

Peoples' Voice

Shirui Lily Festival Impact Assessment

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By

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Introduction

“From celebrating ‘*Shirui Lily Day*’ intermittently on May 21st at the local level since 1990’s, to ‘*Shirui Lily Week*’ (2012-2014) and ‘*Shirui Lily Festival*’ (2015 & 2016) at district level to State Level ‘*Shirui Lily Festival*’ since 2017, we have indeed embarked into a great journey of showing our responsibility towards caring for God given nature, of showing gratitude for the beauty bestowed on us. The celebration of ‘*Shirui Lily Day*’ by the Shirui people in the past reflects the undeniable relationship between the environment and the Shirui people. The celebration of Shirui Lily (now in the form of Lily Festival), therefore is rooted in the community’s effort to;

- Honour the Shirui Lily
- Preservation & conservation of the Shirui Lily
- Restoring and revitalizing the rich biodiversity of Shirui Kashong (*mountain where the lily blooms*)
- Promoting & preserving our heritage and tradition.”

(Abstract from the speech of Khavangpam Wungsek, Headman, Shirui Aze at the Inaugural ceremony of Shirui Lily Festival, 24th April 2018, Shirui Village).

It is to be noted that this assessment is not to defame or malign any individual or group, the information documented is true feedback of the participants in the assessment exercise; therefore this paper is named “Peoples Voice”. It is an opportunity for the people of Ukhrul to have their concerns voiced and heard by the state and people involved.

The Lily: *Lilium Mackliniae*, the Shirui lily or Shiroy lily, is a rare species of plant found only in the upper reaches of the Shirui hill ranges in the Ukhrul district of Manipur, India, at an elevation of 1,730–2,590 metres above sea level. It is located in hills that are located within the boundary of Mapum to the east, Shirui village in the west, Choithar village in the south and Sihai village in the north.

They blossom in the spring, specifically from May 15 - June 5. The plants can grow between 1-3 ft high with 1-7 flowers per plant. It has pale blue-pink petals, but when observed through a microscope has seven colours. They are ivory on the inside and occasionally are coloured a pale pink as well. The outside can be a reddish-purple as well. It is a trumpet-shaped flower which hangs downward.

It was believed that the plant can only be grown on the tops of the Shirui Hill. The flower was discovered when Frank Kingdon-Ward came to Manipur with his wife for botanical research, in 1946. Frank made the exciting “discovery” of the Shirui lily and named it after his wife, Jean Macklin.

The Assessment of Shirui Lily Festival

This is an independent assessment carried out by the TTA from the month of July to October 2018 that seeks to understand the overall impact the Shirui Lily Festival have on the host communities. The festival was initially organised by and for the Shirui village, and often celebrated with a theme that developed from within the community. The festival provides members of a community with opportunities to engage in socialisation, entertainment and the establishment of social networks, which can contribute to the enhancement of community cohesion and the building of social capital. Additionally, in collaboration with the state, they can provide tourism benefits such as increased visitation and promotion of a destination's image and with this objective it is celebrated as a state festival. However, there is the potential for negative impact in hosting the festival, it could result to traffic congestion, overcrowding, vandalism and increased anti-social behaviour to greater magnitude of losing control over our own property, the God given heritage.

This assessment examines the overall impact of the festival to the community and the role that festivals can play in contributing to the development, well being and enrichment of social capital and the negative impact it has to the people. We have collected views and opinions from people in and around Ukhrul town, Shirui Village, Hungpung, Hunphun, participants and stakeholders of the festivals. We use methods like semi structured interviews to focus groups, open-ended questionnaires, and document analyses are employed. The results revealed that there are varied perceptions of the positive and negative nature of the impacts and levels at which they occur. Some can be mentioned as jeopardised identity and organisation, personal frustration, entertainment and socialisation opportunities, community growth, development, and behavioural consequences/degrading moral values and market facilities. This participation provides opportunities for social transactions, relationship building and the development of social networks.

This paper has several propositions for the management of festivals in the days to come, in respect to providing a better understanding of perceptions of the social impacts it creates, towards satisfying the needs of the community and well-being to the enrichment of social capital.

Summary of Shirui Lily Festival.

This conversation serves to profile the festivals, and outlines their history and development, organisational structure, and what this festival offers to participants and the wider community.

The festival represents a community initiative which was designed to popularise Shirui Lily. The present Festival is an outcome of an informal committee comprised of interested individuals. Later it was taken up at a public meeting where all the interested groups were invited; it was at this meeting that the idea for the Shirui Lily State Festival was agreed upon. The idea for the festival stemmed from grassroots community interest and it was further progressed into a State Festival. During the festival, visitors ascended on Shirui, providing an instant boost to see the lily

in bloom. The festival offers musical entertainment, cultural show, and indigenous games. Throughout the festival, music, and cultural performances took place in various locations; Ukhrul, Shirui, Phangrei and Hungpung.

The festival could not be staged without the dedicated group of volunteers, service clubs, voluntary organisations and committed community. The festival operates using 250 to 300 volunteers each year. For their efforts, volunteers from local clubs and voluntary organisations like THYSO, TKS and Ukhrul Samaritans are worth mentioning.

Impact

Immediate impact is the improvement of tourism, toilets facilities, guest houses, and an effort to widen the road. We cannot see other infrastructural improvement at this moment. The festival has exposed our culture and brought changes in the business-market system and has attracted tourists from within the country and abroad.

Most impacts that were perceived to have occurred have been rated as negative in nature, although they were not rated as having high levels of negative impact at this point.

Negative impacts identified by the community includes: youth related issues, loss of Christian and social values, and moral degradation. Respondents were concerned about the negative impacts the festival had on local youth, like infusing poison to the young people. It was more like celebrating the festival to promote rice beer and Shirock concert. Some respondents voiced that “Apart from drinking, and other immoral activities there is no good news of the festival”. They have witnessed underage drinking and the rowdy and delinquent behaviour of the teenagers. In the name of culture, young people begin drinking during the festival and we have the apprehension that they might become addicted to it. Some people are encouraged to continue selling rice beer (which are not true rice beer, a concocted version of rice beer, mixed with locally made alcohol) to sell and earn better. It has increased immorality and greed for money.

Respondents expressed concern at the “number of young children being able to wander the streets late at night”, and “teenagers in groups to have good time, without adult supervision” and law and order personal nowhere to be seen. Many youngsters have taken the advantage to expose their excitement in negative forms. One factor could be that they have no space or recreational centre/place to vent out their energy in a healthy way, therefore it is not the tourists or outsider who create problem but the residents. In Hungpung, respondents commented on the “crowds of young people hanging out in and around the concert venue, seemingly not interested in music or activities around but something else, suspected to immorality”. Others recognised that the festivals are a “nuisance for the elderly” and that “for the elderly residents living near the venues finds it intimidating”.

One concern is the disturbance of their everyday routines/normal week activities especially to adults. They considered it to be a waste of time and labour, five days holiday for school and

offices (two weeks for Govt. School) is a huge loss to the people of Ukhrul District. Important documents could not be obtained from offices due to holidays, a hindrance to progress and business environment.

The magnitude of the festival is high, but the facilities provided are low and they are not adequate to attract international tourism. People only go for money and wanted to become rich in a day which contributes to corruption and illegal practices. It is a poorly managed, low standard state festival. One of the few examples is no proper banking facilities. Tourists could not withdraw money from the bank or ATM due to lack of such facilities.

There is no relation between Shirui Lily Festival and the Church, however, it is also to be noted that Ukhrul is a Christian dominated district and the people belong to the church. The festival ushered more people to drinking, immoral activities and other worldly pleasure which is against the teaching of the church. This has darkened the spiritual life of the church and church attendance was reduced almost to two-third during the festival. We have compromised our Christian values, and this must be seriously thought about by organizers if they cared for the people. The Tangkhul churches are not prepared to be a part of this type of festival; instead of exposing the values of Christianity we are imitated by the imposing values and religion foreign to us, it is suspected that there are other agendas of the state for this festival. The impact shows that church leaders are not able to give proper direction to their members. Churches should unite and develop strategies together to face the challenges posed by the festival and to reach out with the gospel.

Findings from the Stakeholders

This festival exposes the small business to a larger market, this being the only opportunity to display their products especially the local products such as handicrafts and handloom products.

Shirui Lily festival is a state festival but there is little exchange of culture among the different communities of the state, other groups from outside the state of Manipur is being invited but less attention given to the people of Manipur. It is suspected that huge amounts of funds are being spent on programs that are non-beneficial to the people.

On the big display of Shirock, which is believed to have taken a major chunk of the funds is a waste; it overshadowed the Shirui Lily and the purpose of cultural enhancing activities. There were tourists coming to see the Shirock concerts in the evenings, but not the Shirui Lily Festival. This Shirock bring more filthy businesses in the community, many suggested that it should be discontinued, or if it does continue, it should be better controlled.

The facilities and infrastructure are not adequate, from road, to ground preparation in Shirui Village and Ukhrul town, to accommodation, sanitation, transportation. The town is not ready for such events.

Financial management has been the most contentious for all the people involved. There are disparities in distribution of funds, we are not here to audit the fund management but have been informed of the frustration of those directly involved.

General Comments. Youth have no place to vent out their energy and frustration at other times, so it became an opportune time to try out all kinds of anti-social elements such as alcohol, vandalism and prostitution that was rampantly reported. It is a festival to showcase our identity, but many have not made the right choices, a proper direction and right choice will be the best way to minimise the situation we have seen so far during the festival.

The people are not well informed about tourism and what many tourists are after, many of the tourists are economically prepared to exploit those who are ignorant, and therefore individuals need to be educated beforehand.

From Shirui Village. There is too much interference and prohibition from the government and the TNL (Tangkhul Naga Long). Many indigenous activities and tradition of the festival could not be taken up. Much of the preparation work was given to outsiders; even the stage decoration work was given to an Imphal-based firm which was not worth the cost. Moreover, the construction of stage, road, toilet etc. were for the purpose only (temporary). There is no proper planning and implementation of the program, many forest trees were being cut down to give way for the festival programs. The five day festival is too long and it affected the livelihood of the farmers and other business owners. In final analysis, it is a waste of time, labour and energy.

From Hungpung Village. The festival was celebrated on its soil and jurisdiction, as if to encourage local rice beer brewers. Many Andro and Sekmai atingba and ashaba (locally made alcohol) were brought to and were mixed with local rice beer and many prefer the high alcohol contents in order to get intoxicated. In the night, some power lines (electric) were cut off because of the Shirock concert, there was no power in some localities, and it was unfortunate for some to suffer the blackouts. The surrounding localities were disturbed and find it difficult to sleep due to the high pitched sound of the concert. The participants in this survey conclude that funds spent on and for the Shirock could be used for infrastructure like maintaining the road, and sanitation of Hungpung, which will be more beneficial for all. The festival somehow ushers Hungpung to have better sanitation and housing by families who were getting ready for home stays, however it was a huge loss for Hungpung, 70% of Hungpung households incurred financial losses (individual expenses, stall, home stay preparation where few people came to stay at homes). High expenditure and immorality during the festival has a lot of negative impact in the family as well as in the village. The number of rice beer brewers has increased, the roads are too small and there was traffic congestion and no proper parking facilities arranged.

General Findings of the Assessment

Planning Process. Shirui Lily being a State festival is under the control of state mechanism with various agencies to play their own role. Nevertheless, the planning process of the festival began

after the signing of MoU between the Government of Manipur and the Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL) on 01-05-2017. That, “1. The Shirui Festival shall be observed every year in consultation with TNL & Shirui Village Authority. 2. The venue of the event shall be at Shirui Village and Ukhrul Headquarter only, and 3. In order to conserve the Shirui Lily, the State government shall honour and respect the Customary Laws of the Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL).” As per the agreement the celebration was to be in consultation with the TNL and Shirui Village Authority. However, the whole process is more of an imposition by the state government and the agreement (MoU) was only to fulfil the requirements of the festival in the name of development and tourism, which was not implemented or honoured. TNL, CSO’s, frontal organizations were sidelined and hardly consulted. Even the involvement of Shirui Lily Organizing Committee of Shirui Village is confined to Shirui village alone.

As the State government took over the Shirui Lily Festival, the sanctity of the festival is being diminished; it is more about promoting the interest of the people in power and not the locals. The programs focused on entertainment and not the Lily Festival that is promoting the culture and tourism of the people. The programs of the festivals were not properly planned or organized; a simple example is it does not follow the printed programs. There was inconsistency and differences between the tourism department and the local organizer, had there been an independent legitimate local organizing committee including local frontal organization, CSO’s, NGO’s, churches, villages and schools in the planning process the organizing structure and implementation would be more contextualized and relevant.

Fund allocation. The amount being sanctioned for Shirui Lily Festival as a state festival is limited compared to other state festivals. It is not allocated according to the purpose and importance of the festival, program like indigenous cultural promotion is very low whereas big allocation is given to Shirock. It will be of more worth if the funds allocated were used for the development of roads, advanced communication networks, proper refurbishment of public buildings, playgrounds and sport complexes.

The three MLA’s of Ukhrul, Chingai & Phungyar constituency were in-charge of the works undertaken for the festival, most of the works and contracts are done by their respective party workers and non-local agencies (e.g. Stage decoration). Few local involvements were in the construction of stall and as volunteers.



Cultural showcase. Proper promotion of local indigenous tradition and culture and indigenous talent display is desirable, rather it was arranged without the local's knowledge. We need to have a pre-audition and selection process to have different villages and other communities in the state involved. It appears to be cultural imposition to the locals by the organizers, as few local cultures/traditions were not given space and deserving participants/artists were not given enough remuneration for the efforts put in.



Cultural promotion of Tangkhuls: Clothing, Food, Art and Craft. The part of cultural promotion was not satisfactory, in the pretext of promoting indigenous 'khor' (rice beer) most of them mixed Andro and Sekmai atingba (locally brewed alcohol) for better sale, this was possible for sellers as there was no guidelines or direction in this dry state of Manipur. Only few local entrepreneurs could market khor, the traditional local products, which was not as popular among drinkers for it does not serve their purpose of getting intoxicated.

Stalls and sales. There were 20 stalls inside the Pakshi mini stadium, out of which only 3 stalls were given to the locals and the rest were occupied by the government including people from outside the state. Stalls were poorly constructed and suggested that sale must be focused on home grown products. Every stall should be required to have recipes of their products and sale and price should be regulated. A standard control mechanism needs to be developed and implemented.

The business community will learn to keep their prices controlled and require quality products in the future. As competition sets in, all are aware of the losses incurred when not planned well and one cannot make sale of all the displayed products in a few days' festivities. It is a festival and not a business exposition.

Impact on Faith & Church. We see negative impact on faith and church. A respondent describes the festival as "Sodom and Gomorrah" of the Bible. The festival is a big challenge for the church, church attendance was reduced almost to two-third during the festival, Tangkhul Christians are not prepared to host this kind of festival. It has ushered more people after money, drinking, and other immoral activities which is contrary to the teachings of the church. We can simply conclude that it is a challenge to our faith and culture. All the churches must unite and

develop strategies together to face the challenges posed by the festival and to reach out with the good news of salvation.

Transport. There were no adequate transportation facilities and coordination during the festival, no proper parking space and traffic control in the town. There was lack of transits/entry points or registration of tourist, adequate taxi, bus services were not taken into consideration. Attempts to improve roadways have not been successful up to date, but the people hope that it will take precedence in future planning.

Financial implications. Financially, the festival incurs a huge expenditure by the government as well as the locals. The public believed that most of the profits go to the hand of officials who took the contracts and manages the show. The food stalls and restaurants incurred heavy losses as well as those families who were set to host guests and tourists at home, the “Home Stay” does not work out as planned, and many families do not have guests in their homes. It is especially sad for the Shirui village, not a single tourist came to stay at the home as tourists bypassed the village towards Phangrei camps.

There are only a few businesses that have benefited financially from the festivities, though it is a few days sale.

Cultural impact. The festival impact on awareness of the available cultural activities, local character, identity and education experience were out of sight, local traditional culture was not given enough space and encouragement. It is more of a cultural show of other communities especially outside of the state. Having failed to induct youth during the festival, with 5 days school & college holiday, the youth were given a license to explore and experiment the rock culture that dominates the festival.

One major achievement of the festival will be the ties that had brought the Meitei community and the Tangkhuls, it is learned that many of the misconceptions of Valley people before coming to the festival have changed, that they learned Tangkhuls are friendly and have no grudges to the people from the valley. We need to take such opportunity to bring better ties with programs especially targeted to bringing peace and harmony, one or two dance troupes performing during the festival will not suffice, and we need people interaction through seminars and dialogues.

Activities: Concert, Sale, Tourist and Sports. Most of the respondents have the opinion that the activities carried out during the festival are not in line with the purpose; activities at Phangrei (camps) and Bakshi ground (Shirock Concert) are a disgrace.

Camps: There were tents set-up at Phangrai grassland and continuous parties and immoral practices were witnessed. The law and order community have little control in that vast open area.



Concerts: The festival is more of a musical festival and less of a Shirui Lily festival. Certain controlling mechanisms need to be developed, many respondents have the apprehension that it will worsen and that activities such as Shirock concert and night program should be stopped (no night activities). It has become an opening for youngsters to get into drinking and immoral activities. The sound disturbs and is annoying for a majority of citizens who are close by the location.

Sales: Except for rice beer there was no significant and profitable sales during the festival, most of the items were not indigenous food. Therefore, various traditional and organic items with lower prices could have a positive business in the future.

Tourism: Because the festival was before the time when the lily blooms, tourist visits were lower than expected. There were no trained tourist guides and professionals with proper guidelines for direction, tourist spots, facilities, story narration and maps. Volunteers, guides and locals must have been given proper orientation and guidelines on tourism (including hotels). The cost of home stay rate was too high comparing to the quality and service. During the festival several camps were set-up in the forested mountains; it was observed that there were rampant immoral activities witnessed by citizens who lived nearby and as well as the tourist.

Sports. Sport such as mountain biking & paragliding were carried out, though there were no standard guidelines for such dangerous sports in place. There is a need to promote eco-friendly tourism and sports that are safe and eco-friendly. Indigenous games and sports like saotheila, kazei kaphar etc can be played and activities that educate like essay writing, poetry etc, need to be included in the program which will have a positive cultural impact to our people.

Recommendations

1. The Government should continue to create opportunities for members of the host community to be involved in the festival organizing and planning. It requires professionalism both by the community and authority, especially planning committee and law enforcement.
2. There is a need to re-assess the goals of the festival to come more in line with the objectives and with the values and aspirations of the community. However, should community support continue to decline, then fewer people will become involved in the festival, and the opportunities for social interaction and the building of relationships will

decline. This would likely have negative implications for the community's well being and the level of social capital within the community.

3. 5 Days Festival & Holidays given to the Government and school children is unprofessionally thought out and implemented, the public opined that the Shirui Lily Festival be reduced to 2 days at the maximum.
4. Sensitivity of the people is not considered in planning and implementation. The community's opinion needs to be sought and transparency to be maintained.
5. A Rock Show/Rock Festival is the last requirement of the people at this point. This is to be given the least priority during the festival; other imminent needs such as infrastructure, roads, water supply, stadiums, education are to be the highest priority at any given point of time for Ukhrul District.
6. There must be an intentional effort to showcase local talents, culture and develop the economy of the community and not impose other culture during the festival.
7. Honour the MoU signed with the Tangkhul Naga Long and the understanding of the Shirui Village.
8. The dates of the Festival to be during full bloom of the lily flower, which is from the 15th May to 5th June.
9. The Festival should not be politicalized in any form or manner.
10. Seminars and dialogues to be taken up for inter-community harmonization prior to the festival to be managed by social organizations.

Conclusion

This study set out to achieve a greater understanding of the impacts of Shirui Lily on communities. This study highlights the need to combine qualitative and quantitative data for the best understanding of impacts that festivals have to the community.

This paper contributes to the theoretical development of the event and provides us a deeper understanding of how festivals contribute to the community's well being, the development and the negative impact that can thwart the growth of a society. The findings from this research could contribute to better planning and management in the future. There are perceived positive and negative impacts of such events, the study is to capitalize on positive social impacts, and minimize negative social impacts.

In the future a more intensive research could be undertaken for a deeper understanding, such research could focus on identifying what action is required to change the way people feel, act and direct for a more positive participation that will become a precedent for other festivals that are a common phenomenon in the region.

The Tangkhul Theological Association (TTA) is indebted to the Shirui Village, Hungpung Village and people in Ukhrul town who have participated in this assessment without ignoring the many individuals who willingly spent time with the staff and answered the questionnaire given to them.

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Sources:

1. Booth owners
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 4. Home stay families
 5. Hotel & Restaurant Owners
 6. Kangla Online
 7. MoU of TNL & GoM
 8. Observers
 9. Pastors
 10. Participants
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