

BACKGROUND

Loktak Lake, the largest freshwater lake in northeastern India, located near Moirang in Manipur has played an important role in the socio-culture and economy of the state. It serves as a source of water for hydropower generation, irrigation and drinking water supply besides being a source of livelihood for the rural fisherman, who live in the surrounding areas.

Considering the ecological status and its biodiversity, the lake was initially designated as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention on March 23, 1990. It was later designated by the Ramsar Convention under the Montreux Record on June 16, 1993.

A rich biodiversity has been recorded during a scientific survey carried out between January 2000 and December 2002 in different habitat patches of the lake. The lake's rich biological diversity comprises 233 species of aquatic life-forms, 116 species of birds have been noted in the lake including 21 species of migratory waterfowl (most migrating from different parts of the northern hemisphere beyond the Himalayas). Also recorded were 425 species of animals (249 vertebrates and 176 invertebrates). The list includes rare animals such as the Indian python, sambhar and barking deer. Keibul Lamjao National Park, located within Loktak Lake is the natural habitat of one of the most endangered deer called Sangai, the Brow-antlered deer (*Cervus eldi eldi*) which was once thought to be extinct.

With fish yield from the lake reported to be about 1,500 tonnes (6,600,000 lb) every year, the State Fishery Department has introduced millions of fingerlings of Indian and exotic major carps. Natural capture fishery without the requirement of any lease or license have also been in practice in the lake. The fishery at the lake is now a mixture of capture and culture systems. However, the lake and its precincts have faced serious problems due to loss of vegetal cover in the catchment area and construction of Ithai barrage at the outlet of the lake for multipurpose development of water resources.

The degradation of the catchment area of the Lake along with deforestation and shifting cultivation has accelerated the process of soil erosion resulting in the lake's shrinkage due to siltation. The siltation from the catchment area and domestic sewage from Imphal city carried by Nambul River are discharged into the lake affecting its water quality, thus encouraging the growth of water hyacinth and phumdis. All these activities have a direct bearing on the ecological instability of the lake. These can interfere in navigation and overall aesthetic value of the Lake.

The thickness of phumdis has decreased in the Keibul Lamjao National Park thereby threatening the survival of Sangai (the Brow-antlered deer) and interference in the migration of fishes from Chindwin-Irrawady River system of Myanmar resulting in changes in the species composition. With the phumdis becoming thinner, the hooves of the limbs of Sangai get stuck in the marsh and results in their drowning. The livelihoods of people dependent on the sale of edible fruit and other water plant products have suffered due to steep decline in the growth of these plant species.

CAMPAIGN AT THE GLANCE

Save Loktak, Our Life is a call to all the people who care for their environment. It is an effort to draw the attention of people to the rich legacy of the Loktak Lake, its rich socio-cultural link to our society and its present dire situation.

The effort of Tamna Sanggai is not only to connect people from the state of Manipur but also to draw the attention of a larger audience towards conserving the Lake through interactions during the campaign. In doing so, we have used the platform of music and the energy of young people best embodied in the musical presentation of Ranbir Thouna's song dedicated to the Lake.

Ranbir Thouna under the aegis of Tamna Sanggai has organised a series of concerts around the theme of saving Loktak one in Imphal in April 2009 and the other at Moirang (June 2009). The campaign has also branched out to two major metro cities of the country viz. Delhi and Bangalore in 2011.

The concerts have been organized side by side with road shows, cycle rallies at Imphal and Moirang with public participation while the concerts themselves have used slideshows on life around the lake, which have been deeply appreciated. While there are various efforts taken by different Government and non-government agencies towards preserving the bio diversity of the lake, we believe that each of us should be aware and informed about this critical lifeline. In continuance with our aim to further engage with one another, we at Tamna Sanggai are looking at putting our efforts in using the platform and synergy of music to put the spotlight on Loktak Lake. We are keen to take the "Save Loktak, Our Life" musical awareness program to Guwahati in Assam and Shillong in Meghalaya among the North Eastern states this year so that people from the region get to know about the significance of Loktak Lake. The two states have been chosen since there is a sizeable population of the Manipuri Diaspora settled therein. The final stopover of Tamna Sanggai's Save Loktak, Our Life' campaign will be at Moreh and Imphal in Manipur bringing full circle our efforts to put focus on Loktak.

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LOKTAK

SAVE LOKTAK, OUR LIFE

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SNAP-SHOTS

The first leg of the 'Save Loktak, Our Life' music campaign started off at Imphal, India with a road-show comprising of young people and distribution of campaign T-shirts bearing the "Save Loktak, Our Life" slogan on 8th April 2009. Enthusiastic road-show participants drove around town distributing campaign pamphlets and playing messages about Loktak Lake on loud speakers.



A press conference was held at Bhagyachandra Open Air Theatre (BOAT) on April 9, 2009, where media practitioners interacted with environment experts Dr. Shamughou, Nandiram Sharma, Tamna Sanggai Public Relations Executive Purujit Lairikyengbam and Ranbir Thouna. Campaign details were briefed to the media, highlighting the conditions of the dying lake.



A booklet titled "Loktak-Manipur's dying lake", an audio CD (comprising of 4 tracks on the theme of Loktak composed by Ranbir Thouna) and a DVD set (music video conceived and directed by Oinam Doren of Ranbir Thouna's theme song for the Lake: **Ho ema nungshibi Loktak, Ho ima nungshibi Loktak (Oh beloved mother Loktak, oh beautiful mother Loktak)** were also released on the side lines of the media briefing. Following this, the first music awareness concert of the 'Save Loktak, Our Life' campaign took place on 10th April, with video installations and was telecast worldwide on the internet by www.siroy.info



Taking the 'Save Loktak, Our Life' campaign further, Tamna Sanggai organized a T-shirt launch on April 6, 2011 at Bir Tikendrajit Manipur Bhavan in New Delhi followed by a music concert the next day at Dussehra Ground at Mukherjee Nagar, New Delhi.

The campaign at Bangalore also introduced the concept of interactive sessions on Loktak Lake which was held in colleges, shopping malls and public areas in Bangalore with the concert taking place on April 16, 2011 at ABC Ground, Ezipura.



Ratan Thiyam
Theatre Icon

"The movement towards protecting and saving Loktak is well past its time. Our history can never be complete without Loktak and it is the duty of each and every individual to work towards protecting the lake."

"His (Ranbir Thouna's) focus is saving the Loktak Lake, Asia's largest freshwater lake around which thrive not just one lakh people but the endangered Sangai or Manipur brow-antlered deer. Thouna through his songs relates the importance of the lake, now reeling under utter neglect, to Manipuri life."



Sangeeta Barooah
Special correspondent, The Hindu



SAVE LOKTAK, OUR LIFE SAVE LOKTAK, OUR LIFE SAVE LOKTAK, OUR LIFE

