 km south-east of Imphal (State capital). Keibul Lamjao National Park lies to the south east of the lake and is formed of *phumdi* or floating vegetation. Loktak is also one among the four identified wetlands in India under The Ramsar Wetlands of Significance.

The lake and its surrounding areas are unique and rich in pristine natural beauty and heritage that still subsist in various forms. Considering the area to be a treasure trove for tourism development in Manipur, the government of Manipur have undertaken several initiatives. The places in and around Loktak lake area is indeed a State asset but entangled with controversies unfortunately. Mention may be made of the communities that underwent several traumas of displacements and human rights violations due to military operations of the Loktak Lake, such as Operation Loktak in 1999<sup>2</sup> and Operation Summer Storm in 2008. In addition to this, the Loktak Multipurpose Hydroelectric project commissioned in 1984 (by constructing Ithai Dam), not only submerged more than 60,000 hectares of prime agricultural land, displaced several thousands of people, but also devastated the biotic ecosystem leading to the extinction of several endemic plant, animal and aquatic species. Communities affected by the project are yet

<sup>2</sup> "Operation Loktak", Report of the Joint Fact Finding Team by Committee on Human Rights, Manipur. 1999

to be resettled and rehabilitated. Further, Loktak Protection Act, 2006 and the scam of "Cleaning of Phumdis from Loktak Lake" project by Loktak Development Authority (LDA) and K-Pro led to arsonist act of vandalism, of nearly one thousand floating huts by Manipur Police in 2011. The communities not only received blames as polluters of the Lake but were also subjected to forced eviction and State brutalities.

The livelihoods of several communities of the lake have been snatched as prohibition on indigenous fishing methods and agricultural practices have been imposed. Farmers around the lake are also left landless for agricultural practices. The removal of *phumdis* has resulted in drastic changes in the occurrence of current waves in the lake which has now become unfavourable to the traditional canoeing and fishing practices. Traditional wooden canoes are used in the lake mainly for fishing, as a form of local commuting and as leisure activity catering to visitors. Among the three types of traditional canoes used in Loktak, the smallest one is soon to disappear as it can no more withstand the rise in current waves post removal of the *phumdis*. After the controversial eviction, only few *phumdi* huts/ *khangpoks*<sup>3</sup> are remaining. The community continues to resist any more arson by the authorities. Currently, communities are facing the brunt of 'development'.

Privatization of State government run tourist accommodation units: 'Sendra Tourist Home' is located at Sendra hillock where one can have a bird's eye view of Loktak. The State government gave its approval through a Cabinet meeting held on October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2013, to lease out the government run 'Hotel Imphal' and 'Sendra Tourist Home' to private parties. Cabinet members decided that the privatization exercise should be completed within a month so as to accommodate tourists coming for the State Tourism Festival and the International Polo Tournament,

<sup>3</sup> Phumdis are floating vegetation and Khangpok are the huts built on these vegetations.

both of which are held annually in November. It took less than the stipulated time for the privileged private party to take-over, renovate and make them full-fledged accommodation units. The local residents of Sendra fear possible eviction of the entire *Sendra village* (see box on *Sendra*) to create more space for further tourism infrastructure development i.e. government's endeavor to promote tourism in Loktak.

The fate of both Loktak and the communities in and around the lake has become increasingly uncertain with new tourism related 'developments' ventures. These includes introduction of adventure water sports in Takmu, recently inaugurated mega project – "Integrated Cable-Car, Ropeway and Lakeside Development, Loktak Lake" which aims to promote wide scale tourism activity in the Loktak area and generate large revenues, the lake being a tourism asset of Manipur, it is understood that other tourism projects in and around Loktak area are in the pipeline. With this plethora of activities, tourism in the area might flourish sooner or later. It is here that the type of tourism and its impact both on the people and the natural environment becomes a major concern.

## 2. Shirui

Shirui-Kashong a picturesque village located 15 kms east of Ukhrul, the district headquarters. Shirui Lily (Locally known as *Kashong-timrawon*) is a rare terrestrial, seasonal lily species native to Shirui-Kashong peak. The greatest threat to the rare Shirui lily is from the large influx of tourists. Climate change, local forest burning, deforestation are other major concerns for decreasing the Shirui Lily bloom. Local people say that today, the Shirui Lily is seen flowering only on the higher ridges of Shirui peak.

Tourism activities at Shirui peak began around 1983. Two adjoining villages - Lunghar and Ngabum lies around Shirui peak. Presence of Village authorities, women groups, and youth

clubs have been an integral way of life. Local governance and decision-making is mostly in the hands of the village authorities. Shirui Youth Club has played a strong role in reviving traditional practices. However, they were not functional during time of agitations in 1964. At present, there are 350 youth members, from inside and around Shirui.

Since 2000, Shirui Youth Club has been tirelessly protecting the Shirui peak. Youths are in-charge of monitoring and maintaining the Shirui hill ranges. Steps taken by youth club members include protecting the lilies, checking the visitors, guarding the site as volunteers, putting up barbed-wire fencing around the site, levying a fine of Rs 50 for every lily plucked, and Rs 500 for every lily plant uprooted.

The Youth Club has been assigned with handling, registering and welcoming tourists during Shirui Lily Week festival (21-27 May). A Committee has been formed to manage Shirui Lily Week. With an amount of Rs. 2 lakhs from the Directorate of Tourism and, besides local contributions, these have been the only sources of funding during the week-long festival. The theme of the festival in 2015 was "Burn Calories, not Forests". Activities during the festival includes essay and painting competitions, flower show, folk song and dance shows, indigenous food stalls, and pork-eating competition.

Every visitor to Shirui peak pays a registration fee of Rs. 10. Visitors are checked, and a deposit of Rs. 50-100 is taken for cameras, plastic bottles and packets. The hard work of the Shirui Youth Club has borne fruit and after a gap of nearly 11 years widespread flowering of the lilies can be seen again.

The resource centre at Shirui peak is the only accommodation facility with a 50-bed capacity.

Tourism projects that are lined up as part of Destination Development Projects (2013-2014) at Shirui are:

- Integrated Tourist Destination at Shirui Hills and adjoining areas

- Promote Lui-Ngai-Ni and Lemon festival under Celebration of Fairs and Festivals scheme
- Formulation of an ecotourism policy and a joint task force around Shirui National Park
- State Transport Authority, Manipur 'may' also consider grant of contract carriage permits in respect of intermediate public transport vehicles for enhancing connectivity in between important tourist destinations with district headquarters/ sub-divisional headquarters of the state
- Phase - II (2018-2021) will cover the hill stations in Ukhrul district. There exists a wide gap between concerned authorities and local people that they are unable to recognize the self-sufficiency of Shirui. Due to the lack of proper information on the issue of tourism, the local people are unable to recognize their ability to manage tourism amongst themselves with minimal consequences for their community.

Shirui peak has been declared as the Shirui National Park in November 1982. The serious concern is of converting this community forest into a reserved forest or national park, which the local people have resisted vehemently for some time now. It is well known that a reserve forest or conversion to a national park takes away local ownership and in fact destroys the forest. However, indigenous peoples have not been able to come to a consensus with the government's terms of declaring the community-owned forests and hill tracts as a National Park. There are also issues concerning about the low compensation given for acquisition of the land. Thus, instead of declaring the peak as a National Park, it will be wise instead for the government to help the community to re-develop their forest, and initiate a tourism plan that will promote conservation and revive traditional aspects of the community.

Health and education for native population must be given priority. At present, there is only one Public Health Centre (PHC) that is almost dysfunctional. And construction of hotels or shops, and other infrastructural development in the existing pristine locale could end up losing

its charm and rustic aura. This is why any tourism projects in and around Shirui must include and revolve around the inhabiting indigenous peoples and their traditions.

Prospect of community tourism is high at Shirui-Kashong and adjoining areas, with organic food, unique cultural aspect and unexplored natural surroundings. Guides from the local community must be mandatory for trekking at Shirui peak. There is an urgent need to conserve forests, that is the catchment areas and natural source of water.

There exists a wide gap between concerned authorities and local people that they are unable to recognize the self-sufficiency of Shirui. Due to their lack of proper information on the topic of tourism, the locals are unable to recognize their ability to manage tourism amongst themselves with minimal consequences for their community. Locals must be fully aware, not just of the plans for tourism, but the impact these plans will have on their life and livelihood. They must decide for themselves if this is what they want. Locals must be recruited and employed for tourism. Some basic training and guidelines is pre-requisite for tourism promotion at Shirui. If any facilities are added (for example, building hospitals, public toilets, housing with running water and electricity) these should benefit the locals as much as the tourists. This is not just in the spirit of equality but also because for rural tourism to really work, the tourist must see the place through the eyes of the locals. And with any lifestyle differences, this would not be the case.

Lastly, tourism at Shirui must be based on a policy of quality, not quantity. Existing resources must be improved for local benefits, and tourism should not expand into a large project that will not be suitable in the local context. Instead, Shirui should be an exclusive, authentic Ethnic/ Community tourism destination. Expanding Shirui would dilute its element of wonder and magic. Let it remain as it is, and let outsiders

fight to be lucky enough to see it.

### *3. Nongmaiching*

Nongmaiching hill range, located at Imphal east district, is a vast and extensive degraded forest tract surrounded by lush valley at its foothills. The culmination of ChingkhelChing marks the beginning of Nongmaiching that stretches till Irilbung, at the fringe of a reserve forest; dense vegetation, variety of flora and fauna endemic to the region. Government of Manipur has identified Nongmaiching's immense biodiversity as the base for setting up of various tourism activities. Selloi Langmai Ecological Park lies at the foothills of Yangbi Ching (also known as Baruni Ching) that forms the southern portion of the lengthy Nongmaiching stretch. It is situated 9 kms due east from Imphal. The Park is also known as EECO-park as it was developed by Eastern Ecology Conservation Organisation (EECO) in association with the locals of Naharup, the immediate surrounding area of YangbiChing. The park was developed since 2007 but officially opened to public in 2009. The Secretary of Apunba Naharup Development Committee states that the park was started by a group of people to preserve the existing greenery of the place, beautification of the area by maintaining hygiene & cleanliness and making the area easily accessible to public. EECO-park has received government aid through the Tourism Department of Manipur for construction of cafeteria, toilet and vehicles parking area. An initiative of a private organisation with support from communities around, EECO-park today receives local picnickers on a daily basis. The crowds are all local people, most of them who appreciate greenery. During season and weekends, the crowd is too huge and becomes difficult to control. There have been instances of crimes committed by visitors; few of the offenders were caught for robbery, drug abuse and indecent sexual behavior. Waste litter by visitors are visible in the surroundings. Environment degradation

of the surrounding area of the park is witnessed due to heavy movement of people and vehicles. The prices of easily available local products like bamboo has now soared upto 3 to 4 times the price before coming up of the park.

Wakha is a beautiful site rich in greenery, pleasant slopes that lies serenely in the western foothills of the lengthy Nongmaiching stretch. The place can be sighted in movies or portrayed in works of artists but is not frequented by many people. Wakha also possess significant heritage resources in the form of artifacts and age old traditions practiced by the villagers there. Recent development in this area is the adventure sports activities such as hand gliding, paragliding and parasailing, taken-up on a seasonal basis. Adventure sports activities are becoming popular and slowly picking-up in the State. There is a rush for adventure sports activities during State Tourism Festival time, that is 21<sup>st</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> November. During 2014 State Tourism Festival, a lot of people were seen as never before, queuing up for the activities. The adventure sport is conducted by a private party from outside Wakha area. The people of Wakha are clueless of the benefits and the demerits of the activities that are taking place in their area as things are quite new. Locals are enjoying the attention that the place is receiving now and just going with the flow.

Government took-up a project to develop an eco-park on an area of 35 acres at the foothills of Nongmaiching, adjacent to Top Makha Leikai. The first order for land acquisition for development of eco-park was passed around 2006-07; farmers were unaware, until the notification was out in 2009. The government acquired prime agricultural land measuring 30.70 acres for development of the park. 37 farmers residing at Top Makha Leikai were affected by the land acquisition. The farmers were snatched off their livelihood with monetary pay-outs that can never compensate the loss brought by the acquisition. Of the 37 affected farmers, majority had raised concerns regarding the compensation

rate as the monetary compensation was calculated based on the land rate that was fixed during the last official land survey conducted in 1961. This was totally unfair and unacceptable to the farmers. Regarding this, a case was registered by the farmers against the State Government. In reality, there was one concrete structure seemingly an office building with 2 waiting shed like structures in between lush green paddy fields inside the compound wall fencing in the entire land demarcated for the park. Locals and the affected farmers have no information on progress or actual works that will be taken up in the area. The government's inefficiency is significantly affecting the people who are dwelling there.

The foundation stone for the Institute of Hotel Management and Catering Technology (IHMCT) at Nongmaiching was laid in March 2014. At the same time, the tender for construction and development of an 18-hole golf course through Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) mode was floated by the State government. Farmers have protested against the acquisition of agricultural land. Government, totally neglecting the voice of the farmers of the area continues to add more projects at the area despite protests by the local community. The amount of seriousness of the State Government's thrust towards tourism development at Nongmaiching for the benefit of the peoples is nowhere evident from the series of events. At the time of writing this report, it is learnt from reliable sources in the government that there are no takers for the golf course.

#### *4. Kabow village regarding expansion of State Government run Hotel to a privately run 5-star category hotel*

Kabow village also known as the Naga river colony, lies at the eastern side of Hotel Imphal. The colony is 100 years old with a population of 500 in 32 houses. Just before the privatization of 'Hotel Imphal', the government had forcefully evicted the inhabitants of Kabow village. The ruthless eviction was enacted in fulfillment

of government's intention to create space for expansion of the hotel premise and ultimate conversion to a 5-star category hotel in Public-Private-Partnership mode. Despite wide protest from the local dwellers of Kabow Leikai and several NGOs and human rights activists against the eviction, the State government dismantled all the houses, three churches and one temple at Kabow Leikai in presence of heavy police. All the people who had settled and constructed houses in Kabow Leikai were termed as encroachers. The eviction left the total population of the village homeless.

#### *5. Upgradation of Tulihal airport to international airport.*

Ningombam case regarding Airport expansion. Eviction and status of the Airport Expansion affected people, October 16, 2014.

Imphal Airport which is sought to be expanded since 2008 has not seen the light of the day for two key reasons. One is that it was not based on actual need, and the other is that, affected villages have not been resettled and rehabilitated properly.

Of all the airports in India, Tulihal Airport is closest to the city and falls within the larger populated area of Imphal. Since its creation during the Second World War, it has been expanded in 1961, 1970 and 1991 and the villages in the surrounding area have been pushed out several times. The present project, seeks to further expand the Airport by an additional 690.8 acres of land. Homestead land, agriculture land, pisciculture (fish farms), laiumang (sacred groves), community ponds and grounds and even a school are affected.

In response to a Public Interest Litigation (PIL), No. 7/2009 filed by North East Peoples Alliance and Human Rights Alert asking for environmental clearance for the expansion, the Airport Authority of India responded saying the question of environmental clearance does not arise



at this moment as the government must first hand over the land to AAI adding that there is no plan from the side for the AAI and that it is the government of Manipur that is 'pushing' the Authority for such an expansion. While many interpretations can be derived of this statement, it is clear that the idea of expanding the current airport to an 'international standard' (as different from an international airport) is not based on actual study that justifies a need for expansion. While the question remains whether one can acquire land prior to a detailed project report and environmental clearance being done, it will be democratic for the government to explain why such an expansion is still required and why such a vast amount of agricultural land is needed.

In a desperate attempt to register their objections, the affected villagers in the past formed a Joint Action Committee and organized a series of strikes and protests ever since they heard about the expansion move. However, without taking note of any of the peoples' objections, the Government proceeded with the acquisition of land. As of now, the agricultural land and homesteads have been fenced and few have left their ancestral land to seek life elsewhere, but more than half the families still live within the fence seeking government action for proper rehabilitation and resettlement.

World over, those forcefully evicted, as is the case here, are treated under some kind of Rehabilitation and Resettlement policy, whereby those evicted get to have a life better than they used to. But in this case, these farmers are almost thrown onto an uninhabitable, uncultivable piece of land after clearing half a hillock not enough for all the evicted to accommodate.

In the latest case of forced eviction for the expansion, 120 households of Ningombam Awang Leikai and Ningombam Atom Leikai, Imphal West district have been waiting for implementation of assurances promised by the government of Manipur in multiple occasions. About 60 households who were 'tired' of waiting for the government response have already shifted to

other places of their own initiatives. On 28<sup>th</sup> September 2014, an eviction order was served against 60 families who cannot afford shifting. The order threatened the families to quit their homesteads by 6<sup>th</sup> October 2014.

Previously the government had agreed to entitle a small plot of land of 0.15 acre to each affected family and accordingly, government officials identified alternative lands for rehabilitation and resettlement at a nearby hillock called Heibokching Macha. But as of now the purposed area is not feasible for human settlement. The area to be settled compared to the displaced population is too small. There is a lack of basic amenities such as water, electricity, proper approach road, drainage or sanitation. Besides, the soil is not suitable for growing and maintaining even a small kitchen garden, which is basic to the people. Some of the houses face the possibility of exposure to landslide. We witnessed a cliff side crumbling as well. In addition to these issues, there are still 20 families who have not been allotted any plot of land by the government. Again many families have not received compensation towards the loss of agricultural land and horticultural property. All these happened in spite of the government's frequent assurances for building better houses and making an exemplary model village for affected families.

We seek better attention from the government in handling proper resettlement and rehabilitation program for those who have sacrificed for the development of the state. We believe that proper houses should be constructed with adequate sanitation facilities, water and electricity, and that the affected villagers should also be provided with amenities like community hall, sacred sites etc. so that some sort of community life can be restored. Most importantly, it is elementary to restore livelihoods for those who have lost their only way of life i.e. agriculture. Commitment to deliver such solutions will help restore faith in the government.

### **III. TOURISM TREND – ANALYSIS**

The significant increase in tourist arrivals, both

DTVs and FTVs in the last 10 years is taken as a positive sign by the government. They assume that tourists would have brought more money to the poor State, and that the people are getting direct and indirect employment. The concern here is, out of the total expenditure made by the tourist during his/ her stay in Manipur, how much money remains with the local community. Then, who has got what type of job and at what cost? The impacts of tourism development on the people and the area tells another story.

1. The emerging trend of star category hotels and resorts has provided the much-needed space for tourists to stay-over, which in turn generates income and provides direct as well as indirect jobs to many. Private parties are directing tourism developments. They become the primary beneficiary from the tourism benefits. Farmers become landless and taking-up menial jobs. Local's lose land ownership and farmers lose their livelihood. Local dwellers are forcefully evicted of their own houses, in creating place for tourism development. Tourism development projects have caused social displacement.

2. Government gives prime attention to development of infrastructure (with PPP framework) in terms of star category accommodation units, resorts & restaurants, good roads, facilities and amenities and creation of world class infrastructural set-up in order to attract more tourists. The immense tourism potential of the State continues to be explored and the benefits of tourism development is harnessed by a privileged few at the cost of the local people. The key beneficiaries of increased tourist traffic in Manipur are the hoteliers and tour operators, who are often outsiders.

3. The advent of private parties in setting up star category hotels at naturally beautiful tourist destinations gives an alienated look to the overall set-up of the area. In a run to meet the demand of the tourism market, the area loses its natural charm and becomes artificial. In such approaches, the destination life tends to be short

lived and the tourist attention from the destination shifts to another as tourism is an ongoing process. Such kind of short lived tourism leaves behind wastes in place of the natural charm that existed before tourism came to that area. The State Government never paid attention to the concept of home-stay and other sustainable options of accommodation in tourism. This being the reason, the news of two foreign tourists who stayed at Ithing village in a home-stay for four days stroked headlines.

4. On several occasions, Government has addressed that more tourist arrivals mean more money coming in to the State and job creation. This is misleading people as the money spent by tourists does not guarantee to remain in the local economy. The current tourism trend implies huge financial leakage and concentration of tourism benefits in pockets of privileged few. Tourism is seasonal, it doesn't promise round the year employment. Above that, every tourism destination has a product life. The longevity of a place as a tourism destination is uncertain. Tourism is too risky to be fully dependent on. This advice that once tourism leaves the place, post its product cycle, people who are fully dependent on it will be left with nowhere to go and nothing to do for their livelihood.

5. The concept of good roads, improved facilities, etc. cater to a few thousand odd tourists but does not fulfill the basic needs of the 29 lakhs (approx.) population of the State, is discriminatory of the locals. Manipur has been known for its human rights abuses in an environment of militarization with Disturbed Area Status and AFSPA continuing since decades. Manipur is witness to various clashes and encounters. There are frequent strikes, road blockades which continues for months. There is conflict in promoting our State as a peaceful tourism destination. Due to frequent bomb blasts and recovery of planted IEDs, the State has already started garnering unfavourable titles – the land of Hand-Grenades and IEDs. These will only

worsen in the due course of time if the cause(s) are not addressed. It is a matter of the State's image. However, it is partially incorrect to term the current unstable law and order problem as one of the factors for tourists not preferring to visit Manipur as the conflict, law and order situation have contributed in tourist arrivals. The matter of the State's image is very important from various angles and not just for the sake of tourism. Once there is good infrastructure and improved facilities for the people of Manipur along with stable law and order situation, tourism will automatically flourish in Manipur, as it has enormous tourism resources to attract tourist from across the world. Much emphasis should be paid to develop pro-people projects & schemes, come-up with measures for conflict resolutions and peace building activities.

6. An ecotourism conclave supposed to influence people failed in the absence of key stakeholders i.e. the people from tourist sites and non-representation of CSOs who deal with important issues of the State. The participation fee of Rs. 500 charged by ESOI formed as a barrier to those who couldn't afford to pay the fee. The valuable ideas and suggestions from the speakers that ought to reach stakeholders at tourism destinations remained confined within the premise of handpicked private parties and dignitaries present at the conclave. The intention behind organizing such an event by the government in an exclusive manner is questioned. While giving a presentation on community based ecotourism, one of the prominent speaker mentioned that the venue of the conclave was inappropriate to hold such conclave and suggested the organisers to be careful in future.

At the end of the day, tourism conferences and events remain about four fundamentals:

- *Highlight the opportunity for tourism, by bringing forth the enormous tourism resources of the State that lies unexplored.*
- *Talk in volume about tourism promotion and its benefits.*

- *Formulate strategies to market or sell Manipur as a preferred tourism destination to the world.*
- *Bring in privileged private parties to manage the industry.*

Issues of tourism such as the likely impacts on the natural environment, people, traditions through tourism, local community's perspectives on tourism development and critical analysis on the presumed benefits versus actual benefits of tourism development, who really benefits from Manipur tourism development, are never part of the discussions held. Another important aspect that remained detached/ out-of-discussion was the issue of Carrying Capacity and Sustainable and Responsible Tourism development. These critical issues of tourism never crossed the minds of the masterminds or the tourism experts of our State and the organisers of tourism events in Manipur. Pro-capitalists and one-sided approach of tourism development visibly reflects in the current tourism trend of the State.

7. Road connectivity seem to have improved however, its condition is still terrible for vehicle movements. Most of the roads remain impassable due to either natural calamity or man-made calamity. Issues of potable water scarcity hit most areas of Manipur during summer and in the lean season there is little to drink and with the government not able to supply piped water, potable water tankers rule the roost. While there seem to be some improvements, most parts of Manipur continue to remain dark for most part of the day. Rice cultivation of Manipur is not sufficient to feed the State. Health care facilities do not reach rural areas. Diverting scarce resources for tourists while not attending to one's own citizens' smacks of serving profit mongering private parties of the state. With the growth of tourism, the demand for these vital resources and facilities is going to get more and more.

Manipur showed reduced crime rates but rate of cases reported for violence against women raised. The infamous National Highway 39 which is now renamed as Asian Highway 1 (AH1) con-

tinues to serve as a haven for smuggling of drugs. The issue of resource sharing, law and order situation and human right abuses are broad areas that co-relates with tourism development in any given tourism destination. Studies have shown an increase in crime rate, substance abuse and flesh trade in many popular tourism destinations. These issues deserve equal focus as the promotion and marketing of Manipur tourism.

8. State tourism festival has become robust with participants from other States as well as from other countries. They participate as stall owners and cultural troops mostly. The festival is not a tourism festival by its appearance, it is a trade fair within militarized atmosphere and negligible tourism promotion outlook.

9. As tourism is a service industry, Tourism and People are inseparable. Tourism growth creates the requirement of human resource. Manipur tourism anticipated to grow needs to be well equipped with human resources to cater to various needs of the tourism sector. For local people to make 'informed choices' about tourism, they need awareness and sensitivity which is not prevalent in people of Manipur as tourism is still in its infancy. The State government has not made any attempt to make the deserving indigenous people reap the benefits of tourism and make them direct beneficiaries. The capacity building programs from the Government's side can only meet the requirements at the operational level, low income generating and labour oriented tasks that are dependent on employers. Impacts studies at many tourism destinations has shown that employers are often capitalist outsiders who exploits the destinations and takes lion share of the monetary benefits while the locals are utilised to fulfill the market demands of the lucrative tourism industry, local people becomes mere pieces of display in the tourism activities that happen in their own area. In this top-down approach, locals and the destination gets exploited. A similar consequence is feared for Manipur, the winner of 'Most promising tourism destination

award'. Manipur is also described as 'the sleeping lion of tourism' by tourism experts of the State.

10. Numerous plans for tourism development are being laid out but without a proper framework or tourism policy that can guide tourism development in the State. Tourism stakeholders have been urging the Government to come-up with a proper State Tourism Policy that works for all. The Manipur Tourism Policy, 2014 which was finalized without public consultation and hence lacks people participation, has completely sidelined the interest of the indigenous people and does not address core issues of tourism.

11. The Government claim to have deliberated on the tourism potential of the State. Series of programs and projects are taken-up based on the outcomes of the deliberations. The projects and programs totally neglect the critical aspects of tourism viz,

*Economic impacts:* Financial leakage and benefit sharing remains unchecked.

*Environmental impacts:* Carrying capacity is not assessed, resources management (land, food, energy, water, fuel) and waste management issues.

*Socio-cultural impacts:* Change in indigenous identity and values, cultural clashes, Ethical issues, Loss of land ownership, loss of livelihood, raise in social inequality and injustice, conflicts.

12. There are conflicting views with the Government concerning benefits, participation, acquisition of land and the idea of tourism itself. Communities have very less or no idea on upcoming projects in their areas and their interests are sidelined. People are not averse to the idea of promoting tourism, they want more transparency. Communities are overlooked throughout the entire decision making process. Tourism sites are identified for tourism projects without consulting the local people. The local community who knows the area best is not encouraged to participate in the tourism project development but a duplication of projects from other famous

destinations. As a result, the projects struggle to adapt with the local area, which has led to failures while the Government remains unaccountable for the same.

13. In case of marketing Manipur, Government should be mindful that they are marketing a sensitive and conflicted State and they should be extremely careful and cautious about it.

14. Manipur is projected as a promising destination rich in tourism resources in the form of serene natural beauty, favourable climate throughout the year, fascinating range of flora & fauna, co-existence of several communities in harmony, indigenous sports, lifestyles, arts & culture, fairs & festivals, rich heritage, handlooms and handicrafts, and exotic cuisines. On the flipside, these resources are undergoing extensive destruction through projects that are directly/ indirectly linked with tourism development and people are suffering from it. There is rampant tourism infrastructure development taking place in the process to make Manipur a tourism hot-spot in the coming years. Land for infrastructure development is created through exploitation of natural habitat & resources and forceful eviction of communities. Decrease of State agricultural landholding is alarming. Flora and species have become rare and extinct, especially in the case of Loktak. Indigenous people are left to abandon their traditional lifestyle, fisher folks and farmers end up as labourers in the pursuit for tourism development. Conflicts between Government and Community, Private parties and Community, Community within and intercommunity's have arisen. There are continuous protests against proposed act of acquisition of certain lands by the State government for various projects.

These become a big challenge in the conservation and survival of the existing rich tourism resources of the State and its cultural heritage.

15. The government has been swift in implementing schemes of tourism infrastructure development including mega projects worth

multi crores. Tourism projects are inaugurated in a hurry but their completion goes well past due dates and in many instances, they remain incomplete. The guest house constructed at Shirui lies incomplete till now. Official reports on status of the eco-park project at Nongmaiching are contradictory. Site visits to the spot proves the thoughtless approach of the Government. There is minimal or no proper implementation of various other grass root level schemes which are equally important for overall tourism development of the State.

Tourism in Manipur is in a nascent stage but rapidly being pushed as an industry from several quarters. This is one of the primary reasons for urgently taking steps to involve the people to formulate a proper State Tourism Policy with crystal clear objectives that will work for all. The 'Manipur Tourism Policy, 2014' should be reviewed making it a policy for the people, by the people. Community outrage is hinted in near future when outsiders presume to intercede on the community's behalf with the government in planning and implementation of tourism projects.

While developing tourism projects, proper research and monitoring mechanisms should be in place to carefully study each of the unique tourism resources that every destination possesses and plan accordingly. These resources are worth preserving for the future generations. Assessment of 'Carrying capacity' of a destination, guidelines and regulation to evaluate and monitor tourism projects and its impact becomes a must at this stage for planned and controlled tourism development.

Tourism in Manipur is lately developed. As such, beyond infrastructure development and tourism marketing there are several other key avenues to be looked upon for a smooth passage of tourism development in our State. There is an advantage for late development, we can learn from mistakes and success stories of other tourism destinations. Huge emphasis should be given to tourism

awareness campaigns, and sensitization programs at grassroot level should be initiated. This should go hand in hand with every tourism project.

Tourism projects have failed to serve the purpose. For instance, the Rural tourism development projects taken up by the State government under the assistance of the Central Government failed to promote and preserve the tourism characteristics of the villages. Instead, the project developed concrete structures that were totally alien to the rural setting of the area. Due to the projects, the area lost its unique tourism resources. It is not only Rural Tourism projects that failed but various other projects too have proved futile. Let's take the instance, the annual tourism festival of our state, the 'Manipur Sangai Festival'. It is important to consider as to what extent has the chaotic 'festival' contributed in responsible tourism development of our State.

The recent tourism development trend in our State indicates that the people living in and around tourism destinations are not, in any way, encouraged, trained and supported to become direct beneficiaries of most or all the tourism development projects. Special provisions and incentives should be provided to the less privileged population for even distribution of the benefits from tourism development. Community participation in the decision-making process should be sought, suitable model(s) of community entrepreneurship should be adopted and local participation encouraged in constructive tourism development. Financial leakages should be checked.

The concept of Medical tourism, Polo tourism, Dark/ War tourism along with Adventure tourism and Nature based tourism have garnered acceptance as niche tourism products of Manipur. Several other types of tourism proven to be responsible and sustainable forms of tourism, such as Ecotourism, Community-based tourism, Rural tourism among others, are not yet explored in its true form. These types of tourism should be encouraged and supported for overall

development of Manipur tourism. They have the potential to be part of the solutions to the issues of benefit sharing, community ownership, longevity of tourism destination life, environmental and social issues.

# 2

## *Corporatising Tourism: A Critique of the Manipur Tourism Policy 2014*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Manipur Tourism Policy 2014, states tourism to be one of largest global industry of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, projected to grow even faster in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The introduction of this 58-page Policy clearly highlights the essence and spirit of the policy. Listed below is our critical look para wise at the policy's outlook. The text in boxes are recommendations/ alternatives, which we consider as a way forward for a more just tourism:

Tourism cannot be seen as an economic booster since it is seasonal and vulnerable to several extraneous factors. Apart from an economic angle, it has multifarious socio-cultural and environmental implications. We have the advantage of 'developing late'; having learnt/ seen/ heard of the negative impacts of tourism and its infrastructure in places like Himachal Pradesh, Goa, Sikkim, Nepal. If ever, we have to plan tourism in Manipur, it should include a collective framework that engages individuals and communities right from planning in the decision-making tasks.

While, there may be an increase in foreign exchange earnings from the increase in tourist arrivals, it does not indicate the retention of income in the local economy. In Goa, based on a study conducted by EQUATIONS, it was found that charter tourists were less liable to spend on accommodation, food and drinks since these were part of the package. The key beneficiaries of charter tourists are therefore the tour operators in the home countries. At the domestic level, while, Leave Travel Concession for flights might have increased the number of tourist to the

North East, benefits to the local economy is of doubt for the similar reason, where tour operators take the major stake.

The economic and job creation data mentioned in the policy is suspect. Where and how is this data being generated? If the Tourism Satellite Account has been used, then how has this been adapted to address the context in Manipur?

The statement that young boys and girls from the state are good mannered and have friendly attitude and pleasant approach is but a creation of the industry itself, wherein they are bound by the norms forced on them. The overarching statement that the 'law and order problem' and 'insurgency' can be solved by bringing tourism in a large way needs a deeper and larger understanding of the 'situation' rather than merely having a 'perception'.

The scope of employment for local people is mostly confined to low qualified, low-income activities and menial jobs that will not provide enough remuneration and at the same time there is no training to ensure growth or upscale in the profession. Additionally, an assessment of the loss of current livelihood to make way for tourism is needed. This will also answer the question about increase in employment but at what cost?

Development of tourism in Manipur from the economic and employment perspective only, is a limited view. Besides, there is huge financial leakage that happens. The global spread of tourism also produces many unwanted developments such as child labour, sexual abuse of women and children, in interlinked sectors. These factors should not go unchecked. The

impact on women and children has been hugely detrimental in many tourist destinations globally and this issue in an already volatile border area, where the nexus of trafficking, both in drugs as well as in women and children, is prevalent and cannot be brushed aside in absolute ignorance or rather a deliberate rebuttal of acknowledgment of the issue at hand. The policy does not speak about the issue of sex work and trafficking and therefore has not put in place any mechanism to arrest this issue.

The ever-increasing craving for modernization to attain urban status has phenomenally resulted in felling of trees for construction sites, besides fuel and timber consumption. Massive deforestation and poor management of environs has resulted in many floral species becoming extinct and further deteriorating soil productivity and fertility. Skewed development and misleading promotion of Manipur tourism by the Government has already led to a negative image of Manipur – promises made through attractive tourism brochures and other marketing gimmicks are not ‘delivered’ in practice. Considering the fragile nature of tourism, its development should be taken up in a systematic and co-ordinated manner, with appropriate safeguard mechanisms for indigenous peoples and their lands. This process cannot and should not be done hastily.

While tourism potential has been scantily studied, no assessment of the potential negative impacts has been looked at to contextualize the development. For e.g., what about water scarcity that the state already faces? Tourism is a highly resource intensive industry using up water and energy and a significant generator of garbage. Has the state assessed what the impacts of all these will be?

With the coming of Act East Policy through North East, Trans-Asian Highway and Railways, government plans to develop Manipur as the “Gateway to South-East Asia”. In conformity with its modern outlook and strategic location, the ‘Gateway tag’ will alter/ transform Manipur

(Imphal per se) just like the unplanned, chaotic and crowded Guwahati city - Gateway to North-east India. The tag will create a ripple effect.

This policy has completely ignored what communities can initiate on their own or their inherent rights of *free, prior and informed consent* of projects that are introduced by either government or by private parties. The Policy mentions focus on Community participation, involvement of private entrepreneurs for comprehensive development of tourism industry in Manipur. It reflects assigned participation, and not a pro-active role of the community. There are no attempts to address the interest and rights of indigenous peoples.

## **2. MISSION STATEMENT & PRINCIPLES**

The role of the government is to frame laws, regulate and provide directions and not to handover people and resources to the industry. It will be a frightening situation if the market with its sole profit making intention is allowed to reign free. The role of the tourism industry is omnipotent with no mention of the role of residents living in and around tourism destinations. The approach in this paragraph is that, if the State and big private corporations earns, then the income level of the people is enhanced. This is a flawed perspective of economic benefits of any industry. Economic benefits alone are not the outcomes of tourism and there is no recognition of this fact.

*The Policy should give clear directions as to the role of State and tourism industry while squarely placing residents of tourism destinations at the center of decision making processes. While acknowledging that potential economic impacts, other impacts both positive and negative, needs to be acknowledged in the first instance so that appropriate checks and balances are in put in place in the subsequent sections of the document.*

Viewing tourism as a purely economic tool is flawed. For e.g. tourism also leads to cultural exchange. This exchange could be healthy and one



which creates mutual respect and understanding of each other's culture. However, tourism could also go horribly wrong and lead to loss of cultural ethos of the residents of tourism destinations. Similarly, there are other social and political impacts which would need to be planned for.

*Approach of the mission statement is geared towards tourist satisfaction without considering the aspirations of residents of tourism destinations. Given the understanding articulated in the comments section, it is critical that this be covered in the text of the mission statement.*

2.1. Putting all eggs in one basket is bad strategy for anyone. Tourism cannot be the solution for all problems that ill the state. To plan the development of people based on an industry as fickle as tourism is surely tantamount to enslaving people to the sector.

*Tourism in Manipur should be promoted within the larger context of livelihoods in the state. While tourism gets a boost with a new tourism policy, similarly, well thought out strategies to revive traditional livelihood practices, which have either disappeared, or which are perishing should be ensured.*

2.2. Have there been any studies that the Department of Tourism has conducted to prove that significant jobs would be generated by tourism? Further, existing documentation shows that the employment generated by tourism for residents of tourism destinations continue to be at the lower rung of the ladder with little to no avenues for skill development and growth, leading to increased indignity.

*Assessments of potential impacts of tourism should be conducted prior to any project so that true benefits will accrue to residents of tourism destinations.*

2.4. While it is positive to have inter-governmental agencies, critical departments have been left out: like that of the Department of Community & Rural Development and Panchayati Raj and Tribal Affairs.

*The inter-agency linkages planned should in no way replace structures for democratic decentralization, which exist in the state.*

2.5. The view of north eastern states in a unified manner is caricaturist and does not allow for cultural interactions between the tourists and residents of tourism destinations. Considering the hue and cry in Manipur for Inner Line Permit (ILP), the existence of ILP system in other North Eastern states, and the resentment felt by many locals because of the homogenisation of the very unique states, a hassle-free movement will still be difficult.

*There has to be recognition of different states, however, joint development of tourism with aspirations of all states addressed might be facilitated.*

2.7. The entire paragraph is highly problematic – it is well accepted that the tourism industry comprises 70% of the unorganised sector – SMEs (including small shops and guest houses), taxi/ auto drivers, guides. A sizable number of people involved in these are residents of tourism destinations. Yet, as per the policy, the private sector is seen as large private corporations and not the unorganised sector.

Regarding what is termed as shared vision, what is the process that the Department of Tourism has engaged in, to arrive at a shared vision? Given that the government has not even followed a democratic process in the finalisation of this policy, it is arrogant on the part of the State that it would sensitise stakeholders about a 'shared vision'. It is very clear that this shared vision is of the government and the private corporations, which is being taken to other 'stakeholders' to be convinced about.

The perspective of the State towards people is highly patronizing, with people being seen as those who receive crumbs (trickle down) in the name of tourism benefits but are completely left out of the decision-making process.

*The role of the unorganised sector in the tourism industry needs to be given due acknowledgment as*

*equal if not greater drivers of tourism than large private interests.*

*Residents of tourism destinations along with the government should be the leaders of tourism so as to ensure that they have an influence on the way tourism unfolds in the state and that they are direct gainers.*

2.8. It is appreciated that there is a plan to prioritize, however, what will be the criteria and process? Additionally, it is important that current use of resources (especially natural resources) by residents of tourism destinations needs to be factored in so as to avoid residents of tourism destinations being dispossessed and lose control over these natural resources.

- *Clear criteria and process be laid out.*
- *Limits of Acceptable Change be assessed in preparation of these criteria*

2.9. How did the government prioritize using of its scarce resources in creating world class infrastructure?

Will this upgrading of destinations lead to uprooting of livelihoods? It has also been seen that high end tourists do not necessarily cause economic benefits to residents of tourism destinations as they usually prefer chartered and packaged tours rather than engage with 'locals' as they are seen as touts and money mongers. This would go against the earlier statements made in the policy linked to economic benefits to communities.

*Accommodation and other infrastructure should be developed keeping in mind the architecture and culture of the destination and its residents rather than the need of tourists alone.*

*There is a problem with all tourism projects being considered as public purpose. Within tourism there are different kinds of projects ranging from creation of sanitation infrastructure, bus stops and shelters to five star hotels and high end shopping malls. A distinction between the tourism projects as those open to public access and those which only the elite can access needs to be made. While it would be the*

*duty for the State to ensure that sanitation facilities, interpretation centres, public markets, access roads, bus stops, shelters and the like would qualify as public purpose, there is no reason for the tourism departments and tourism development corporations to be involved in the creation of high end projects like 5-star hotels and luxury resorts. These should be left to the private sector and should not be within the purview of Public Private Partnerships (PPP).*

#### ON PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

*There are several issues with PPPs, with its efficacy and therefore the decision of the Government to use this method of procurement is suspect. Some of the more important issues are:*

*1. PPP as a model is driven by economic interests and return on investment and these are the only criteria for the consideration of the clearance of a PPP project. This has implications on services like health and education, the provision of which are the obligation of the State. With PPP entering these sectors, their costs will no more be affordable to the under-privileged populations and only to those who have the ability to pay the high prices that will be charged. People who are under-privileged must be able to access these services with dignity and not be at the mercy of the private sector for their basic access and rights. Therefore, the State should not allow the entering of the private sector through the PPP or any other mode into sectors like health, education, water, electricity and food.*

*2. Need for PPP projects: In the context of tourism, apart from Rajasthan no other states have conducted studies to identify demand drivers for the PPP projects that have been approved/ implemented.*

*3. Impact of PPPs on local communities: No studies on the potential impacts of PPPs on local communities, has been conducted prior to the approval of the same, nor has there been studies on the impacts of PPP projects already under implementation.*

*Analysis of the tourism projects under PPP show that they are essentially private in nature and are*

*not public access projects, therefore benefit only an elite section of tourists. Of the 105 PPP projects in India, 60 are high end projects including construction of 5-star hotels, golf courses, high-end malls and theaters. About 12 are ropeway projects in the hill regions and the rest are a combination of budget hotels and way side amenities. Andhra Pradesh which has the largest number of PPPs in the tourism sector has also cleared a project for the construction of a training centre. In fact, of the 40 PPP projects in tourism, only 5 are projects which would be accessible for the general public.*

*4. Lack of documentation on the outcomes of PPP projects: Studies highlighting the implication of PPPs on the changing role of the State and its implication on delivering of basic services, impact on local self-governance structures are inadequate. This has skewed the mind set of policy makers into favouring PPPs. It is clear that a PPP project could easily lead to eventual privatization if not transferred back to the Government. Currently almost all the tourism-related PPP projects are the Build Operate Transfer (BOT) type and the policy draft mentions preference for BOT and Design Build (DB) as its preferred models.*

2.10. The view of tourism as being the sale of a tourist experience or a tourist product needs to be reviewed. Tourism is probably the only industry in the world, which markets what it has not either manufactured or protected (apart from mega tourism projects). Therefore, while promoting culture or even natural resources these need to be done in a manner which is acceptable to the primary custodians of these resources. This means that if Loktak Lake is to be marketed, then those who have lived and preserved the lake should have primary say and/ or benefits of any tourism activities relating to Loktak.

*Approach to promotion and marketing will take into consideration perspectives of the custodians of the cultural practice/ natural resource*

2.11. How will tourism be made Sustainable and Responsible is not clear in the policy. As mentioned above tourist destinations are thriving places which are homes of people or even areas that they access for their daily needs e.g. forests, water etc. for their livelihood. The tourism industry is forever promoting pristineness of places and this attempt might be prone to preserve and protect in absolute terms without understanding the current use of these 'products'. This is a cosmetic view of destinations which is devoid of the understanding of the people living there and is to be avoided.

North Eastern Region (NER) has reached a critical juncture with local people realizing, consequences of unplanned development. While bureaucrats and experts emphasize on the tourism industry for economic thrust for the region, indigenous peoples habiting fragile areas have been constantly facing the aftermath of mass destruction of forests (with the rest declared into Forest Reserve areas) and the rights of indigenous peoples are also not acknowledged anywhere.

*No tourism linked activity – promotion or protection – should result in the loss of access and control of tourism destinations.*

2.12. Attempts have been made to 'stabilize' the region for decades now. It is unrealistic to plan for a time when this goal will be achieved. Is it the intention of the government and private corporations to "dilute the insurgency substantially" through tourism? There are many substantial reasons for 'insurgent' movements and tourism should not be used as a means to dissipate resistances that 'people' and communities have waged for decades now and at steep human cost.

Avenues for recreation: According to this policy, the tourism industry will mainly create jobs in the hospitality industry such as bus-boys and waiters. These are low-income jobs with demanding hours, and hardly generate an infrastructure with avenues for recreation, or

sufficient income and time to enjoy recreational activities.

The State cannot shy away from its primary responsibility, which is to the people. To say that the security of the tourists is paramount, amounts to adding insult to injury to the people of Manipur who continue to face human rights violations on a daily basis at the hands of the State.

*This entire paragraph should be removed from the policy.*

2.14. Trickle-down effect is an economic fallacy. If the economically weaker sections of society are to benefit, there must be direct involvement. It also contradictory to say that the tourism industry will be the key economic activity for Manipur when there is no direct involvement of the same people.

### **3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The broad objectives laid down by the policy seem like mere lip service and not reflected in the actual direction of the policy. They are unclear, like the first objective does not define who these people(s) are. The policy lacks understanding of a society and its structure.

Clear directions on how the objectives will be achieved with well-defined roles should form a significant part of the policy. Below are what we believe the objectives of the policy should be aligned on:

#### **1. People centered**

- Tourism is based on local aspirations and contexts and delivers local benefits
- Tourism development acknowledges people's primary rights over common property resources and natural resources & recognizes that nature is not a commodity
- Tourism models shift from a mass / consumptive nature to interactions, learnings, genuine human exchange and mutual respect
- The success of tourism projects is measured

not by the economic gains alone, but also the growth of social capital and empowerment

- Local people's right to say no to tourism is respected

#### **2. Democratic/ Participatory**

- Decision making is participatory, transparent, inclusive and based on primary research and facts
- Tourism development is undertaken with people's consent, keeping in view their vision for how tourism should develop
- Tourism is regulated by norms developed by local communities, local governance bodies, and tourism developers that aim to minimize negative impacts and ensure sustainability and equity
- Consultations on tourism impacts are based on dialogue, education, awareness, learning from experience

#### **3. Equitable**

- Systems and mechanisms encourage and facilitate participation of local communities and local institutions to influence tourism and the sharing of benefits in more equitable ways
- Local ownership is strong, small and medium enterprises are vibrant, local employment and local economies are stimulated by tourism development
- Strong backward linkages ensure that tourism relies on local produce and local skills
- Innovative models of benefit-sharing are evolved and implemented

#### **4. Accountable**

- Tourism policy makers and implementers hold themselves accountable through ethical practice and stringent regulation for negative impacts, and if tourism does not deliver on its promises
- Information about tourism plans is in the

public domain – so that impacts can be assessed and plans and policies influenced

- Processes of consultation and free and prior informed consent are ensured in decision making

#### 5. Non- exploitative

- Tourism does not displace, alienate people from traditional livelihoods or and exploit marginalized communities, women and children. In particular, tourism has zero tolerance to any form of child abuse – labor, sexual abuse, pornography, trafficking
- Tourism does not expropriate – land, water, public commons, forests and other natural resources. Tourism conserves biodiversity.
- Tourism is culturally sensitive and does not commodify local practices and culture. It strives to balance the need for commercial viability and the supporting and reviving of cultural traditions, arts and crafts
- Tourism practices ensure responsible use of natural resources, low energy use, effective waste management, and minimum negative impact on the environment

#### 6. Transparency

- Tourism policy makers are transparent about information, decision making processes and fund flows
- Advisory Bodies formed for tourism function in a transparent manner
- Tourism industry players conduct impact assessments in a transparent manner and people have access to the same

Clearly the policy makers were not visualising a situation where people's skills will be developed through appropriate training. This corroborates the attitude of the tourism industry to be tokenistic about employment of residents of tourism destinations.

It is assumed that there is no negative impact on culture and the environment. The issue of solid

waste, sanitation and garbage generation are the bane of any tourism destination. This policy does not adequately factor this in.

What is Manipur's traditional philosophy of giving the highest honour to a guest? In which text or customary laws is it found? This is but an attempt of the colonial state to thrust on the people a right-wing attitude in order to give impetus to a market making the people subservient.

*Guidelines and rules for solid waste management, sanitation and garbage management needs to find mention in the policy. While tourism does possibly help people who have been alienated from their culture to re-connect, the negative impacts far outweigh the positive impacts. Checks and balances for this as well need to find space in the policy.*

3.1/a.b. The last sentence contradicts the rest of the paragraph. While the earlier in the section, the policy talks of following the Panchayati Raj Act, the same section talks of 'well-directed public participation' in a benign manner. Therefore, making a mockery of the Panchayati Raj Act.

*Any tourism development will follow principles of democratic decentralised decision making processes and will not be diluted to 'well directed public participation.'*

3.1/c. Community must play an equal role in this relationship, as PPPs are profit driven and oblivious to long-term consequences that only the communities are capable of understanding. What is the rationale for the formation of the Tourism Development Society? Formation of parastatal bodies and special purpose vehicles (SPVs) should be refrained from, as they interfere and curtail democratic decision making processes. That this will happen in the case of the proposed Society, is also evident in the composition of the Society which is envisaged. While the policy talks about a framework for engagement of public private partnerships, this is not mentioned anywhere in the document. Therefore,

what the terms of such engagement are, is not publicly know.

*Addressed above in PPP Box - No parastatal bodies and SPVs to be set up.*

3.1/d. The role of the government vis-a-vis the tourism industry is far more detailed with barely a comment on local communities and their interaction with the state.

There should be no changes in policies, rules, guidelines or laws for tourism without a wide public consultation and debate on the issue. That people of the State have struggled for access to basic rights for years, has been denied and taxation and land policies are rationalized is unacceptable. The State should not allow the tourism industry to wield such power over it.

*Role of the government should be elaborated in the following role categories:*

5. *Policy making*
6. *Planning*
7. *Regulatory*
8. *Coordination and Monitoring*
9. *Implementation*
10. *Research and evolving appropriate models for tourism*
11. *Protecting – ensuring ethical and non-exploitative tourism*
12. *Education and Awareness*
13. *Strengthening Local Institutions and Local Capacities*

3.1/d/xv. Will it divert electricity slots for communities? Scarce resources should not be prioritized for tourists.

3.1/e. The State would need to ensure that interests of the unorganised sector in tourism are represented in the tourism policy and industry associations.

3.1/e/ii. Can the formal tourism industry be trusted to regulate itself? What are the mechanisms that the government will put in place to monitor this?

*Corporations and companies need to make their actions visible through transparent and accurate reporting on social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts. These reports need to be accessible to local communities. A regular impact assessment conducted on the social, cultural, economic and environmental levels. Corporate decision making to be influenced by these assessments.*

*Corporation and company plans that impact local communities need to be in consultation with them to keep them informed and give them the opportunity to object.*

*Resources or property should not be taken from local communities and if this happens they should be compensated appropriately and adequately for their loss.*

*Standards on social, environmental, labour and social justice issues should be high and based on the existing legal frameworks of the country and international conventions.*

*Corporations and companies should mention their Corporate Accountability philosophy and practices on their websites so that their customers can make informed choices.*

3.1/e/v. Residents of tourism destinations cannot be seen in this instrumental manner. They are in fact in a position to take key decisions at destination level regarding form and nature of tourism, permits for tourism businesses to operate, collection of tax among other issues. The industry and the government cannot be in a position to take such decisions as they have little idea of the context.

3.1/e/viii. The safety of tourists is not the only priority but the industry/ private sector should ensure that the same tourists do not violate the people or the environment.

3.1/e/x. Marketing and promotion are one thing on the list that the private sector is capable of doing independently. The collaboration has to come into play on issues of community involvement, equitable distribution of profits and pro-

tection of indigenous peoples' rights, livelihood and land.

3.1/f. The policy patronises voluntary organisations and attempts to humour them with the offer to provide the human touch. Civil society organizations raise critical questions about justice and rights in the society. Their voice needs to be heard and matters brought to the notice of the State on tourism, should be investigated and addressed. Instead the policy attempts to make civil society organizations the custodians of cultural preservation and promotion. Why is there not this onus on the government and the corporations, who are most likely to bring in a populist understanding of tourism?

*As a start, it would be critical for the Department of Tourism to walk the talk and facilitate public discussions and debates on the tourism policy itself. Having done that, the Department should then give detailed responses to the people including incorporating relevant demands and observations made at the discussions and debates and ensuring that critical aspects are also enforced to the corporations in tourism.*

3.1/g. Large areas in the state are not under the Panchayat system but the hills are under Village Councils and Autonomous District Councils. PRIs and Councils are Constitutional bodies and cannot be utilised by the State as it wishes to. Self-rule systems are reposed with functions, funds and functionaries with certain powers and authorities devolved to them by the State government. In order to address ownership of tourism assets on community lands – proper clearance, resettlement and rehabilitation of displaced families must be considered.

*Instead of using the PRIs/ Councils as per their need the Department should facilitate the strengthening of these institutions in the context of tourism by ensuring decision making regarding tourism is devolved to the Institutions and by giving strict instructions to the industry that they should abide by the decisions of the PRIs. Further, all assets created*

*by government funds should be handed over to the PRIs/ Councils for administration and governance.*

3.2. What is the rationale for the creation of the Tourism Development Fund? Who will be administering this fund? What will be the modalities of its operation? The State is proving that it has next to no interest other than serving the purposes for the industry and ensuring that their path is smooth.

*No special structures – administrative or financial be created to serve tourism. We have a robust system of administrative and financial governance which should be upheld and strengthened rather than creating parallel structures, which will be controlled and operated by administrative personnel and the tourism industry rather than by elected representatives.*

3.3. Since the policy by its own admission has stated that the tourism industry is private sector driven, what is the need for promoting foreign investments? Big industry players know the game and are completely capable of figuring out their own resources!

As mentioned above, big industry players have access to the required financial resources and should not be privileged while doling out concessions. Instead, it is residents of tourism destinations who might aspire to be a part of the industry but are unable to do so due to lack of financial resources. We reiterate that under no circumstance should big tourism infrastructure be built under the PPP mode.

*Local entrepreneurship should be promoted by the State by creating relevant schemes, which will help residents through subsidies and access to cheap credit.*

*The criteria for rationalising taxes is to ensure that tourism infrastructure is built in distant places. However, in these kind of places, rather than big investment, what is needed is according to the ecological and cultural realities of the place. Therefore, low credit rates and subsidies should be offered to*

*those residents who would be able to create relevant tourism infrastructure like accommodation units and other tourist amenities. The government should provide financial support to people living in tourism destinations to ensure that.*

A critical question that the Department of Tourism and the state needs to answer is what is the role of the Department and whose interests is it aspiring to serve?

3.4. That technology would be used in the tourism sector is welcome. Especially in the context of sewage and garbage management.

Before using audio kits for guiding, it should be ascertained that guides from the resident communities are not available.

While developing technology for tourism, it would be important that the government applies this technology to collect authentic tourism statistics. This is important since the government does use these statistics to plan for tourism in the state. Our experience has been that there are major flaws in the data regarding visitation numbers and amounts expended by visitors.

*Knowledge should be transferred to the residents of the tourism destinations so that they have an opportunity to stay connected with tourism.*

*Instead of bringing in audio kits, the government should train residents of the tourism destinations to be guides and equip them with the most modern technologies. This would ensure that the tourists receive most authentic information and that the residents of the destination are also in charge of the kind of communication that takes place with the tourists.*

3.5. The disconnect between the State and its people is clear. While the people of Manipur are vulnerable to security threats from the State itself, that the Department should be willing to create structures for the protection of tourists, is an irony and just wrong.

Additionally, residents of tourism destinations are vulnerable to misbehavior by the tourists.

Tourists have sometimes stolen from residents. In many instances women and children fall prey to vile intentions of tourists out to have fun at the expense of people living in the destination. Who will protect them?

*Mechanisms to protect residents of tourism destinations, especially, women and children should be put in place.*

*Strict action should be taken against the tourism industry and tourists violating the rights of residents.*

*In the event that a village/ community develops specific codes of conduct for tourism, the government should ensure that these are upheld by the tourism industry. Relevant text to this end should be added to the policy.*

*The State should uphold and implement the Code of Conduct for Safe and Honourable Tourism, as mandated by the Ministry of Tourism.*

3.6. Introducing Visa on Arrival when employment opportunities are rapidly emerging in the state will almost definitely lead to an influx of people seeking employment or residence. Filtering tourists from migrating workers is an issue that needs to be considered.

3.7 The main arguments on the non-feasibility of this model are summarized below:

The STA mode clearly privileges luxury and elite tourism. The benefits go either to private players or repatriate profits outside the country in the form of “leakages”. Enclavised tourism (as Special Tourism Areas and similar models around the world have shown) have resulted in strong opposition from local communities as they bear costs of loss of land, livelihood, basic rights, and in return get very little benefits.

The economic rationale of providing high subsidies, tax sops and highly concessional terms proposed in STAs is both questionable and unjustified. The broad range of concerns and arguments against SEZs, such as land use, displacement, serious dilution of environmental and labour



regulations, overruling of the constitutional right of local self-governance will apply to STAs as well. There should be no tourism in places where people have been displaced especially under the pretext of conservation. e.g. Loktak Lake. Further, it is an irony that Loktak Lake Protection Act of 2006 which is enacted for the protection and conservation of this reservoir lake will be up for sale as Special Tourism Area. Existing laws such as this Act and India's commitment to Ramsar Convention will not allow large scale tourism activities unless they are able to prove that those activities will not further degrade the lake environment.

*Special Tourism Areas (STAs) should not be promoted. Like we have mentioned earlier, big corporate players in the tourism industry will find the means to operate their businesses. Instead community enterprises should be supported by the State.*

*No STA should be created without the consent of the people.*

3.8. Calculating carrying capacity is welcomed. However, the traditional method involves using a numerical formula. This does not take into consideration the existing use of and pressure on resources nor does it take into consideration aspects like cultural and social impacts.

*Research as to the appropriate method to calculate carrying capacity should be conducted to establish qualitative parameters other than quantitative ones. Based on this the limits of acceptable change to a destination should be arrived at.*

*One of the foremost tasks of the Department of Tourism is to ensure that people living in and around tourism destinations and the people of the state participate in the formation of perspective plans. It is the onus of the government to ensure that processes to elicit their responses are put in place.*

3.9. Remnants of Sacred Groves are existing witness to conservation effort by communities at fringe-forest areas. Communities are already

appreciating their rich heritage, it is the uncaring tourists who needs to be educated so that they do not destroy.

The mainstream notion of conservation overlooks and does not acknowledge the role that is played by indigenous communities in conserving the forests as well as the diversity. Notions of modernity treat cultural and conservation practices as backward without understanding respect for the sustainability and spirituality that they embody. Forms of conservation are also very often indigenous in nature and are tied with the religious and spiritual beliefs.

Therefore, it is important that forests not be seen merely as providing ecosystem services alone but as an ecosystem which comprises of the people living in and around the forests including their historical and organic relationship with the forests, the flora and fauna.

*Community conserved areas, sacred groves and other natural spaces used by residents should not be opened up for tourism without prior discussion with them. Tourist education is critical and should be covered in the policy.*

3.10 Currently promotion and marketing in tourism are equated to market research for potential destinations and new activities in existing destinations. This is also de-facto the foundation of tourism planning in the country.

*Market research and promotion should take into consideration the opinions of the local communities in terms of the kind of tourists that the destinations are targeted at as this in turn influences the potential social, economic and cultural changes that the region would see.*

3.12 Tourism teaching institutions are a cornerstone for tourism development in the country. The curriculum of these institutions is outdated and cater far more to the fulfillment of tourist satisfaction and the profit motive of the tourism industry.

*Tourism teaching institutions should weave into their syllabus impacts of tourism, sustainable development and interests of communities living in and around the tourism destinations.*

#### **4. CURRENT SCENARIO AND SWOT ANALYSIS**

4.1. What about ethnic groups, their cultural aspects and traditional games? Indigenous groups represent a large section of society. Proper description must be given on the number of languages and groups inhabiting Manipur and to their diverse cultures.

4.2. Less emphasis is given to the cultural aspects and much more emphasis is given to newly developed festivals that do not possess any cultural significance.

Manipur is home to more than 33 different communities. Their cultures with their respective festivals is one of the most significant cultural aspect of tourism in Manipur. Amazingly, around 80 cultural festivals altogether are celebrated in Manipur in just a year. Effort should be put towards research and development to get an understanding of the backdrop of celebration of the festivals and promote them in a responsible manner.

Manipur with its variety in terms of landscape, water bodies and plenty of greenery offer huge scope for various nature-based tourism than just adventure tourism alone.

#### **5. THRUST AREAS: NICHE TOURISM PRODUCTS**

5.1. Mention of 'Nature / Eco-tourism' to be one is misleading. Further, the policy does not make clear the definition of ecotourism that is subscribed to. How does the policy expect to promote ecotourism, if it does not clarify what is meant by the term and the accompanying elements?

5.1/iii. The National Park mentioned above is at Shirui hills, Ukhrul, where, even today people

are opposing against declaring the community forests as National Parks. Forests are an integral part of indigenous peoples, as it is culturally and spiritually, connected with them. Varieties of wild plants having medicinal and aromatic properties are part of the everyday diet of the local inhabitants, usually collected from roots, stalks, flower, and foliage but as a result of massive deforestation and poor management of the environs, many floral species have already become extinct.

5.1/vi. The 'Homestay Concept' sounds interesting. However, if the communities that will provide these services, are not involved in the initial planning and collective decision-making, there is bound to be internal conflict.

5.1/vii. That tourism leads to conservation is contested.

Decisions are made without involving local communities, despite the Constitution and the law that make it mandatory that indigenous communities are to be involved in decision-making processes. Indigenous communities are often displaced from core zones of Protected Areas (which includes Wildlife Sanctuaries, National Parks, Biosphere Reserves and Tiger Reserves) without even being informed beforehand that said areas are being declared as protected areas; these areas are then later promoted as ecotourism destinations. This is seen in the case of Loktak.

Community skills and practices, and employment opportunities: During the tourism planning and development stages, activities do not take into account the cultural and social specificities of communities in the region. Neither do they take into the account the special knowledge and skills that each of the communities have in terms of conservation. This results in a vast disparity between the number of members of the local community employed and those hired from major cities who conform to corporate requirements.

Very often ecotourism activities impinge on resources that are otherwise used by indigenous

communities for livelihood. Resources that otherwise serve as an integral part of their work, health and other purposes and have allowed them to be self-reliant and self-sufficient. Indigenous communities who have already been alienated from their natural resources due to prevailing conservation laws, face further alienation due to the advent of ecotourism development.

Additionally, there is huge pressure from the tourism industry on the communities to sell their land due to their prime location. The sale of land to tourism projects is not a sustainable option for communities since these monies dry up rather fast and leave no other source of income in their hands. Until now the only livelihood option that has been opened up for communities is their employment in tourism establishments, which translates to the fact that communities who were once land owners and practitioners of agriculture and other livelihood systems, with diverse cultural and social histories have become homogeneous cheap labour in the tourism industry.

Despite being overlooked for roles within the tourism enterprise, they are often cited as beneficiaries of tourism led development in the local area. Communities are objectified in ecotourism literature, often displayed in their token roles in propaganda, intended to further the cause of the ecotourism enterprise and any other involved parties, including the state government.

Construction of tourism infrastructure like roads, living structures like permanent tents, cottages and so on, further damage the environment, and subsequently are also a threat to the people. Environmental impact studies are not conducted thoroughly enough to determine the affect they might have on the local communities and ecology.

Further, the use of pollutant construction materials, such as cement and plastics, result in irreversible environmental damage. Most permanent structures and tents constructed are also fitted with air conditioners. Resorts which do so

have captive generation of electricity, while very often the villages in surrounding areas have not yet been electrified.

Generation of garbage and littering by tourists is a serious issue in natural areas and has long term implications for the health of the biodiversity.

5.3. Proper and basic healthcare facility is a must for every citizen and not be used as a strategy just to attract more tourists to the state. While facilitating medical tourism, is the government also ensuring that the people of the state have equal access to health infrastructure? Tourism is known to bring in its own set of medical issues due to the spread of drugs and sex work. One of the most common outcomes of this is the spread of HIV-AIDS. Manipur is already ranked high in this regard and would make the people more vulnerable to the disease if tourism is promoted in an unregulated manner. The policy does not anywhere speak about and address this issue.

5.3/xiii Giving prime focus on tourists from outside Manipur for Medical tourism is not appropriate at a time when locals are suffering due to lack of medical facilities within the State. There is a long way to go for high end medical facilities as seen from the fact that people, for those who can afford to, go out of Manipur to seek better medical facilities. Situation becomes worse for people at many rural and remote areas.

Introducing alien-alternative therapies will jeopardize traditional medicinal practitioners if their efforts are not acknowledged. Traditional practitioners must be revived with proper scientific intervention.

5.5/v. Pilgrimage tourism is irrelevant in Manipur and this section should be removed.

5.6 The policy lacks clear understanding of what community tourism is. Community tourism is not all about 'sharing' the local natural resources with the world. Community tourism is that which recognizes communities as knowledge and resource holders and as an opportunity for them to share this with the world, if they wish.

Additionally, it is not the benefit of the state which should be focus, but it should primarily benefit the community.

## **6. ACTION PLAN**

The policy has not been taken to the people for their inputs and approval. This action plan does not reflect the aspirations of the people and therefore should not be implemented.

6.1/c. Construction of helipad will divert land-use pattern. There are existing helipads in all hill districts and more diversion of land for tourist helipad will be unnecessary. Proper use and maintenance of current infrastructure is more appropriate when the people of the state are able to access these especially in times of emergencies.

6.7. Carrying capacity, Environment Impact Assessment, Cultural Impact Assessment, Social Impact Assessment, Project Feasibility Study and Community Level Consultations on tourism projects should be made mandatory for any tourism development project.

Lake / Cruise tourism in Loktak should not be allowed, since the people living on the lake are being displaced in the name of conservation. Would tourism not act counter to the objective of conservation? E.g. oil leak from the boats, garbage dumped by the hotels.

6.12. The tourism policy 2014 itself is unclear causing a clash of ideas. Aligning all the elements mentioned in the policy is critical so as to not create confusion, which the industry will most definitely use to its benefit.

## **7. STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PLAN & PROMOTION OF THRUST AREAS**

7.1. There is too much emphasis on infrastructural development, and there is no mention on the kind of trainings and capacity building activities to empower the communities to be able to participate in tourism. Helping communities to build themselves for tourism will not require

land acquisition, building huge infrastructure and therefore will not be capital intensive. If the government is serious about communities benefiting from tourism, it would then reflect in strategy where in the 'scarce resources' would be diverted from serving the interests of big private parties and would instead invest in local community initiatives.

7.1/i/b. We wonder if members of the big tourism players have written this policy. While there are indications of this across the entire document, this specific section reeks of influence of the big tourism players. What is meant by 'standard accommodation'? This question is answered later in the paragraph, when it says that 'All measures shall be adopted to build only star category hotels and facilities'. What happened to the government's commitment to facilitate community empowerment through economic benefits reaching them? Would anyone living in a 5-star accommodation buy tea from the person on the road? Would they patronize enterprises of the local communities which are not 'standard' in nature? High end accommodations are known to consume more water and energy due to the facilities like bath tubs, swimming pools and central air conditioning. Maybe the government should stop attempting to look like they are on the side of the people and openly declare that they have been sold out to the big industry corporations.

7.1/i/e. The people of Loktak are being driven out. Lately homes have been burnt to make way for 'conservation'. Now with the plan to open the lake up for tourism and that too high end tourism, is an arrogant step by the government. It has once again proved that its preoccupation is colonial in nature and all about extracting from the local people what is their own. Allowing activities like hobby-fishing while restricting indigenous fishing practices, which are a livelihood for the people amounts to rubbing salt to injury.

7.1/ii. In an effort to create 'World-class' structures, natural ecosystems and pristine locale of

the hill districts will be destroyed.

7.2/iii. The Ima Market in Imphal including those across the state have a rich social and political history and manifests the power women have wielded. This cannot be diluted to become a tourism destination as it alienates the market from the people. There should be no attempt of the Department of Tourism to interfere in the workings of the market as decision making currently rests with the women. Therefore, this paragraph should be removed from the policy and if the Department wishes to encourage tourism in the Market, it should negotiate this with the market governance structures.

7.2/iv/g. Nambul River is almost a drainage carrying filth that is dumped into Loktak Lake. So the kind of cleansing mechanism that will be adopted must be highlighted.

7.7/viii. Land acquisition has been prominent for tourism projects. Adverse impacts on livelihood, access to resources, decision making powers of the community and socio-cultural ethos, which is forced. The roll out of Special Tourism Zones, land banks, and tourism policies focused around tourism promotion has caused concern for farmer groups, fisher folk communities and people's movements. The growth of tourism has put immense pressure on land needs and areas are increasingly acquired to accommodate for the tourism industry. Land banks have started to be used by the tourism sector, where a state government will take an audit of state land and transfer it to the private sector for tourism projects. Similarly, state governments have been using the practice of land acquisition for "public purpose" in relation to tourism projects like in the case of Kabaw Leikai, which was acquired and handed over to a private corporation for expansion of Hotel Imphal. The people of the village today are scattered all over the state, affecting the social, cultural and economic rubric of their lives. Therefore ad-hoc creation of land banks is to be avoided.

As a critique of formation of land banks and

tourism being indirectly considered as public purpose, an understanding of the origin is needed. The ability of the state to acquire land for such projects arises from the doctrine of "Eminent Domain". The restriction which is placed on such acquisition is that there must be some "public purpose". Under the doctrine of Eminent Domain every state reserves the authority to appropriate or confiscate or deprive the owner of the lands situated within the limits of the jurisdiction for purposes of public utility. Eminent Domain comes from the colonial principle of terra nullius according to which land not having individual ownership documents belongs to no one, and hence accrues to the state. British colonisers applied this principle in occupying land in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the Americas. The doctrine inherited from colonial legislation was adapted to the needs of the modern developmentalist state.

7.7/x. Creating single window clearances systems will bypass every democratic structure in place and should therefore not be implemented.

7.11 & 12. No parastatal bodies like the different committees/ advisory bodies/ societies should be formed. This would also serve to bypass democratic decision making structures that already exist and which probably need to be strengthened. Additionally, the Tourism Development Committee (TDC) and Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC) find no space for representatives of people living in tourism destinations.

7.12. The government plans to establish Manipur Tourism Development Society (MTDS) for professional and efficient management of tourism related activities – it must include people at the village-level.

# 3

## *Who's Lake, Who's Tourism?*

*Kalpna Thaoroijam*<sup>4</sup>

Every visitor to Manipur wishes to visit Loktak pat (pat is lake, in Meiteilon) or reminisces a visit to Sendra hillock, a boat-ride in local-made canoes, few clicks and poses, foods and drinks, and leave behind unwanted dumps. Earlier people visited Loktak area during Lai-haroba (festivals of Meitei sylvan gods) of the local Thangjing deities. People and their clan deities from other parts of the valley gather at Loktak pat during month-long festival in summer.

Loktak Pat, the largest fresh-water lake in North East India, is designated as a wetland of international importance under Ramsar Convention on March 23, 1990. It was also listed under the *Montreux Record* on June 16, 1993, “a record of Ramsar sites where changes in ecological character have occurred, are occurring or are likely to occur”; considering the ecological status and its biodiversity values (Recommendation 4.8, 4<sup>th</sup> COP, Montreux, Switzerland)<sup>5</sup>.

*Wetlands are indispensable for the countless benefits or “ecosystem services” that they provide humanity, ranging from freshwater supply, food and building materials, and biodiversity, to flood control, groundwater recharge, and climate change mitigation.*

Loktak is situated 38km south of Imphal in Bishnupur district. Loktak pat acts as the only natural water reservoir. It is fed by different rivers and streams of the hills and valley of Manipur. Some of the major rivers that flow into the pat are Nambul, Yangoi, Yagjoimacha,

<sup>4</sup> Kalpna works with Indigenous Perspectives as community tourism coordinator.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ramsar.org>

Thongjarok, Ningthoukhong and Khuga. The areas around the wetland include Moirang, Lam-mangdong (Bishnupur), and Mayang Imphal, and the islets of Thanga, Karang, Sendra, and Ithing. These include 65 villages, and an almost contiguous stretch of phumdi<sup>6</sup> land of about 40 sq. km. forming the present Keibul Lamjao National Park<sup>7</sup>.

Keibul Lamjao National Park, was established in the year 1966 as a Sanctuary, and in the year 1977 as a National Park, which is the last natural refuge of the endangered Sangai or brow-antlered deer (*Cervus eldi eldi*). It covers an area of 40 km<sup>2</sup> (15 sq m), situated in the southeastern shores of this lake and is the largest of all the phumdis in the lake<sup>8</sup>.

### *Tourism Plan at Sendra*

*The Tourist Home situated atop the Sendra hill of the government of Manipur has now been privatized under a lease to Classic Group of Hotels. It is renamed as Sendra Park and Resort by the Classic. It is part of government's policy to privatize all public services as well as to provide world class hotels – the five-star dream! Below this hill is the Sendra village mostly settled by fishing families, and this village of some 500 population stands to be evicted for Integrated Cable-Car and Lakeside Tourism Development Project. Based on a letter*

<sup>6</sup> Phumdis are heterogeneous mass of vegetation, soil, and organic matters at various stages of decomposition

<sup>7</sup> Ecological and Social Impacts of the Ithai Barrage, Wangkheirakpam Ramananda

<sup>8</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loktak\\_Lake](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loktak_Lake)

*(No.27/1/2013-TSM) to Director Tourism, dated 30 December 2013, by the Deputy Secretary (Tourism), GOM, several plans were made including eviction of this said village for tourism expansion. Other plans include, water body under fishery to be allocated to Tourism Department, evacuating Security from Sendra Hillock to Chaoba Ching, Detailed Project Report for development of Sendra and Takmu as a mega tourist destination and submission to the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. From information, available, the central ministry has released Rs. 10 Lakhs as token money for Integrated Cable Car and Lakeside Tourism and Rs. 933.72 Lakhs for project development of Tourist Resort at Sendra!*

*Recent eviction of some 11 families at the foothill of Sendra as encroachers indicate that the process of eviction has indeed begun. It also proves that the model of tourism that the government is planning is against the poor and against existing fishing families of Loktak. Unless local people are united, they will soon find themselves on the streets.*

### **LOKTAK PAT AND LOCAL PEOPLES' LIVELIHOOD**

Nobody questions the plight of fishers, or where have they disappeared in this melee. The battle is on who will get the larger portion of Loktak – Loktak Development Authority, National Hydro Power Corporation, private investors, Fishery, or Forest department (which controls the Keibul Lamjao National Park)!

The traditional economy, sustenance, and livelihood (in the present context) of local villagers are dependent on Loktak pat. Fishers of Loktak are rich with traditional knowledge on fishing techniques, its implements, and familiar with movement and flow of the water. Loktak pat booms in aquatic vegetation; many species are edible, and are integral ingredient for local cuisines.

Fishing is primary source of livelihood and main occupation for fisher-folks who live in the

surrounding areas and on phumdis, also known as “phumshangs. The villages around Loktak pat are mainly covered by two districts out of the nine districts of Manipur, namely Bishnupur and Imphal West. Study of fishers' socioeconomic and cultural profile around Loktak pat was carried out in five villages, which were selected by adopting a case study cum survey method. The study revealed that 44 percent of the fishermen belonged to the old age, 58.67 percent had family size of more than 5 members, 88 percent had medium level of scientific orientation, 36 percent had annual income between Rs 20001-30000, 38.67 percent had 11-20 years of fishing experience.<sup>9</sup>

The Loktak Development Authority (LDA), claims as though, as the only savior of Loktak pat, as mentioned in their website<sup>10</sup> – LDA was formed to provide for administration, control, protection, improvement, conservation and development of the natural environment of the Loktak Lake and for matters connected with as incidental thereto. The LDA has control on the lake comprising of large pockets of open water and marshy land formed at the southern part of Imphal valley upto the confluence of Manipur and Khuga river in the districts of Imphal West and Bishnupur. Under the Manipur Loktak Lake (Protection) Act - no resource/research can be conducted in the lake without permission of LDA, and in Section 25 – authority/officials have the right to search any huts in suspicion of insurgents.

LDA have not mentioned about the communities who have been living on the phumdis for generations. LDA does not mention the dilemma or the condition of the fishers whose homes on phumdis have been burnt down. Instead they have accused them for the detrimental state of

<sup>9</sup> Study of fishers' socioeconomic and cultural profile around the Loktak lake of Manipur, India, Nongmaithem Bijaya Lakshmi Devi, Ajit Kumar Ngangbam, Dr. Sheela Immanuel, and Ananthan P. S

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.loktaklake.org/about\\_us.html](http://www.loktaklake.org/about_us.html)

pat, without checking the urban effluents and garbage that flow down - passing through several settlements in the valley, without a mention of the negative fallout of Ithai dam.

Fishers have been pushed to oblivion. One of the displaced fishermen expressed his concern over recent tourism projects coming in and around the pat, that tourists will come see/visit the pat. But what about the displaced peoples who live here, and whose sole livelihood has been only fishing? How will they survive when their only livelihood is taken away?

Phumdis are natural filters that controls siltation and pollutants entering Loktak. But removal of phumdis have led to irregular flow of strong waves, and resulted in drastic change in the occurrence of current inside the pat, and has become unfavorable for traditional canoeing and fishing practices. The livelihoods of several families of the pat have been seized as prohibition on indigenous fishing methods had been imposed. Farmers around the pat are also left landless for agricultural practices.

On World Environment Day event, June 05, 2014 at Langolshabi, community leaders expressed concern over degradation of Loktak pat.

- *Diversion of water from Loktak pat in the canal, lead to diversion of fish, and further expansion of Phumdis (floating vegetation mass)*
- *The lake has become like a dustbin as most rivers flowing into the lake bring in garbage and sewage along*
- *To conserve Loktak pat, removal of Ithai Barrage is a must*
- *Invasive fodder that arrived with imported grains have also affected the livestock*
- *Water is no longer safe to drink – seepage of pesticides/fertilizers into the pat is one of the reason*
- *Varieties of local fish are already extinct*
- *Displacement of local people is an ongoing process.*
- *People must come together and need to raise voice.*

## **TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENTAL WOE BETIDE**

Any development will be a sham growth if government or people in power will not include the interest and progress of its local inhabitants. Raped and marred with projects in the name of development, is Loktak pat. Its inhabitants had been victims of displacement, and deprivation of traditional livelihood. Development always has direct impact on environment. Understanding the village perception is important for any development process. Despite various development programmes taken up for welfare of Loktak ecosystem, the ultimate developmental plans/schemes have not benefitted its local populace, and socioeconomic conditions of the fishers are still poor in terms of basic amenities like health, education, electricity et al.

Article 5 of the WTO (World Tourism Organization) - Global Code of Ethics states that local populations should be associated with tourism activities and share equitably in the economic, social and cultural benefits they generate, benefit from the direct and indirect jobs created by it and that tourism policies should be oriented towards improving their standard of living. The need for tourism to be sensitive to the economic, social and cultural climate of the region is echoed in the Commission on Sustainable Development principles that urges governments to advance tourism with appropriate consultation with indigenous groups at all stages including the policy formulating stage, undertake capacity building works with local communities to ensure their active participation and to maximize the benefits of tourism to local communities by developing strategies to eradicate poverty<sup>11</sup>

According to government of Manipur, Loktak pat is looked as a prospective tourists site and initiated scope for developing Eco-tourism as an alternative livelihood for communities. Tourism

<sup>11</sup> Impact Assessment Framework for Developing Countries; EQUATIONS and EED publication, August 15 2005, <http://www.equitabletourism.org/readfull.php?AID=654>



accommodation units under the Directorate of Tourism have been announced for privatization while some are already privatized like the one at Sendra hillock. A resort has already come-up at Sendra, and another star category hotel in one of the islands of Loktak is under construction.

The fate of both Loktak and its communities has become increasingly uncertain with new tourism related 'development' ventures. The advent of private investors in tourism operation in the area, development of tourism infrastructures and activities are clearly visible. Introduction of water-adventure sports at Takmu, ropeway project between Sendra and Thanga (twin islands within the lake), and recently conceived mega project – 'Integrated Cable-Car, Ropeway and Lakeside Development, Loktak Lake' to name a few, aims to promote wide scale tourism activity in Loktak area and generate large revenue.

The fishing community whose livelihood depends on fishing is concerned that the introduction of motorboats will have negative repercussion on the locals and their livelihoods, disconnecting their source of livelihoods and transportation, disturb aquatic life, impede movement of fish, and destroy varieties of edible plants. Local wooden canoes that are traditionally used for commuting, fishing, and these days catering visitors for boat-rides will be impaired. And spillage of oil (from motor-boatvvs) will further pollute the already polluted waters.

But the idea of forced household evictions to give way for various tourism projects is a wrong concept. The role of community in tourism prospects must be transparent, and equitable benefit sharing must be the norm. Tourism ventures around Loktak will eventually deteriorate the conditions of the pat, and there are factors that will impact lives of local inhabitants such as –

- *Tourism infrastructure is given prime attention, ignoring local people's distress, cultural heritage, traditional livelihoods, land-ownership et al*
- *All projects are in line with PPP model with no*

*clear ways of helping the people of Loktak*

- *There has been no public consultation in any of the developing tourism projects*
- *No community participation or involvement of communities in the projects*
- *Tourism earnings will not reach communities as the benefit will be shared between government and private entrepreneurs*
- *People are unaware of changes of tourism development. But they are witness to the tourism infrastructures in their areas.*

If government of Manipur envisages protection and development of/around pat, they must look at ways to work closely with local people. At a village set up, attention must be given on more awareness and meetings with communities. Involvement of local communities is very crucial, and decision-making must be conducted along with them.

We cannot deprive the communities of their livelihood support. When we vision additional livelihood options for communities, we need to visualize how people will benefit from the venture. Longevity or short-lived of Loktak ecosystems, depends on age-old conservation ways of people. The people of Loktak know the Lake more closely, and we need to consider their traditional pool of knowledge for conservation to be effective.

There is urgency for conservation initiatives as immediate attention to safeguard Loktak pat, and eco-tourism prospects need to take backseat. Protection of local peoples' rights, preservation of their cultural/traditional practices, and conservation of its habitat had been affected in the development process. It is here we need to include local inhabitants and their traditional know-how; without their support conservation of Loktak will be incomplete.

The government's outlook of tourism as a metaphor for development is a myth. Loktak pat is an identity for Meitei peoples. There is an inherent need to bring equilibrium for any development

to be beneficial for all. Thus, Loktak must be conserved, and its people must be given their due rights to live with dignity. At the moment, there is absolute lack of communication between government of Manipur, and peoples of Loktak (as elsewhere where such private-government partnership projects are lined up). At this stage, we need a structural tourism policy that will look into / cover the needs / rights of local populace.

# 4

## *Golf tourism at Nongmaiching: Eco-tourism as they say it!*

*Soiraism Devajani*<sup>12</sup>

The growth of niche tourism development has given rise to development of golf tourism as a niche tourism product. Manipur government too, in the run for rapid tourism development is taking up an 18-hole golf course project worth Rs. 98.50 crores at Nongmaiching to promote golf tourism.

Nongmaiching range is a horse-shoe shaped hill range located at Imphal East district. The culmination of Chingkheiching hill range marks the beginning of Nongmaiching that stretches till Irilbung area, at the fringe of a reserve forest; dense vegetation with a variety of flora and fauna endemic to the region. As the name suggests *Nong* – Rain, *Mai* – facade and *Ching* – hill meaning rain-facade-hill. The hill top touching the sky is trailed by gradual hill slopes that end in lush paddy fields. Sudden downpour and year-long moderate climate is a blessing for this area. Majority of the hill range comes under forest area. Its foothills retain its abundance of natural beauty including large water-bodies. This fascinating area located not far away from the chaotic Imphal city makes it wanderlust for nature lovers. Nongmaiching, also called as Baruni hills (Barun or Baruni for the rain of gods of Hindus) occupies cultural significance to the traditional Sanamahi religion as well as vaisnavism. *Wakha* is another spot in the Nongmaiching area where adventure sports: hang gliding, paragliding and parasailing are taken-up seasonally.

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### **18-HOLE GOLF COURSE PROJECT AT NONGMAICHING**

It has been around a decade of pursuing golf tourism development at Nongmaiching by the Government. It was in September 2005 that a Detailed Project Report (DPR) for ‘Tourism Destination Development at Nongmaiching’ was prepared by India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) for the Directorate of Tourism, Manipur. Government of Manipur had plans for construction of an ecotourism model village with 31 other recreational facilities including a golf course at Nongmaiching, under the Project. The ‘Tourism Destination Development at Nongmaiching’ project with an estimated project cost of Rs. 57.34 crores covering 200 acres was considered a dream project during that time. Some of the locals who supported the project perceived of local area development in terms of creation of direct and indirect jobs as well as modernization of the area through the golf tourism project. The locals of the area mainly constitute of farmers, auto-rickshaw drivers, small scale retail shop owners and weavers. The DPR when sent to Union Ministry of Tourism didn’t get approved due to certain constraints from the Ministry’s side. The State received blame of being careless and not adhering to the guidelines of the Ministry in preparing the DPR. As a result, the DPR was revised and ultimately broken down into phases.

Following this, the 1<sup>st</sup> phase was approved in the same year and the estimated cost of that phase of the project i.e. Rs. 345.29 lakhs were sanctioned by the Centre. The first phase was

to develop an eco-park for an area of 35 acres. Its foundation stone was laid on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2006 at Tharoishibi Lok of Nongmaiching along Porompat-Nongmaiching Road. The project spot lies east of Top Makha Leikai, at the immediate western fringe of Nongmaiching range. In the subsequent phases of the DPR, many other components of ecotourism and an 18-hole golf course which was in the earlier DPR (which got rejected) was to be added.

Even though sanction for the 1<sup>st</sup> phase was issued by the Government of India and its foundation stone was laid, a lot more needed to be done by the State Government in order to effect the project. The required forest land was to be transferred including the acquisition of contiguous area for construction which could be done in a non-forest area. The transfer needed to be effected on an urgent basis along with the construction of a proper approach road.

The first order for land acquisition for the development of an eco-park was passed around 2006-07; the farmers were unaware until the notification was out in 2009. The government acquired prime agricultural land measuring 30.70 acres to meet the 35 acres of total land requirement for development of the said eco-tourism park. 37 farmers of Top Makha Leikai had to give away their land reluctantly, for they knew that the monetary pay-outs by the Government in lieu of their lands could never compensate with the loss brought by the acquisition. Their livelihood was snatched by the acquisition. Of the 37 affected farmers, majority had raised concerns regarding the compensation rate as the monetary compensation was calculated based on the land rate that was fixed during the last official land survey conducted in 1961. This was totally unfair and unacceptable to the farmers. Regarding this, a case was registered by the farmers against the State Government.

Those who gave away their land unwillingly solaced themselves with the hope that their land shall be utilised for the overall area development

viz., infrastructure, employment and improvement in economy. As the project developers says, the project will bring the State revenue, improve State economy, generate income, solve unemployment issues, area development, preserve environment & ecology and bring peace to the conflict in the State by undertaking the project. To the dismay of the sacrifices of the farmers, the development work was delayed year by year by ITDC, the reason being that "all its engineers were engaged in construction work for the Commonwealth Game in New Delhi, and as such it could not provide man-power for the Park works". Later on, the work was eventually handed over to State Government and Manipur Development Society (MDS) was entrusted to continue with implementation of the project. The series of events that have unfolded for almost a decade with regards to 'Tourism Destination Development at Nongmaiching' nowhere prove any amount of seriousness of the State Government's thrust towards eco-tourism development at Nongmaiching.

There are contradictions regarding the current status of the project. One report from Tourism Department says the project is 'completed but not inaugurated as on June, 2014'. Another report generated on October, 2014 by the same department says that the no? stage of the project will soon be completed. These reports are only on paper as the reality on the ground gives a different story. One concrete structure seemingly an office building with two waiting rooms in between lush green paddy fields, inside the compound wall fencing could be the only structures sighted in the entire land demarcated for the park. Along with it, the construction of cemented pathway inside the fencing and the approach for the park can be seen taken up gradually. The affected farmers continue paddy cultivation in those fields with the belief that lands should never be left unused. Locals and the affected farmers have no information on progress or actual works that will be taken up in the area.

The already affected farmers pleaded with the government to advance the development works and make the ecotourism park operational soon to fulfill the government's statements (employment generation and area development to be precise) made while procuring the agricultural lands for the said project. This plea does not indicate that the farmers are for the golf course, but since their lands are already acquired, they wanted the projects to complete.

Meanwhile, the local people and the fateful farmers are left in an ambiguous atmosphere throughout the process of tourism development that is taking place in the area. A new development at this site is the laying of foundation stone for Institute of Hotel Management & Catering Technology (IHMCT) at Nongmaiching in March 2014 by the Secretary of Tourism, Government of India. Farmers are unconvinced with the government's decision on the site selection of IHMCT at Nongmaiching. At the same time, the tender for construction and development of an 18-hole golf course at Nongmaiching through Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) mode was floated by the State government. The golf course is to cover a total area of 160-190 acres approx. with an indicative project cost of Rs. 98.50 crores. Out of the total land requirement of the golf course, presently available government land (present eco-tourism park) is 35 acres, available forest land is 30 acres approx. and another 100 acres approx. shall have to be procured. The 18-hole golf course project is being taken-up by the State government through PPP mode on Build, Operate and Transfer basis. Farmers have protested to acquisition of agricultural lands to meet the land requirement for the golf course project in times. Government, totally neglecting the voice of the people of the area continues with the project. The project reflects a total disconnect between the government's decision and awareness of the local community about the project.

## **MANIPUR AND GOLFING**

The 1<sup>st</sup> golf course in Manipur was established at Kangla with 9 holes while the 2<sup>nd</sup> is at Leimakhong, where the layout and coaching is done. The 3<sup>rd</sup> is a 9-hole golf course at Mantripukhri popularly called 'Mantripukhri Greens'. Another one is a mini training four-hole golf course at Khuman Lampak Sports Complex where the Manipur Golf Association had its office that was later shifted to Lamphelpat Officers Club.

In Manipur, golf is played by an exclusive few and golf courses are developed in militarized zones probably due to the conflict situation of Manipur and the security concerns for those few. They remain confined with limited facilities. As such, these golf enthusiasts have applauded the initiative of the Government for the Golf course project at Nongmaiching that has been announced by the Government on several occasions since 2005, since the inception of the DPR by ITDC as part of tourism destination development. They look forward to the project as they expect a brand new vast green pasture and their golf clubs, golf balls and tees with other golfing accessories and equipment to indulge in their leisure.

## **ECOTOURISM AT NONGMAICHING**

The prevalent nature of Nongmaiching area: its natural beauty, cultural significance, environment and proximity of Nongmaiching from Imphal are opportunities for tourism, which needs no artificial dev. such as golf tourism. The lands procured for golf tourism development lies at the foot of its hill, they are resourceful agricultural lands and there are also spots of religious significance that has to be conserved. Study reports on golf tourism has shown that golf course developed on resourceful lands has resulted into devastation. There is loss of biodiversity, deterioration of water bodies through use of fertilizers, contaminate both the air and water. A golf course is a heavy user of water for irrigation leading to scarcity of water for con-

sumption by local inhabitants, it uses biocides to maintain the greenness of the 'greens', control insects, fungicides and weeds. The site identified for golf course project consists of forest lands, resourceful agricultural lands that are under cultivation, sacred groves worshipped by the local people. Adjoining to this project site are privately owned fish farms, paddy fields, a school, chives and other vegetable farms extended to several households. Time and again, studies and researches have concluded that impacts of golf course developed on resourceful agricultural and forests lands have proven destructive and futile. It is indeed worrying to consider the costs that the local people, farmers and the lands including forest area would have to forfeit for the 18-hole golf course project at Nongmaiching.

Moreover, the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of the project has already brought damage in the form of conflict besides other adverse impacts. There exist conflicts in land acquisition by the Government for the project. The affected people whose lands were acquired for the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of the project have realised the loss of taking compensation for their agricultural land. The farmers have apparently become rickshaw/ local taxi drivers, labourers, some have migrated and very few have pursued other alternatives as they have become landless. Majority of them have reported negligible income and are finding it hard to sustain a livelihood. There is social displacement of the local people. The farmers have, in turn, become members of an organisation that works for the conservation of agricultural lands for long term benefits. They now stand strongly against the recent government's decision for acquisition of another 100 acres (approx.) of agricultural land for the upcoming 18-hole golf course project. Further, the present thrust on golf-tourism at Nongmaiching remains questionable as to who is benefiting from all the tourism development and at what cost? The exclusive golfers of the State continue to insist upon the government to implement the 18-hole golf course project

at the earliest. They do so for their personal satisfaction, to show their passion for golfing and to portray an elitist & exclusive lifestyle. The opportunist private parties' push for development of golf tourism taking into account the economic benefit they would receive from it. A golf enthusiast has to spend substantially on golf equipment alone. There is a high cost incurred in the practice of golf that often results in golfing to be an elitist sport. Golfing attracts the high-spending social groups and individuals as tourists thereby claiming a greater contribution to the economy. The money generated from golfing can be profitable to its developers and this could be the prime factor for developing a golf course at Nongmaiching through PPP mode. The project implies a top-down approach that often ends with concentration of tourism benefits at the top level at the cost of local people and resources.

It is as well imperative that State will receive certain amount as revenue as the project is to be taken up in the PPP mode and that the private firm/ project developers will be the primary beneficiary of the economic returns out of the activities from the project. Besides, satisfying the needs and wants of these preferred few, the golf-course project does little for the local people especially the affected farmers. The 18-hole golf course carries scope for trickle-down benefit of the monetary gains where the local inhabitants of Nongmaiching lies at the lowermost layers.

Regarding new job creations out of golf tourism, the type of new jobs that are to be created and the aptness towards those new jobs with the people in Manipur, especially the locals of Nongmaiching whose primary livelihood activity is farming and fishing, continues to be uncertain. With the amount of risk of financial leakage, the high cost of maintenance incurred in golf tourism and its adverse impacts on natural environment, the entire effort to develop a golf course on the resourceful agricultural and forest land of Nongmaiching is not significant. Apart

from State revenue generation and benefiting corporate(s) primarily, the other objectives for development of golf course at Nongmaiching as stated by the Government is skeptical.

The inclusion of 18-hole Golf-course project in the subsequent phase of the Destination Development project at Nongmaiching overlooks the obligatory assessments of the natural environment, social, plus human rights issues – particularly those of land ownership of the area, tourism benefit sharing and the current state of conflict in Manipur. Considering the likely impact on ecology of the area, loss of livelihood, unfair compensation deal, the 18-hole golf course is an unwanted development, that is in no way going to benefit its local populace, nor the place that is already so rich. If golf tourism has to be promoted in Manipur, then than better option could be to develop the existing golf courses that remain militarized.

The enormous resources that are predominant at the site of 18-hole golf-course project should be conserved. The spot provides scope for more sustainable and responsible forms of tourism to substitute golf tourism. If at all, the government wants to bring prosperity for the people at Nongmaiching then the local community must be involved right from the decision-making task to every process of tourism development. The time has perhaps come to re-think golf tourism at Nongmaiching.

# 5

## *Tourism and Human Rights: Manipur Perspective*

*Jinine Laishramcha*

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There have been loud noises for about 30 years that tourism and its associate activities in Manipur will bring benefits to the peoples and will boost economic development in the state. However there also emerge questions on the adverse impacts on human rights, livelihood and the environment raising the concerns for the need of rational policy and monitoring of tourism development.

Here, the issue of human rights comes along, since the role and responsibility of government is primary and paramount. It involves a notion of a contractual condition between the government and its citizens that is encoded in the Constitution and other legal instruments for protection and deliverance.

Extending a bit further to the title theme; Human Rights are something we cannot live without. They are of life, liberty, equality and dignity, which the government solemnly promised us in the Constitution. Only by virtue of being human, we all are equal in dignity and rights, each of us is worthy of being honoured and living with full enjoyment of life, no matter how one's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status are distinct. These rights are advocated on the basis of three fundamental building blocks - *universality, democracy and guarantee*.

*Universality* says we all are equal in dignity and rights irrespective of race, religion, creed, language, or geographical condition. While *democracy* implies that human rights and related legal instruments should be of the consent and

the mandate of the people, *guarantee* fixes the obligation that human rights are given by the government; so, the main responsibility of the protection should be of the government.

One emerging concern about the guarantee that is relevant to tourism and it's so called developmental work is the role of the State in extending equal economic opportunity and participation, and dealing with exploitation, violations by private bodies and companies. The Government is accountable for the acts of perpetration by the private bodies since usually the government is the virtual authority laying down the policy and regulation under which the private bodies operate.

The rights regarding the equal economic opportunity and participation are codified specifically in the International Bill of Human Rights namely - Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966, (and Civil and Political Rights 1966). The bill enumerated some rights related to work - equal pay for equal work; the right to form and join trade unions; right to an adequate standard of living. However, the rights which in some ways associated with tourism and development are enumerated in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In the Declaration, Articles 10, 21, 23, 26, 27 and 28 mentioned - rights not to be evicted forcibly, not to be discriminated; right to participation, prioritize, strategize the development; right to free, prior and informed consent; right to land and resources; right to preserve and protect the environment,



and right to proper remedies.

Especially in the context of Manipur Article 30 is important which articulates that, military activities shall not take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples, unless justified by a relevant public interest or otherwise freely agreed with or requested by the indigenous peoples concerned.

Again, a fundamental frame of reference for responsible and sustainable tourism is the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, which is a comprehensive set of principles designed to guide key-players in tourism development. Addressed to governments, the travel industry, communities and tourists alike, it aims to help maximise the sector's benefits while minimising its potentially negative impact on the environment, cultural heritage and societies across the globe.

Adopted in 1999 by the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organisation, its acknowledgement by the United Nations two years later expressly encouraged UNWTO to promote the effective follow-up of its provisions. Although not legally binding, the Code features a voluntary implementation mechanism through its recognition of the role of the World Committee on Tourism Ethics, to which stakeholders may refer matters concerning the application and interpretation of the document.

The Code's 10 principles cover the economic, social, cultural and environmental components of travel and tourism:

*Article 1: Tourism's contribution to mutual understanding and respect between people and societies.*

*Article 2: Tourism as a vehicle for individual and collective fulfilment.*

*Article 3: Tourism, a factor of sustainable development.*

*Article 4: Tourism, a user of the cultural heritage of mankind and contributor to its enhancement.*

*Article 5: Tourism, a beneficial activity for host countries and communities.*

*Article 6: Obligations of stakeholders in tourism development.*

*Article 7: Right to tourism.*

*Article 8: Liberty of tourist movements.*

*Article 9: Rights of the workers and entrepreneurs in the tourism industry.*

*Article 10: Implementation of the principles of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*

## UN-EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Many new wonderful English words are seen blooming in the garden of the corporate media. A recent one, is the theory of Trickle-down Economics. There have been frequent extensive propaganda and policy, carefully hiding the crafty facet of looting other resources. This certain theory itself is glorified in the Manipur Tourism Policy 2014 attempting to convince and fool the people of Manipur in tourism undertaking. How we are told about this system is that, benefit comes first pouring to the pockets of the few who are sitting on top of the structure and after filling their pockets, then eventually there will be small overflow that will trickle down to larger number of people in lower part of the system. The privatization of Sendra tourist spot, operation of motorboat service in the Loktak, and proposed installation of cable car in Thanga Karang will share economic benefit with community is merely an elaborate charade. The intentions of such plans are designed to accumulate wealth for few. The work generally robs communities of their common resources and tends to devastate an already deteriorated natural environment. Even in the sector of homestay which appears as a way to participation of communities in receiving benefits, it is not so. The middle men and tourist agents hijack the lion share of the business.

## LAND GRAB

On 20 May 2013, about 500 residents who had been residing for decades were evicted from Kabo Leikai/Naga River Colony, Imphal to clear the 1.5 acreland for the construction of a five-

star hotel. The demolition work uprooted 35 houses; affected 144 school going children, 2 residents died and 1 woman went insane. Remedies for the affected people were not taken – there was no compensation given nor any support for resettlement and rehabilitation. This was a venture of the Government in collusion with a private party in the name of development under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model.

Usually airports are paved and enclosed in good distance away from residential areas. This however is not the case of the Imphal Tulihal Airport, which is situated in close proximity to the crowded capital town. The Government of Manipur should have shifted this misallocated airport away from Imphal city to an appropriate space. On the contrary, it is being expanded causing displacement of thousands of people.

After having acquired 700 acres of land since early 2011 for the airport expansion, the government again notified to grab another 116 acres from the surrounding areas. The eviction threat traumatized about 120 households of Ningombam Awang Leikai and Ningombam Atom Leikai around the airport. Due to the threat, about half of the total households have shifted to other places on their own initiative without receiving proper compensation and rehabilitation and resettlement assistance. On 28 September 2014, another eviction order was served to the remaining half who could not afford relocation. The order threatened the families to quit their homesteads within a week's time.

Now, the challenge is being aggravated with the coming of BJP's government – developmental enthusiast. The dilutions of legislations regarding the Environmental Protection, Forest Rights and Land Acquisition are on. The amendment of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 gives the Government enormous powers to acquire land without the landholders' and Gram Sabha consent for projects involving defence and military production,

village infrastructure development, village housing and electrification, industrial corridors and infrastructure projects including those taken up under Public-Private Partnership (PPP) mode.

### LOKTAK HOT-SPOT BURN

One tourism related discrimination by Indian Government and its provincial government is of the Loktak Lake.

First, by implementing the Loktak Protection Act 2006, a Manipur Government establishment called Loktak Development Authority (LDA), using state police forces, burnt and demolished over 500 huts, rendering more than 3000 members of the fishing communities homeless. The demolition project and *phum* (floating biomass) clearing mission reportedly spent Rs 374 crores, funded by the Planning Commission through a controversial pipeline called mystical K-Pro. Such action of state exhibits a glaring unintelligible dedication and self-contradiction simply because they destroyed the *phum* and the huts, at the same time they imply the *phums* and the huts are the natural beauty and values of the lake which attracts tourists. Authorities earmarked an amount of Rs 40,000 each towards compensating some victims, which is only a meagre amount to their loss that will stretch to long term suffering.

Second, there were scenes of small crowds of people at the Loktak in the eastern outskirts of Phubala village which was marked as a tourist spot. Some twenty-thirty years ago, there was a season every year when many a family member would come down every afternoon to gather basketfuls of Heikak (water chestnut). Heikak was a substitution for rice in those days and Yenna-Yetli (leaves of water chestnut) was the vegetable available in abundance. If Ithai Barrage was not built, the Heikak, Yetna-Yetli and that afternoon scenes might have been good for both, tourism promotion and livelihood for the communities.

Third, Construction work at Loktak started

in 1971 under the Ministry of Irrigation and Power. After six years, it was handed over to the National Hydro Electric Power Corporation (NHPC). The project was commissioned in 1983. The Government attempted to generate 105 MW power, installing three 35 MW unit engines. To increase the water level, the Ithai Barrage was built. This blocked the natural drainage of the Loktak and brought the paddy fields under water. There are over 10,000 families in and around Loktak losing over 60,000 hectares of paddy fields.

In those days' people were talking about Indira Gandhi's promise of free electricity to Manipur out of Loktak (multipurpose) Hydro Electric Project. Dispute and controversy continue over the monetary compensation for submerged lands. The project and policy have simply been torturing Loktak so brutally; she is dying so helplessly along with precious indigenous fishes and vegetables. Despite all these odds and the government's good propaganda, the Loktak Project produced more or less 35 MW. Out of this about 24 MW, (approx 65%) of the project's power output is sold by NHPC to Nagaland, Assam, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Tripura. Manipur needs about 170 MW but gets only 11 MW. In fact, the NHPC has already earned profits out of the tragedy of Loktak and the plight of its dependent community.

### **MILITARIZATION**

Tourism and its associated undertaking will take the advantage of prolonged militarization in Manipur through the imposition of draconian military legislation – AFSPA and the strong impunity that has allowed perpetrators go scot-free. The human rights violation by the security forces are mainly of civil and political rights which include: the right to life, liberty, and security of person; freedom from slavery and torture; equality before the law; protection against arbitrary arrests, detention or exile; the right to a fair trial; right to own property. The fear is, in the name

of protection of tourists and keeping business in an environment of good law and order, the deployment of security forces in about 350 military stations will remain. It includes the army and paramilitary forces drawn from the 59<sup>th</sup> Mountain Brigade, Rajput Regiment, Raj Rifles, 73<sup>rd</sup> Mountain Brigade, Garwah Rifles, Gorkha Rifles, Grenadiers, 44<sup>th</sup> Mountain Brigade, Sikh Light Regiment, Madras Regiment, Assam Rifles, 57<sup>th</sup> Mountain Artillery, Maratha Light Infantry, among others. In addition, there are 10,050 Village Defence Force, about 10,000 Manipur Police including 1,800 Commandos, and about 15,000 Indian Reserved Battalion and Manipur Rifles.

The security personnel have already been in public's bad book on many occasions – they have frequently been involved in the organised crime nexus with some underground elements, of drug and armed smugglers, kidnapping, human trafficking, rape and robbery. The same habit may increase as the military authority always has the upper hand over civil administration and corruption has been structured in every segment of government and society.

### **CONCLUSION**

Through the experience from the other parts of the world, we have learned other critical challenges of tourism associated with human rights issues like child rights, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and damage to the culture and heritage. The same may also be predicted for Manipur. To combat the impending threat and to protect our human rights, a concerted effort and consistent attention should always come from the civil societies, NGOs and the media. The situation calls for the continuous monitoring, advocacy and educating of the public so as to pressurise the government/ State to uphold our rights. There is a need to make noises for the deliverance.

# 6

## *Ecotourism Society of India and Government of Manipur's Conclave on Tourism in Manipur: A Perspective*

*-North East Peoples Alliance, Equations, Indigenous Perspectives & People's Campaign for Resurgent Manipur*

### **THE ECOTOURISM SOCIETY OF INDIA**

Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) was formed as a non-profit organisation to promote environmentally responsible and sustainable practices in the tourism industry spearheaded by eminent professionals from the tourism industry as well as Environmentalists in 2008. ESOI is expected to work closely with Central and State Government bodies responsible for 'Sustainable Tourism', as well as network with like-minded regional / State players across the country to facilitate and support synergy of policies, initiatives and activities at the national and State level by spreading awareness and educate tourism service providers as well as local govt. officials on the urgent need to ensure perpetually sustainable tourism practices.

Contrary to what it claims, in many of their series of workshops, it has not made any attempts to include any or connect with unions/ associations of the informal sector in tourism destinations nor with communities living in and around the ecotourism destinations. An illustrative case is the 2-day International Conference on Sustainable Tourism, 2013 conducted by ESOI in collaboration with the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation where key international players were invited. At this conference, EQUATIONS challenged the Society about the non-representation of the informal sector and people impacted by tourism, yet ESOI remains unaccountable for the same.

A similar cloud of doubt looms over this Conclave which is happening for the first time in India where different industry operators of

Manipur will apparently converge. Tourism in Manipur and North East is in a nascent state but rapidly being pushed as an industry from several quarters, and that is the reason why there is an urgency in taking steps to involve the people in coming up with Tourism Policy that works for all. The disconnect between the conclave and the people living in the potential tourism destinations of the state is felt as evident with the non-inclusion of civil societies and those 'impacted' by tourism. The vested interest behind this conclave is questioned. Does it even matter to the Society and the State what these people and communities have to say about tourism?

### **TOURISM TREND IN MANIPUR**

Recent trend in Manipur needs some careful look to understand the kind of tourism that is unfolding like the removal of permit regimes, taking up various tourism projects with varied themes, infrastructure development, etc. There seem to be no clear understanding on what kind of tourism the state will pursue. Will mass tourism or a mix with other forms will benefit or will be more destructive. A discourse is much needed.

To further contextualize the issue, the Disturbed Area status with the implementation of AFSPA and the wide prevalence of human rights abuses in Manipur makes a contradictory picture for the State and battered people to be showcased as a tourist destination.

Impacts of tourism projects taken up by the State in the last few years have taken a toll on

the local dwellers. Mention may be made about the expansion of a State government run hotel by forcefully evicting Naga River Colony. The hotel was 'handed' over to a private party soon after the eviction. Along with this, State government run 'Sendra Tourist Home' (located in the vicinity of the Loktak Lake) was also transferred to the same owners. It is also unfortunate that the people living in and around the Lake- like Thanga or Karang are not encouraged, trained and supported for home-stays (community tourism) where they can become direct beneficiaries rather than some trickling effect. This happened due to 'Tourism Development through PPP model' where private parties are considered based on their financial capabilities.

Along with it, projects on Rural Tourism Development also failed miserably. While the Ministry of tourism has put 'Rural Tourism Development' as a priority in its 12th 5-year plan, the tourism planners of our State doesn't seem much aware that it has certain characteristics, most significantly- community participation and to benefit the host primarily. Likewise, development of tourism project with other tourism themes should satisfy their themes and the purpose.

There is also no trace of tourism education system and research on tourism in our State. Lack of tourism awareness and sensitivity is the result of such neglect from the past.

## **TOURISM POLICY**

A proper State Tourism policy is expected by the people as the recent tourism development trend in Manipur seems to follow what has been stated in the Draft Tourism Policy of 2011. It is a vague document without a clear objective of quality tourism which also lacks public participation for larger community interest. It is crucial time that tourism planners and developers start to orient tourism development towards quality tourism, the kind of tourism which implies responsible, inclusive, just and sustainable tourism for long term gain. Tourism industry should be devel-

oped in our State, but not just to earn revenue, foreign exchange, employment generation but also to bring an overall development of the State through conservation, preservation and revival of our indigenous heritage.

We collectively should define what type of tourism development is Manipur looking forward to, so that necessary measures could be taken up to mitigate the possible negative impacts of tourism development.

## **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. Such conclave/seminars must be composite and inclusive.*
- 2. The Manipur Tourism Policy must be shared for wider consultation with all stakeholders for finalization in order to give a sense of direction.*
- 3. Tourism must be just, inclusive, democratic and equitable.*
- 4. Introduction of tourism education system and initiate schemes to encourage research and development in tourism related aspects.*
- 5. Make tourism impact assessment (TIA) compulsory prior to any tourism development.*
- 6. Regulation and guidelines to evaluate and monitor tourism projects for planned and controlled tourism development.*

# 7

## *Home Stays: The only viable option for Shirui tourism*

*Sothing Shimray<sup>13</sup>*

Staying close with nature and more or less with sparse population the concept of modern tourism was not in<sup>13</sup> the mind of the indigenous people in the past. However, the concept of village tourism, a practice whereby the visitors stay along with the family, was an intrinsic part of the indigenous people. Among the Tangkhul Naga tribe of Ukhrul District the culture of village tourism known as 'Ram Khayao' was an essential part of its culture. The popularity of village tourism, however, died with the dawn of modernity and a shift from agrarian based society to capital based economy. Of late the concept of village tourism as practiced in the past has become just another past feature of indigenous culture with its failure to link the traditional practices with modern culture.

Ukhrul District with its rich culture and naturally endowed landscape is an ideal place for cultural and ecotourism. The District, predominantly inhabited by Tangkhul Naga tribe, is also known as the land of festivals due to the celebration of festivals from different villages round the year. Apart from the Tangkhul Naga tribe, pockets of the Kuki tribe and Nepali settlements are found in the District. Being located at the easternmost part of Manipur, the District is also poignantly referred to as 'land of the rising sun'. Ukhrul town is the District Headquarter. It is linked with the state capital Imphal at a distance of 84 kilometres (two and half hours' drive) on NH 150.

Ukhrul, is best known for the enchanting Shirui peak and the world famous Shirui Lily, the state flower of Manipur. The village, Shirui, is located 12 kilometres from Ukhrul town.

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<sup>13</sup> Sothing Shimray is a Ukhrul Based Journalist.

### **POSSIBILITIES**

Situated at a height of 2,835 metres, the Shirui peak offers a panoramic view of the surrounding areas including Ukhrul town. Every year during summer, thousands of domestic tourists climb the peak to enjoy the view and stay close to nature, or even to just to get a glimpse of the world famous Shirui lily found on the upper reaches of this hill. The Shirui lily, scientifically called *Lilium Mclinea Seally*, was discovered by a British botanist Frank Kingdon Ward in 1946. The lily, locally called Kashong Timrawon, has the distinction of growing only on this particular hill and nowhere else in the world. The lily was officially declared as the State Flower of Manipur in 1989. The Postal Department of the Government of India brought out a postage stamp in 2002 as a tribute to the beauty and uniqueness of the lily. The peak season of its bloom is May 15 to June 5. The height of the plant is 1–3 feet (0.30–0.91 m) and has one to seven flowers per plant. The weeklong Shirui Lily Festival is celebrated simultaneously, at Shirui village and Ukhrul town during the month of May every year. A national level football tournament known as Shirui Lily Football Meet is held every year at Ukhrul town during the months of October and November to boost sports tourism as well in the District.

Shirui hill with its vast forest area is also a noted place for bird watching and an ideal place for eco-tourism. This sub-tropical forest is the habitat of many endangered species like tragopan blythii, pangolin, hooting monkey, porcupine, and salamander among others. During winter,

it is also a sanctuary for migratory birds from Siberia. The forest is also endowed with different medicinal plants and valued trees, including different species of orchids and rhododendrons. To encourage tourism, the Manipur government had proposed 100 square kilometres surrounding the Shirui hill to be developed as a National Park in 1998. However, it was rejected by the local people because of a lack of clarity from the government in its proposal which failed to factor in the land holding system that was central to their livelihood.

Apart from the nature endowed attractions, the renowned performance of the 'virgin dance' locally called 'La Khanganui' of Ukhrul during February, the celebration of Luita festival of Longpi (Seed Sowing festival) and the neighbouring villages during January and February, fairs of Hungpung during Dhareo festival in October, week-long celebration of Yarra (Feasts of Peer Groups) in all Tangkhul villages during the spring season, the archaeological cave site of Khangkhui are some of the added attractions for tourists.

### **STATUS AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVE OF TOURISM**

The spaces of engagement between the local communities and tourism has invariably been ignored due to adequate understanding of tourism among the villagers and lack of a practical tourism policy of the state government. While the idea of tourism as a potential income generating industry is what has enthused the local populace they however seem to have failed in coming up with any tangible outcome, particularly in the absence of an empirical understanding beyond the lily and its preservation. Apart from the naturally endowed landscape, there is also the potential for the local people to use their skills in developing souvenirs or mementoes that the tourist can buy. The only thing that tourists go back with is what they click with their camera and the abstract picturesque memories of the

landscape and of the Shirui lily. Shirui with a population of one thousand has practically no trained person who has worked in the tourism industry. This is a major setback for the development and promotion of tourism in the village. Aside from the Shirui Lily Week, there are no initiatives to attract tourists and villagers naively believe that tourists would queue up to visit the village. This helplessness is a sign of over-dependence on the government to improve their village and its tourism potential.

### **GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE, A MERE LIP SERVICE**

Tourism was accorded industry status in Manipur in 1987 and series of plans have been initiated to make tangible long term future gains. The State government has a targeted plan for the development of human resource, infrastructure viz. hotels & restaurants, places of interest, publicity and marketing as a pre-condition for the development of the tourism in Manipur. From the financial aspect, funds have also been invested for the development of tourism in Manipur. The annual budget of the State and central government has a sizeable fund earmarked for tourism. However, the initiative seemingly remains just a mirage, with no tangible result or success due to absence of realistic implementation. Among others, it is found that there is a palpable absence of co-ordination between Tourism Department and other departments including the District administration, local bodies' viz. Autonomous District Councils, Village Councils and civil society organizations. The State government identified Ukhrul District for rural tourism with a plan to support home stays and develop community-based tourism. However, this remains a mere plan, as the Manipur Tourism Department failed to coordinate with local bodies. Effective methodology needs to be evolved and implemented to forge co-ordination of various departments and organizations directly and indirectly associated with tourism.

In Ukhrul District, absence of a District Planning Board is one main factor which has caused stagnation of overall development as well as that of tourism. It was found that even the District administration does not have a concrete list of places which have tourism potential thereby making the tourism policy of the government a mockery.

Ukhrul District virtually does not have any trained tourist guides. Consequently, there is no one to satisfy the inquisitiveness of tourists when they arrive at places of tourist interest. The Department of Tourism's move to train tourist guides did not yield good result as the benefit seldom reaches the villagers. Those who got the opportunity to undertake the training left the profession midway, as they found it to be less paying because of the poor inflow of tourists to the District.

There is also an absence of financial and other incentives offered by the government. Benefits must reach all people, it needs to move beyond the district headquarters.

Even though the Manipur government takes due cognizance of Shirui as a potential tourist destination, nothing tangible has been done for the improvement of Shirui as a resourceful tourist destination site of the state. Shirui has one Tourist Rest House at its foothill which was constructed under the International Fund for Agriculture Development of Ukhrul District Community Resource Management Society (UDCRMS) in co-ordination with North Eastern Council (NEC) to boost tourism for sustainable earning of the local people.

The state government's major initiative, so far, to enhance tourism at Shirui is the construction of Tourist Destination Centre, a rest house equipped with a mini shopping centre but the construction was abandoned midway. The Government has not been able to generate any revenue so far from tourism in Shirui tourism, nor have the local populace. The Government blames poor tourism growth in Ukhrul District

to the presence of militants. However, deeper research has empirically shown that the presence of militants is a cover for the numerous follies in the government's plan to enhance tourism.

Mungleng Vatheh Development Society (MVDS), a government registered society based at Shirui village, which looks after the Shirui Lily is responsible for visitors in the village but the income generated is negligible. The visitor record maintained by MVDS indicates more than a thousand domestic tourists during the lily blooming season alone every year. But the irony is that apart from Rs 10/- per head which is charged as entry fee there is no source of alternative employment that has been thought about or encouraged. In the entire village, there are about half a dozen small shops and tea stalls with nothing attractive for the tourists.

In the absence of a co-ordination system, free and independent tourists including backpackers are the most common visitors at Shirui. Prior to 2013, due to the existence of the Restricted Area Permit (RAP) whereby foreigners needed special permission to visit Manipur and some other north eastern states, the visit of international tourists were small in number. However, after the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India lifted the imposition ostensibly to boost tourism, there are records of some international tourists visiting Shirui.

#### *FOREST AND ECO-TOURISM*

*Forest will suffer much under tourism expansion. Somewhere along the middle of Cheiraoching hill a restaurant is under operation under the garb of protecting the forest. This hill range is under Langol Reserve Forest but much of this forest is already encroached. The recent one is that of Maniwood Childrens Park but operating as a restaurant. The MANIHOOD CHILDREN CLUB is operated under an Eco-Tourism Initiative of Thangmeiband Sinam Leikai JFM, Regn No. JFM/60/CFC/2014-15, Dated 8th December 2014. Conservator of Forest (Central), Government of Manipur. This Club was inaugurated by local area member of the*



*legislative assembly and forest officials on 28 Jan 2015. This means that this operation is 'legally' sanctioned by the government. As a result of this JFM activity, there are regular night parties, bon fire in the campus, waste dumping and littering by the customers. Vehicles freely come up all the way to the door step of this campus and has become noisy and polluting.*

*Can a Children Club be considered as an Eco-tourism activity? Can a JFM operate a restaurant in the guise of a Children Club as part of its eco-tourism activity? Can any activity pass off and feign as eco-tourism even to the extent of destruction of parts of forest area? JFM rules of the center as well as that of the state does not sanction such activities. Given this, Indigenous Perspectives have gone to the National Green Tribunal (NGT) early this year, seeking the court to make this illegal, clear all the illegal the structures and to also remove all other illegal encroachments from this reserve forest.*

The recent Tourism Policy of Manipur 2014 is also found to be more supportive of some sections of society, primarily the industry and not the people, as it is one that adopted a top to the bottom approach. Tourism projects are found to be most meaningful to communities when they themselves initiate the plan and are supported by the government, run on their terms and suited to their needs and priorities. But when policies and plans are developed top-down, and brought to the community only when permission or approval is sought, it makes a mockery of 'community participation & decision making'

## **TOURISM SCENARIO**

Tourism activities at Shirui peak began around 1983. Two adjoining villages - Lunghar and Ngabum lie around Shirui peak. Shirui-Kashong is a picturesque village, covered in greenery and enveloped by clouds, giving it a magical atmosphere. The cultural and traditional customs of its inhabitants fit perfectly with the landscape. But often, places that are naturally beautiful are ruined when they are discovered and visited in

large numbers by outsiders.

Village authorities, women groups, and youth clubs have been integral to their way of life. Local governance and decision-making are mostly in the hands of village authorities. The Shirui Youth Club has played a strong role throughout in reviving traditional practices. However, during the time of heightened conflict in 1964, it became non-functional. At present, there are 350 youth members, from within and outside Shirui.

Since 2000, the Shirui Youth Club has been tirelessly protecting the Shirui peak. The youth are in-charge of monitoring and maintaining the Shirui hill ranges. Among the steps that the youth club members have taken up to protect the lilies, are – checking the visitors, guarding the site as volunteers, putting up barbed-wire fencing around the site, levying a fine of Rs 50 for every lily plucked, and Rs 500 for every lily plant uprooted.

The Youth Club has been assigned with handling, registering and welcoming tourists during Shirui Lily Week festival (21-27 May). A Committee has been formed to manage Shirui Lily Week. They receive Rs 2 lakh from the Directorate of Tourism, Government of Manipur, besides local contributions, being the only other source of funding for the week-long festival. The theme of 2015's festival was "Burn Calories, not Forests". Activities during the festival include essay and painting competitions, flower show, folk song and dance exhibitions, indigenous food stalls, and pork-eating competition.

Every visitor to Shirui peak has to pay an entry fee of Rs. 10. Visitors are checked, and a deposit of Rs. 50-100 is taken for cameras, plastic bottles and packets. The hard work of the Shirui Youth Club has borne fruit and after a gap of nearly 11 years widespread flowering of the lilies can be seen again.

The resource centre at Shirui peak is the only accommodation facility that provides shelter with the ability to house 50 occupants.

## **VILLAGE TOURISM, A WAY FORWARD**

In the absence of the required infrastructure viz hotels, tourist lodges or tourist destination centres at Shirui, the District's most potential tourist site, village tourism, a synonym of Rural Tourism, is the only way to boost tourism and generate sustainable revenue. Home stays in the village in which villagers would provide local style of accommodation in their own homes or in selected places and through which tourists can experience the daily routine and rituals of the local peoples in the village and culture has huge potential. It would mean villagers operate the tourist facilities and services and receive direct monetary benefits from the tourist. The system of village tourism which is the by-product of local ingenuity is unique in a sense that it is supply driven rather than demand driven. Shirui village with a strong customary village authority, women and youth organisations has got great potential to develop the system of Village Tourism which is also an inherent part of its traditional custom. Government support is no doubt inevitable for development of village tourism in spheres which are beyond the reach of the villagers viz road, tele-communication, electricity, watch towers or other infra structural development that needs technical know-how and resources. However small scale development works such as drinking water, local trail improvement, improvement of hygiene and sanitation, development of local entertainment units, development of local skills can very well be done by the villagers themselves from their community fund and voluntary contribution. The village themselves can also take the initiative of letting their youth be trained in the field of tourism through encouragement and exploring avenues through contacts.

The most important feature for Homestays is that it also ensures that women actively take part in the given tourism opportunity that promotes a sustainable community development as women are most affected when there is unchecked

tourism growth. Instead of being employed in a star hotel with minimum qualifications and training, female ownership of homestay in their own secured areas in a large way secures women's avenues for income generation and involves them in mainstream development.

The Tangkhuls have an indigenous cooking and preparation method of curry called '*hao hamban*' a preparation that has become hugely popular as evidenced in some metropolitan cities of India. This kind of indigenous preparation including the locally brewed rice beer could be a local food variety which needs a streamlined approach to boost the tourism industry. Just a few miles away from Shirui lies the village of Longpi which is famous for its black pottery. Its usage expands beyond decorative right into the kitchen. There is an impending need to sustain the livelihood of the artisans.

Almost 90% of the people of Ukhrul District are agrarian. Therefore, agriculture tourism with the innumerable terraced paddy fields at Shirui village should be made an added attraction for visitors from cities. It is also inevitable for the villagers to maintain the general appearance of the village through concerted planning to give the village a pleasant picture.

It may be mentioned here that women are at the threshold of all these activities and the importance to experience the local sights, sounds and flavours with the womenfolk shall necessarily remain the domain for any form of tourism envisaged in this part of the world.

To let the world know about the existence of village tourism facilities, the management committee should maintain a website and bring out a coffee table book and make it available in different tourist places or hotels across the country. On top of that the management needs to have contact and network with tour operators.

There needs to put in place a policy for homestay regulation emphasized to encourage the micro-economic sector in the rural areas; preserve the ecological sustainability; generate

self-employment and economic growth in the rural communities. It can also address to build up the quality life of indigenous people of the village area and make capable to access the benefit through the tourism industry, to increase the use of natural and human resources of the rural areas for rural development; to expose the rural culture and nature to the outside world; to protect environmental degradation; to decentralize the national income and centralize the local resources in the national economy; and to promote and improve local agricultural and other industries<sup>14</sup>.

The State government should take the onus of providing the local people the opportunity for advertising at tourism festivals not only within the state but outside the state as well including at the international level. Only then meaningful development of tourism can take place at Shirui.

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14 Devkota, T. P. 2008, Homestay Tourism in Nepal, Gorkhapatra Sansthan