



REMEMBERING SHIRUI LILY FESTIVAL IN MANIPUR

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Abstract:

Manipur (India) is a land of Blue Hills and green valley. It is in the extreme northeastern border of India. According to 2011 census the total population is 28,55,794 lakhs. Different communities having their own language and culture are residing in the state. But the main language in the state is Meitei language. Shirui lily is the state flower of Manipur and this flower is found only in Ukhrul district. The Government of Manipur organized a festival in the name of this state flower called "Shirui festival" as a state function from 2017 onwards. The main theme of the festival is to conserve the flower as well as unite together all the communities through cultural exchange programmed and enhances the tourism industry in the state. This article is based on secondary data and it tries to highlight the importance of "Shirui festival" in the state of Manipur (India) in terms of sociological, economic psychological and tourism point of view.

Key words: Shirui lily, Shirui festival, environmental conservation, tourism, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION:

Manipur is one of the states of India with an area of 22,327 sq. km. On the basis of the topography, structure, geology, relief and other geographical conditions Manipur can be divided into two most striking major natural physiographic units as

- (1) The hills & mountains
- (2) The valleys

The central plain covers only a small area of the state i.e., 1843sq. km or 8.25percent of the total land surface of Manipur and the remaining hilly part covers an area of 20.484 sq. km of 91.75 percent of the whole state. The central plain is one of the most thickly populated areas while the hilly region is less populated. Manipur is a land lock state with only two important roads: Imphal-Kohima-Dimapur road (NH-2) and Imphal-Cachar road (NH-52) connecting Assam and Nagaland with a runway of nearly 224km and 216km respectively. Still there is no significant railway connectivity with other states but it has international airport i.e., Bir Tikendrajit International Airport. Geographically it is bounded by Nagaland in the north, Mizoram in the south,

chin state in upper Myanmar in the east and Cachar district of Assam in the west. The total length of its border is about 854km including 352km long international border with Myanmar and the remaining 502km long border with the above states. Manipur lies between 23°51' N 25°41' N latitudes and 93°2'E and 94°47'E longitudes. Manipur is characterized by sub-tropical South West Monsoon climate with hot and wet summer, and cold and dry winter. Climatic condition is concerned Manipur enjoyed four season-(1) winter season (December to February) (2) summer season (March to May) (3) rainy season (June to September) (4) Retreating monsoon (October to November).

Manipur is one of the naturally beautiful states in the north eastern region of India. It has rich natural vegetation; the natural vegetation is characterized by sub-tropical forest. Again, the forest of Manipur has been classified into three legal divisions for better management and protection of trees and plants.

- (1) Reserved Forest
- (2) protected forest
- (3) unclassified forests.

These forests areas are the countless wealth of the state. High values of flora and faunas are abundantly available in the state. Not only the forest but there are also many lakes and rivers. Loktak Lake, Kohinoor of Manipur, is its famous heritage of social, cultural, political, economic and geographical importance is the largest fresh water lake in the north-eastern India and many other small pats (Lakes) more than 20 are also there to see in Manipur.

Water fall is a steep cliff like section of a river channel, down which waterfalls vertically it tends to be removed over an extended period of time as rivers achieved a graded state. Some of the important waterfalls are- Barak Waterfall, Khang waterfall (Tittly), Sadu Chiru Waterfall, Ishing Thingbi Waterfall etc.

In the field of sports also Manipur leads in many fields in the national and international level. From time immemorial many people believed that there are so many games being played in Manipur such as, Sagol Kangjei (polo). It was the game of "**Almighty God**" the game has a long history behind. Many Manipuri scholars traced the game chronologically to many centuries before Christ (2000-1500 B.C) while some place it around 33 A.D. Manipur polo symbolizes the immense cultural heritage of the state, and great effort have been put made to raise the standard of this popular game. King '**Kangba**' (1597-1672 AD) took special interest in the game of Sagol Kangjei, khong-kangjei, Mukna martial arts etc.

The polo was first introduced in India by Major General Sheran in 1863. He took two polo teams from Manipur Nation to Calcutta where they played an exhibition match. Many British political agents who worked in Manipur, namely Col. J. Johnstone Mr. Grimwood, TC Hodson gives many information about the game.

Huyen lan-long is an traditional Meitei Martial Art of Manipur. Huyen lan-long can be practiced in three ways: Ritual, Demonstration and Combat. The ancient Manipuri society have their own way of war combat.

Manipuri classical dance (Ras-Lila) is one of the world famous dances among Indian classical dances and other one Maibi Jagoi Traditional Ritual Dance. Among the many festival of Manipur, some are related with the ritual and culture, like Lai Haraoba, Sajibu chairaoba, Nigol Chakkouba, Mera Haochongba, Ougri Hangen Chongba and many more. Nowadays many more are added to the list. Some of them are Sangai (state animal of Manipur) festival, Shirui lily (state flower) festival, Loktak (biggest fresh water lake in north east India) festival etc. the main theme of these festivals is focused on the importance of conservation of lakes, hills, flowers, and animals etc.

Manipur (Kangleipak) was once a kingdom under different successive rulers. Several kings ruled the kingdom right from *Nongda Lairen pakhangba (33-154 AD)* as the first king of Manipur (Kangleipak) up to *Maharaja Budhachandra (1941-1955 AD)* the last king. The kingdom had its own artillery forces, administrative head and functions, constitution, currency (coins), language, religion, culture and traditions etc. during the historic period on Sept 1949 it was alleged that the Maharaja was coerced to sign a Merger agreement with the union of India to take effect on 15th Oct 1949. Finally, in 1972 after fourteen years of Indian direct rule Manipur become a separate state within India.

OBJECTIVES:

The main objective of this article is to highlight the importance of Shirui festival from environmental, sociological, economic, and tourism point of view as well as sustainable development in the state.

METHODOLOGY:

This article aims to analyze the facts based on secondary data available in different forms of publications such as books, journals and documents and from many websites available in national and International publications.

Forest and Wildlife Resources in Manipur:

Forest products are the most important natural resources for environmental protection and maintaining ecological balance of the state. Manipur has rich forest resources. The state is a place of pride for the natural flora and fauna. The state forest can be categorized into three legal state as (1) reserved forest (2) protected forest (3) Un-classified forest. The state forest provides fuel wood, charcoal, round wood and timber as basic needs of the people. Besides structural timbers, matchwoods, bamboo and canes, turpentine and resins, gums, oil, fibers, honey, wax, thatching grasses and medicinal herbs etc.

The state is famous for rich stock of orchids and other flowering plants, which grows abundantly due to varied climatic conditions. Ukhrul and other parts of the state found hundreds of rare orchids. These important species of orchids found in Manipur includes *Shirui Lily (state flower)* which grows at Shirui hill Ukhrul.

Manipur has rich heritage of fauna. The important species found in the forest ecosystem of the state includes the famous blow antler deer locally known as Sangai, only found in Manipur's Keibul Lamjao National Park in the Southern part of the Loktak lake. This park was established under the wild life protection act 1972 and it has been proved to be a good habitat for sangai breeding. The main objective of this act is not only to protect and preserved with remains of wild fauna and flora, but also to augment the protection of the costly national heritage. In Manipur many wildlife developments programmed have been established at different places. Among them Keibul Lamjao National Park and Manipur Zoological Garden are important. The state has five wildlife sanctuaries and three national parks.

SHIRUI LILY: (THE SHIRUI HILL NATIONAL PARK)

The state flower of Manipur (India) Shirui Lily also called Shiroi Lily or *Lilium Macklinae* is a rare pinkish white flower found only in the Shirui Hill range in the Ukhrul district of Manipur, approximately 83km far away from Imphal. The flower was named after Jean Macklin, the wife of Dr. Frank Kingdon Ward who spotted the flower in 1946 while collecting botanical specimen. Although the lily has been around since time immemorial. Since the discovery of the uniqueness of the lily, many attempts have been made by many scientists to transplant the flower outside of its habitants. However, none have succeeded. In Tangkhul local dialect the lily is called "Kashsong Timrawn", named after Timrawn the daughter of Mythical Goddess philava who resides and protect the hills of Shirui. It blooms only during the month of April to June every year.

English botanist Frank Kingdon Ward who discover the three-feet tall, when he and his wife visited Manipur for research in 1946 and he named the lily *Lilium Maekliniac* (botanical name) after his wife Jean Maeklin. Royal Historical Society, one of the leading horticultural organization honored the Shirui Lily with its prestigious merit award at its flower show in London in 1948. Shirui hills are part of the Shirui Kashang range which is to be the national park under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972 and the Manipur government notified its proposal in 1982 to set up a 100 sq. km. Shirui National Park. However, it is in limbo because of a land settlement issue between the villagers and the administrator.

After that the geographical area at Shirui Hill are 56 sq. km. and declared as major hotspot of flora and fauna and declared as a National Park (it was declared the state flower of Manipur on 21st March, 1989). This park has rich natural valuable flora and fauna. Manipur state bird “Nongin” is found in this sanctuary. The park is extending from north to south in Ukhrul district. Ukhrul is the highest hill station of Manipur. This district is bounded by Myanmar in the east, Kamjong district in the south, Kangpokpi and Senapati district in the west and Nagaland state in the north. The terrain of the district is hilly with varying height of 913m to 311m (MSL). It is located at a distance of about 83km to the east of Imphal by National Highway 150. The climate of this district is of temperate nature with a minimum and maximum degree at 3°C to 33°C. the average rainfall is 1763.7 mm (1991). The exact location of the district including (Kamjong district) in the globe is 240 N-55.410 N and 240 E-94.470 E. the rainy season in the district is from May to beginning of October broadly but the winter is very cold. The highest peak in the region is the Khayang peak 3114 m (MSL) through the more popularly known peak is the Shirui peak-2835 m (MSL). (Ministry of electronics and information technology Gov't of India-Oct 11, 2019). This state flower Shirui Lily is grown on this hill range.

SHIRUI FESTIVAL:

Different people of different religion, community have different festival. It can also refer to a particular day or few days when people in a country have a holiday so that they can celebrate something. Festivals may be religious, community or state. Festivals are very important for a country and its people because these celebrations represent the cultural and national identity of this country. We have different types of festivals like community festival, music, film, art, so on and so forth.

The festivals have major impact on the development of cultural tourism to the host communities. The festivals organizers are now using the historical and cultural themes to develop the annual events to attract the visitors and creating cultural image in the host cities by holding festivals in the community settings. The desire for festival and events is not specifically designated to address the need for any particular group. The hosting of events is often developed because of the tourism and the economic opportunities in addition to social and cultural benefit. The government now support and promote the events as part of their strategies for economic development, national building and cultural tourism.

Nowadays, some festivals are celebrated on the basis of need base of the community, society or country as a whole. In Manipur the “Shirui Festival” is sponsored by the Department of Tourism, Government of Manipur to spread awareness about conservation of the endangered “Shirui Lily” and promote the district of Ukhrul as a tourist destination in Manipur.

This festival serves the purpose of bringing happiness to our lives and strengthens our sense of community. Besides being fun, well managed festivals and events offer a host of economic and social benefit to the local communities, if the festivals attract visitors. Festivals also provided free marketing and advertising for local business as visitor talk about their experiences when they go home.

Importance of Shirui Lily festival from environmental as well as sociological perspective:

With the changing scenario of environmental conditions, the type of plants and animals dwelling too have changed. Ecosystem is ecological system in which plant and animals have link to their environment through a series of feedback loops (Hagget p.1972). All human beings have the responsibility to manage the environment. In 1989, the Manipur government had declared the Shirui Lily as the state flower of the state. Even though most of the people don't take the responsibility for conserving this prestigious gift of God to this land, and from one season to another season the number of flower plants are decreasing, due to irresponsible action of the human beings. During the blooming season a large number of tourists are coming and sometimes they pluck the flower and uprooted the plant for their own benefit. However, the people of the village have a heart touch relationship with the lily so the villagers take the initiative to conserve the flower and they take step forward. Since the year 2000 the Shirui Youth Club (a local club) based at the Shirui village which is nearest to the site has been tirelessly protecting the site. Among the steps that the youth club member took to protect the lilies were; 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 hard work of the SYC has borne fruits and after a gap now the lily can be seen again.

Other local's NGO's like Munglong Vatheh Hill Development (MVHD) with financial assistance from forest department take forward step to conserve the flora and fauna in this hill spot. Now, the government as well as local people take much step for conserving the forest presently shirui hills and thus gets the status of community forest mainly govern by the local peoples of shirui villages with financial assistance from the forest department. As the festival of shirui lily week 2014, unfolded, the then governor of Manipur V.K. Duggal express a bit of his concern that the lily is facing threat of diminishing bloom due to unplanned deforestation at shirui hills. After this, a group of scientists from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, led by DR Sahoo, achieved a major break-through in 2015 when they regenerated it through tissue culture, using its bulb. The regenerated lily was later successfully transplanted at the shirui hills.

From 2017 onwards Manipur Government organized shirui lily festival as a state festival under the main motto of conserving the unique flower. As a human being we need to manage our environment in a proper way. Environmental management is the process to improve the relationship between man and environment so that the quality of both the environment and human society may be improved. This improvement of relationship between man and environment may be achieved through check on destructive activities of man, conservation, protection, regulation and regeneration of nature. It is rational adjustment of man and nature, on the judicious exploitation and utilization of natural resources without disturbing the ecological balance and eco-system equilibrium. It has become as a tool for sustainable development.

Environmental development planning is therefore, comprise of eco-system and ecological balance and human material progress, which take into account, the ecological principles and socio-economic needs of the society. It involves socio-economic development of the society and maintenance of environmental quality by protection, enhancement of economic value, and preservation of it for future generation. So, Shirui festival is very important from sociological as well as economic point of view.

Shirui festival from tourism perspective:

A tourist is a person who travels for non-business reasons more than 50 miles and overnights away from his usual place of residence. Tourism can be defined as an act of travel for the purpose of recreation and provision of services for this act. The concept of tourism will include many factors like transportation, hospitality, accommodation, foods tours, rest, culture, adventure etc.

Tourism is one of the broadest covered industries. It can be classified from the following perspective too: 1) geographical perspective 2) sociological perspective 3) Historical perspectives 4) Managerial perspective and 5) Economic perspective.

There are many tourism products that are available to the consumers today. Some of the important tourism products are-

- 1) Natural tourism product- climate, natural beauty, water, flora and fauna, wildlife.
- 2) Man-made tourism product – culture, traditions, entertainment business etc.
- 3) Symbiotic tourism products- aerial adventure sports, water-based adventure sports, land-based adventure tourist products etc.
- 4) Event based tourism products.
- 5) Site based tourism products.
- 6) Health tourism.
- 7) Eco tourism.
- 8) Rural tourism.

The concept of 'event tourism' which includes festival tourism come up for the first time during 1980's. Festivals are used as a tool to construct or reconstruct destinations images and to establish destination branding to national and global tourism map. In the long term a recurrent and successful festival can be part of the local or national tourism product in order to attract visitors' interest and to increase the number of tourists. Each festival with the appropriate planning has the potential to enrich and improve the offered tourism product and finally increase the competitiveness of the whole destination.

Manipur tourism department recognizes the importance of shirui festival as the state function of Manipur and the event is a part of its efforts to develop and implement sustainable and responsible tourism in the state. The government celebrated this festival at Ukhrul district the native place of the flower during the blooming season. The festival was celebrated by the locals in their own level till 2016. When the state government in 2017 declared that shirui festival would be celebrated in state level. In 2017, this festival was started with world famous musical bands such as Nazareth and Shirock. Under this festival all the people of all various communities and tribes residing in Manipur too come together and celebrate its rich biodiversity and cultural heritage. The festival featured demonstration of the age-old traditions and culture of the inhabitants of the state. Beside this, other events like music, cultural shows, beauty pageants, exhibition, folk songs, traditional dances, indigenous games and sports competitions are also held. The Shirui lily grand pix formed part of the festival also gathered and attracted visitors from across India as well as other countries. It helps in spreading awareness about the endangered shirui lily and promote the district of Ukhrul as a must visit tourist destination in Manipur.

Shirui festival from economic perspective:

From economic perspective tourism is a major source of foreign exchange earnings, a generator of personal and corporate income it also increases and create employment and thus contribute to the national economy. From tourism industry we have different types of tourism products. Here we can see the economic perspective of shirui festival in the state. Most of the tourist both domestic and foreign coming for this festival, wanted to see the natural beauty, landscape, climate and the unique flower "shirui lily" beside these many other natural beauties are also there to see in Ukhrul district, such as

Khayang peak: – The khayang peak is the highest peak in Ukhrul district. It lies at an attitude of 3114m above sea level. From this peak one can see other hills, and aerial view of the valley. Most of the tourists are coming for tracking and seeing the sun rise from the peak.

Tilily waterfall: - The biggest waterfall in Manipur near Myanmar border locally called Tilily waterfall/khang waterfall. The height of this waterfall is 754 feet as surveyed and measurement provided by DC Ukhrul and local people.

Angoching: – The Angoching is a virgin forest that lies in the Myanmar border in the east while the river Sanalok flowing on the west. As the Angoching is less explored place in Ukhrul, the natural beauty of the place is more which is sure to grab the attention of the tourists visiting.

Nilai tea estate: - Nilai tea estate is located on the eastern hill called Nilai Kaphung in Talui village in the district. This garden too serves as a good vantage point to enjoy a panoramic view of the entire village and it also becoming an increasingly popular destination for picnic and recreational purposes. From this tea estate the villages produce tea through natural process. So, most of the tourist are attracted and like this tea.

Azoa Jenephiu magi lake: - Azoa Jenephiu Magi lake is also called kachouphung lake in Ukhrul is a beautiful natural lake which is spread over 9 acres and is believed to be roughly shaped in the form of Indian map. This lake is famous for picnic spot.

Kanghui cave: - kanghui cave is well known for its ancient limestone cave locally called khanghui Mangsor (this cave evidence to primitive human (Meitei and other tribe's) being 20000 years ago) This pre historic cave is one of the tourist attractions of Ukhrul district. Archaeologists have discovered many important artifacts, dating back to the Paleolithic culture from this cave. This cave is about 15 km away on eastern sites from the town and it prehistoric sites and heritage site of the state. This limestone cave presents huge tourism potential and can attract lots of students, archaeologist and researchers from both within and outside the country.

Longpi (Nungbi) pottery: - The longpi (Nungpi) village is located at the north of Ukhrul town. This village is famous for its black pottery crafts which are widely used in many parts of the state. These black pots made by mixing serpentine stone and clay. The technique of this art is said to be handed down from the Neolithic period. The baked pots acquire a black color and look almost like metal. Nungbi pots as they are known for making testier food besides being eco-friendly comfortable and hygienic. Now a days many countries are demanding this product and they are exported. These are the original tourism product in the district and we need to sell all these items tourist fetching a good tag. Besides these many other items in the festivals were- live music performance, folk songs, traditional dances, indigenous games and competitions, art and craft exhibitions, food stalls and handicraft vendors make the festival home to every visitor.

Flower show, shumang kumhei, different dance groups kabui, Tangkhul, Mao, Manipuri dance etc. are also performed in this festival. Some of the international rock bands such as Boston, Massachusetts from United States and Nazareth from Dunfermline, Scotland also performed in the festival recently. To sum up Shirui festival has brought a lot of economic prospect to many small entrepreneurs of the state.

Conclusion:

Every community has their own festival. Some festivals are religious, entertainment and amusement, event, seasonal activities and many more. Manipur even though is a small state has many festivals. Some of the important state event festivals are 'Sangai festival' and 'Shirui festival'. The main mottos of these festivals are to conserve the state animal and state flowers as well as to enhance the tourism industry in the state. Due to environmental degradation, environmental qualities are lowered and had many effects to all the biological communities in general and human society in particular. Environmental degradation evolves direct impact on

ecology and it caused ecological imbalance. Even these two rear species i.e., Sangai and Shirui lily are facing extinction from different angles. So, everybody has the responsibility to conserve these things.

The Manipur government in order to address the problem took some of the steps to conserve the state properties. The conservation and multiplication of such plant lies under the responsibility of every citizen and every individual. A conservation programmed to protect the flower is limiting the loss of its habitat, but community wide efforts are needed to sustain the efforts in the long run. We need to check from different angles like environmental point of view, foreigner tourist and tourism point of view attraction as well as economic point of view's specially for local people employment opportunity is major regarding this matter.

So, Shirui festive is one of the important festivals for the Manipur (India) state for sustainable development.

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