

Lake-world: An Anthropological Approach towards Water-Human Relationship

Understanding the lifeworld of Loktak Lake in Manipur, India

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Background: Manipur is one of the Northeastern states in India, which is famous for the only floating lake in the world, Loktak Lake. The area of the lake is 236.21 Sq. km. The unique characteristics of the lake is the floating biomass, where an indigenous community, who defines themselves as 'paat-mi', where *paat* translates into lake and *mi* into people, resides by constructing hut on it. The state has enunciated forceful eviction in 2011 to lower the deterioration of the lake resulting from human interventions.

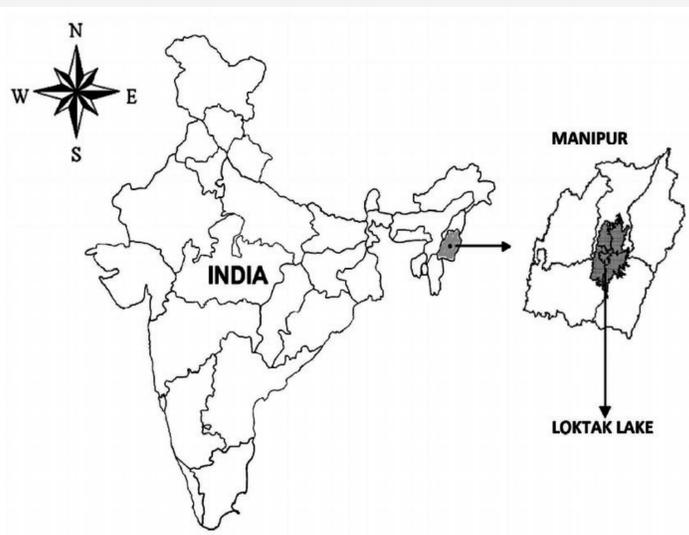


Fig1: Location of the case study.
<https://images.app.goo.gl/KMPH2stqjKfkyAWY8> accessed on 28th October 2020

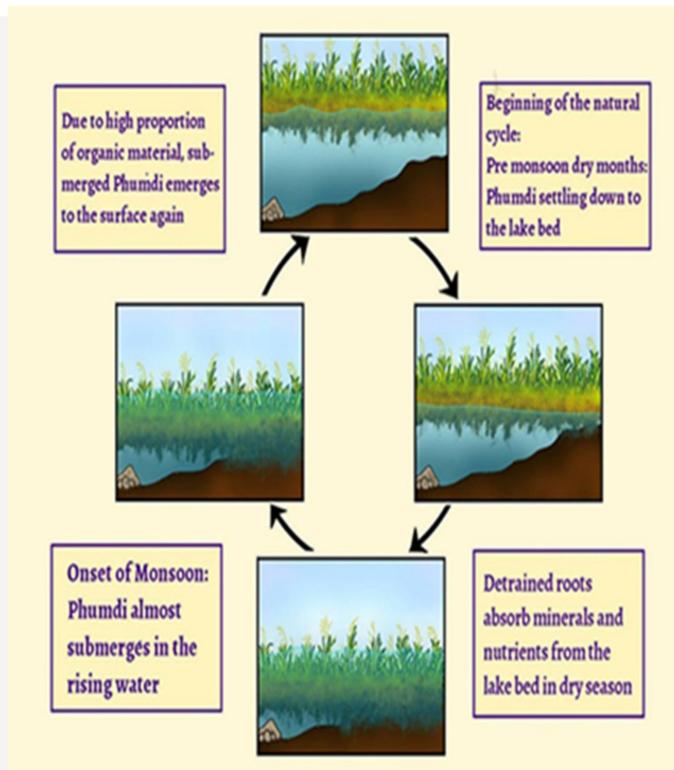


Fig2: Natural cycle of *phumdi*
<https://images.app.goo.gl/HdJoy2e6YNShVVgW9> accessed on 28th October 2020

Ecosystem: One of the unique characteristics of the lake is the naturally grown floating biomass, natively known as *phum*. Natural cycle of *phum* has been disturbed since the construction of Ithai Barrage in 1983 and uninterrupted human intervention has added the biophysical deterioration of the lake. Due to its vulnerability, the lake is listed under Ramsar Wetland of Importance in 1990 and in 2016 it was listed on the tentative list of World Heritage Sites by UNESCO.



Fig3: Aerial view of Loktak Lake
(Photo by: Manimala Chanu Asem)

Objective: The project looks into the relationship between the lake and the community. It investigates the impacts of movement from *water-to-land*, and the effects of climate change and hydro-electrical projects in the lake-ecosystem.



Fig4: Floating hut in the lake
(Photo by: Manimala Chanu Asem)

"We are *paat-mi*, where else will we go?" - an excerpt from a conversation in 2019



Fig5: Traditional fishing in the lake
(Photo by: Manimala Chanu Asem)

Methodology: Primary data will be collected through ethnography, semi-structured interviews and participant observation will be employed for meaningful understanding of their 'life-world', as perceived, understood, practiced, and experienced by them. *Paat-mi* consider themselves to be part of the lake-ecosystem, and the lake has always been their 'mother'. Sharing time with them will lead me towards the world that is expressed when a lake and community dwell together.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the *paat-mi* for giving me opportunity to share time with them in their unique ecosystem.

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