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HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

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CONTENTS

CHANGING LAND RIGHTS IN THE KHASI HILLS OF MEGHALAYA
A Gendered Approach[*]

N. S. KAVITA

ABSTRACTS

The objective of this article is to ascertain whether the customary land rights of women – as currently guaranteed constitutionally under the umbrella protection of the Sixth Schedule, ensure gender empowerment. In order to do so, this paper presents a discussion of the current land rights regime. It delves primarily into a study of the conventional and (since customary laws remain uncodified) - evolving customary land practices and their interactions with the contemporary legal-political and social-economic forces. It presents a narrative of land rights regime and position of women based upon the individual experiences of men and women from the Khasi community. The matrilineal nature of the Khasi community is the reason for choosing the community as a case study. The Khasis of Meghalaya follow the customary practice according to which the females inherit ancestral lands and property in a family.

This paper discusses the formal legal land laws and customary practices following it with an attempt to trace the status of women through the 'grey zones' of the socio-economic and political-cultural dynamics affecting the land rights of women in the East Khasi Hills. The scope of this paper is not to generalize but to provide a narrative of experiences of our respondents.

All the three major tribes of Meghalaya - the Garos, the Khasis, the Jainatias are matrilineal and their customary land rights and practices are covered under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution. Hence, in terms of land rights the concept of 'eminent domain' is not applicable in the same sense as it is in other non-scheduled areas listed in the Constitution[1]. The local communities possess a significant degree of autonomy in their land

[*] This paper is a revised version of a talk titled "Land Rights in Meghalaya: A Gendered Discourse from the East Khasi Hills" delivered at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 14 October 2019.

management practices. By virtue of matrilineal nature of reckoning descent and inheritance, there is a significant gender aspect which is under considered in existing land laws and other legal provisions for the state. Due to parallel existence of customary and the formal legal provisions for land management, the interactions between the two are important 'grey zones' where the contemporary challenges and changes for the land rights regime may be observed.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Before we discuss the legal and customary provisions for land management, it is pertinent to discuss the context in which a discourse of land rights regime can be situated. Despite the customary practice of female inheritance and the constitutional protection of the same, multiple layers to the land rights of women create an overall situation where the gendered dynamics are skewed. The following points will help to elucidate:

1. Ascertaining the extent of landlessness is one of the most important but also the trickiest exercises in India. Statistics shown through national land surveys (NSSO)[2] can seriously undermine the number of landless families.[3]The data-set includes all types of lands including homestead lands and not merely productive/agricultural land to ownership lands[4]. It is common for families in rural Meghalaya to have homestead lands but no land for carrying out agriculture. Landlessness viewed through the lens of statistics of land ownership may affect men and women alike but when we look at the nature of the Khasi community, we find gender gaps.
2. Concerns for landlessness and gender empowerment merge when we consider that women amongst the matrilineal Khasi inherit lands only in the landed families. Socio-economic data from the region shows growing incidence of landlessness.[5]
3. The popular narrative of female empowerment amongst the matrilineal Khasi people may have led to gender insensitive policies by the state.[6] There is a certain amount of female empowerment especially when one compares the status of Khasi women with their counterparts in other patriarchal societies; although the

widely practiced customary female inheritance, on its own, does not mean gender justice in the Khasi community.

4. Once the nuances of common land rights regime and private rights regime are explored, the gendered impact on the land rights regime is evident. Common lands called as Raid lands are distributed to eligible families. Men and women from 'raid dependent families' may not share similar circumstances since other socio-economic and cultural-political factors significantly generate a gendered impact.
5. The tribal institutions that manage common lands too are gender skewed. The socio-political debates in formal institutions of the state such as the ADCs often exhibit a gender biased approach as reflected in the proposed Khasi Lineage Bill[7]
6. In the domain of private lands, women and men have dissimilar circumstances based not merely on the gender factor but also the family situation and status. Landed families and their daughters and sons have lands while landless families have little to give to their daughters except perhaps the homestead land. Boys and other daughters (except the youngest - *khadduh)* of landless families may even not have land for homesteads. Circumstances of a man may differ if he himself marries a *khadduh* or a daughter of a landed family. A daughter of a landless family has limited chances of owning land except through self -acquisition or raid grants.
7. Self-acquired lands, are distributed as per each family's own decision and circumstances. Self acquired property appears tricky so far as establishment of the rights of a woman as a wife are concerned. It appears that traditionally the rights of wife on her husband's self-acquired property are more vulnerable than those of his mother and sisters. Although the influence of modern education and Christianity seem to have altered the family affiliations to an extent.
8. It appears that the legal juridical identities based upon clear cut land rights are fuzzy within the Khasi family's ownership of

ancestral family lands. Self-acquired lands appear to be more well-defined and well documented, registered with state revenue bodies to underscore individual-private titles. Ancestral land is for family and its benefits are to be divided as per custom but also as per each family's personal need while self-acquired land is based on individual choices and decisions. Gendered dimension in self-acquired and ancestral property standing out as 'ancestral property' may be in name of daughters or a single *khadduh* but it is customarily defined and therefore leaves a woman generally in a weaker position to assert her legal individual right of ownership and control. Self-acquired property of men customarily belong to his maternal family and therefore in order to enjoy exclusive control over it, is now increasingly registered in name of his wife and children, thereby prioritising legal positivistic assertion of property rights over customary ambiguities about power and control of family over it. Men and women therefore can experience significant differences in private lands they 'own'.

9. The changes in social-economic and political-cultural relations also affect the land rights of men and women differently. Some of the points listed under elucidate the point:

   - The changing and rising monetary value of land have affected the social and cultural relations of Khasi community with their lands. Common lands are particularly vulnerable to forces of land loss and land marginalization due to market pressures. Social relations can be more severely affected in urban and suburban areas in the East Khasi Hills.
   - The changes in social relations also contribute to conflicts or pressures upon traditions and conventions around land. These changes affect men and women differently and often are more severe for women. Close relations within matrilineal families especially the relationship between uncle and *khadduh*, the position of the father and the uncle within the family face challenges and changes.

- Another factor that influences social relations comes from religion. It is clear that Christianity promotes more patrilineal influences upon the matrilineal people by prioritizing the sons. It does not lead, as a result to, a matrilineal community towards becoming gender equal. Despite many Khasi practicing Christianity, the Church does little to promote the rights of a woman in modern-westernized sense. So on one hand, as we have seen through our case studies, the rights of a son, father or husband may have been indirectly promoted through Christianity; generally speaking, the customary rights of women have not been guarded or upheld by the Church.

10. The Khasi women uphold the conventional responsibilities associated with family and inheritance. Women are heads of the household but their role, status and duties can not be likened to their counterparts in a patriarchal family set-up. *Khadduh* inherits the family lands and household but she is the custodian/provider of the extended family and its socio-religious rituals. In order to perform these duties, she stays under the guidance and often control of supposedly superior males in the maternal family. In this sense, the rights of an inheritor-daughter are less established than her duties. The children belong to the mother, and therefore, in case of abandonment (which is not uncommon), she is to fend for her family. Often in rural areas, marriages are not registered leaving divorced or abandoned women with no legal rights.
11. Women are biologically and socially tied to conventions especially around child rearing and family nurturing in the Khasi convention and culture. Our case studies amply indicate the price Khasi culture places upon feminine qualities of women. Despite being inheritor of ancestral property, she is not considered the owner of it. It appears that the Khasi community is matrilineal in matters of descent and inheritance but is patriarchal in its orientation towards women.
12. Influences such as modern state and state or market induced

development has also affected the social relations around land and seem to affect women and men differently. We see that state driven development and infrastructure plans have affected the monetary value of land in our case study villages. Widowed or destitute women often are more susceptible to be marginalized. Also in other parts of Meghalaya it was shown that state owned banks that offer loans to agricultural families promote individualization of family lands. In order to raise collaterals for banks, when family lands are registered, they are more often in the name of men than women[8].

13. In agricultural modernization initiatives by the state or simple agricultural operations, studies establish that women have faced land losses often to the advantage of men folk from the family. In order to wean people away from *jhum* agriculture practices, state incentives for settled agriculture and cash cropping. This increases the work burden for women and also promotes individualization of land titles in the name of the men folk, or influential men from the community[9]. In Garo Hills, it was shown that changes in paddy production were state introduced and led to loss of women's rights and skill set as agriculturists over their lands[10].
14. Traditional institutions in Khasi tribal polity are ill famous for being anti women and undemocratic. When the community faces the social changes that affect men and women members of the community differently, we find that the absence of women from conventional institutions of collective authority and decision making especially regarding village commons etc. produce a skewed gendered impact.
15. The role of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) has been limited and as in the case of the ill famous Khasi Lineage Bill, the role of modern institutions has been regressive in the name of re-inventing custom and tradition. None of the customary laws have been codified and land records have not been created. The highly contested political debates around these provisions limit the power

and political will of the ADCs towards effective land governance[11].

LEGAL SITUATION AROUND LAND

The Sixth Schedule empowers the ADCs to codify customary laws but this has not been achieved so far. Customary institutions have the authority to preside over land disputes,but the decisions are not above courts of law and in cases of disputed decisions, are accountable to the ADC[12].

The state of Meghalaya as well as the KHADC has passed a number of legislations relating to land : The Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) Act, 1971 and the Cadastral Survey and Preparation of Records of Rights Act 1980. The Meghalaya Land Survey and Records Preparation Act, 1980 provides for a cadastral survey of lands and the preparation of land records in the state. The Act was amended in 1991 to enable the ADCs to undertake cadastral survey with the financial and technical assistance of the State government. The Revenue and Disaster Management Department maintains land records and people are free to register their private lands with them, however there are no records of rights related to lands[13].

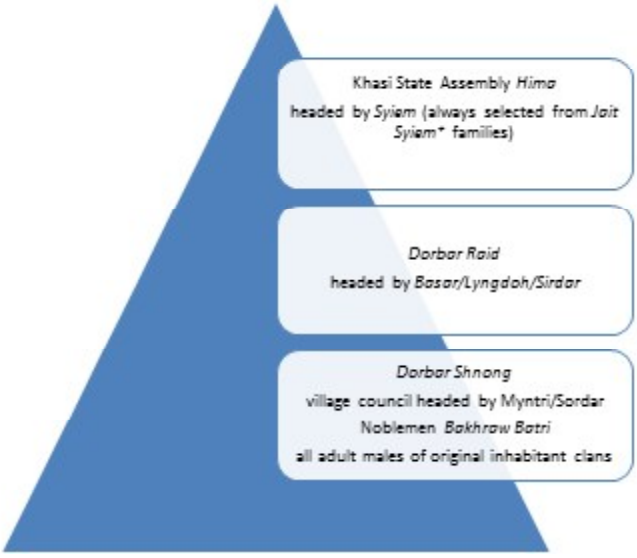
The Land Reforms (LR) Division of the Government of India introduced Digital India Land Records Modernization Programme (DILRMP) in 2008. The main aims of DILRMP were to usher in a system of updated land records on central funding[14], but there has been little success so far.

The primary challenge for the Meghalaya government has been to prepare a record of rights based on extensive land surveys. Despite legislative provisions and strong public opinion no success has been achieved. In 1974, a Land Reforms Commission was set up under the chairmanship of Mr R T Rymbai. The Commission was appreciated for systematically presenting the facts regarding the land system but was criticized for its reiteration of the rights of the landed such as the rich and middle peasants already in control of substantial lands in the name of customary laws and practices[15]. Given the matrilineal system of inheritance,

neither the commission nor the state government despite a number of land legislations, ever considered the necessity to adopt a gendered approach to look at the issue of land management. We shall come to the discussion on gender after we have discussed the customary practices in the following segments.

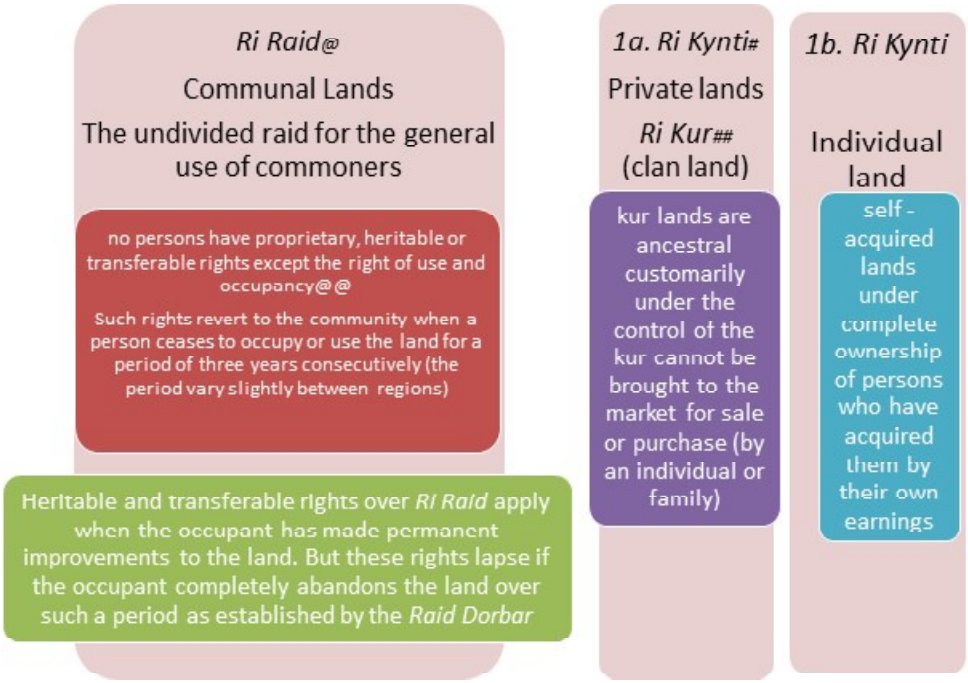
CUSTOMARY INSTITUTIONS OF ADMINISTRATION IN THE KHASI HILLS[16]

Traditionally the Khasi polity continues to be fervently regulated under a three-tier system of traditional bodies.



- **Jait* means a clan or a collection of families bearing often the same surname and tracing their descent from the same ancestress.
- The electoral council besides *Myntries* also comprise of other heads of clans. This electoral council is used to elect and appoint the Syiem.

CUSTOMARY LAND MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS IN KHASI HILLS



@ Ri raid may exist at 3 levels: (i) village (ri raid shnong), (ii) a group of villages (ri raid raid), and (iii) ri raid Hima at top level in tribal hierarchy of Khasi socio-political unit.

@@ "When a plot of ri raid land acquired by a person is kept under regular cultivation by successive generations then it acquires the status of 'NongmeiNongpa', land inherited from the ancestral parents who had first acquired the land for cultivation. In some parts of the Khasi Hills this status is given to the land which had been cultivated successively by ten generations."[17]

"The ancestral 'ri-kynti' as per the Khasi customs cannot be traded in the market in any generation. It can at best be divided amongst the daughters by mother...no elder daughter can stake a claim to such a land or part of it if her mother decides to leave all of it under the care of the youngest daughter"[18]. But the elder daughters and her children in such a case, definitely has a right of self- maintenance from the produce of that land.

"When the ancestral land is not divided in any lineage for a number of generations and keeps passing down automatically as per the principle of female ultimogeniture then it acquires the status of 'rikur'[19].

CUSTOMARY LAND INHERITANCE AMONGST THE KHASI

Khasi trace their decent from the mother's clan and preference is given to maternal relations over the paternal relations. *Khadduh* is a custodian not owner and her rights over ancestral inheritance are restricted.

> "Khadduh has the rights of other daughters with separate shares in respect of her share, but the additional land given for the family religion is family property of which she is custodian. She cannot sell save with the consent of the family. There is no right to demand partition of family property"[20].

Thus one needs to demarcate between heiress-owner-controller of property and ancestral lands.

> "Succession in each stock of the family is the same as if the property had been divided, but the succession is only to a right of occupancy and not to separate property. If any member of the family wishes to dispose of her share, she is bound to offer first to other branches of the family, and only on refusal of these branches to purchase can she dispose of her rights; even then she cannot sell outright (except by special permission of the family) but can only lease."[21]

SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND CUSTOMARY LAND

Khasi democracy is run on the principle of noble lineage, where the "ruler must belong to the jait Syiem and the electoral college primarily consists of the *bakhraw-batri* (noblemen).[22]".Private lands, *ri-kynti*, cannot be ascribed to the modern positivist conception of individual property. It is a type of self -acquired or inherited/ancestral property but for those connected with the 'jaitsyiem and perpetuated with the aid of (tribal) state power'. Hence, *jaitbakhraws* may be regarded as the original settlers who created their own private ownership rights over lands[23]. A more recent study from a village in Kongthangin East Khasi Hills details how a challenge to the traditional prejudice against *'shong-thap'* (later arrivals) from *'nongsensshnong'* (earlier arrivals)in nomination and control of local tribal institutions on principles of modern democracy, were rejected by the highest tribal council and the District Council[24].

Ri raid lands can be regarded as a safety net for the most vulnerable

in the community. Although clan or family lands are also contested, communal lands are more prone to them. Given the overlapping jurisdictions and varying conventions surrounding them, common lands experience more contestations in wake of market determined forces. If permanent improvements (such as building a house, planting an orchard or digging a fish pond) are made on raid lands, permanent and inheritable rights are attached to such lands. Although common, raid lands are granted only to original settlers; our field case studies show that newer settlers of the village can cultivate them after obtaining due permission from the dorbars. Decisions about common lands are made through tribal councils,[25] which are often dominated by the powerful clans and original settlers. In face of legal contests, the local authorities including courts, in absence of land records, rely upon traditional councils to provide records or proofs. In this way, the grey zones of customary practices and modern day legalities are more acute for common lands. Moreover the marginalized status of individuals who may depend upon this vital safety net in a rural peasant economy, may be one of the important reasons for increasing landlessness in rural areas.

The role of traditional councils and the land rights of people have undergone changes. The traditional basis for chiefs' 'absolute' powers or authority over lands has been challenged. Scholars have argued that the traditional chief could not be likened to a territorial sovereign with absolute control and ownership of the lands (unlike the zamindars).[26]Significantly, when the Land Commission was set up in Meghalaya, the public opinion had expressed fears of 'state interference' in traditional system of land governance despite the inegalitarianism of Khasi polity. Over time modern influences including markets and modern state helped give rise to new identities around land. The landed are not restricted to traditional elite but the rise of a new elite as a product of modern state forces can also be landed today despite living in urban areas[27]. The cross cutting identities around land have an organic relationship with kinship patterns which in turn have 'specific historical and socio-cultural context' to them[28].

Despite its challenges, raid land is surviving and is in some places

being revived.Examples of village councils buying lands from landed clans to replenish depleting reserves of their raid landswith the help of outside agencies such as IFAD (land bank programmes)[29] or on their own[30] have presented new hope.

FIELD STUDIES BASED DISCOURSE ON LAND RIGHTS OF WOMEN

The field studies are from a selection of supposed *four different types of areas-localities in the East Khasi Hills* which can help us get a wider idea of the contemporary changes and tensions affecting the women's rights on land. First is a *rural village farthest from the urban* forces of the capital city Shillong. This area presumably would experience relatively lesser influence of the dynamics of an expanding city's land commercialization forces. The *second* area of field studies are a set of *urban residential cum commercial localities* in the capital city of Shillong, which is under acute stress of high land prices. The *third* area is from a *set of villages* in what can be called as a 'cusp' *area* on the outer periphery of an expanding Shillong city and correspondingly receding farming villages. The *fourth* area is a set of localities which would presumably have 'melting pot' effect, due to the possibilities of people from *varied backgrounds and ethnicities* living/working together. This includes university campuses of NEHU and Martin Luther University in Shillong, as well as the city's administrative hub of offices and other institutions.

DISCOURSES FROM THE FIELD[31]

We have discussed land issues with our respondents, the following account is not an attempt to generalize but to summarize a few underlying issues that stand out in our interviews with the respondents.

In order to discuss the land issues, we have to understand the idea of land owning, its division within the family from the Khasi perspective. John Paul (28, Khasi man, small store-keeper at NEHU campus, was a farmer earlier), Jurbor Dkar (39, Khasi man, Government office employee

at Shillong). Both these men moved to Shillong having left their work as farmers to work in the city. They both say that they own property—specifically farmlands back in their villages which is being used on their behalf by family relatives who are in the village. The money from the farm produce is kept by the ones who are working on that farm land. The land in Jurbor's case is in his mother's name. Apparently this does not make him 'non-owner' of the land, as he expresses gratitude that his family members are doing this as a sign of familial solidarity. In case of John Paul, the land is 'given' to him by his mother, but it is still in possession and use of his maternal family. It seems that the sensibilities around ownership of land differ in these cases from a general, more monetized and materialistic view of land. Land is providing them a sense of well-being and connectedness in their villages while they work and live in Shillong.

There is another case of two sisters from Smit village, Jingiet Nongdhar (58, Khasi woman, elder sister, teacher) and Baphira Nongdhar (49, *khadduh*, big landed farmer of the village). Jingiet's daughter is a nurse in Shillong and doesn't live in the village. She appears more confident about deciding over her self-acquired property along with her husband but for decisions about her inherited land, she relies upon Baphira's consent since she is the *khadduh.* Jingiet's inherited land supplements the family provisioning and income. The landed *khadduh* Baphirais a big farmer and runs her farms with help from her husband and brother. On being questioned about documents, we learn that none of the sisters has transferred property papers as the land is still in the name of their late mother. The question of who owns the land, in juridical sense, is not a question that seems to deeply resonate with this sense of identity and understanding over who owns the family ancestral land. The families openly appear to be more co-dependent upon each other's goodwill and, familial consent on the matters—who would own and how much, is decided by family consent. The same sense of belonging was not observed from migrant families.

Baiahunshisha Kharkrang is a respondent from MawdiangDiang

village (24 years old with 2 children, a housewife, husband works as a cleaner at state hospital). The family migrated to this village because of his job. In her ancestral village, her family is landless and her mother was abandoned. The family neither received any raid land nor any monetary support from the village Shnong. According to Baiahunshisha her village does not have any community land, and to her knowledge all lands are private lands. She asserts that in future she would prefer to buy land closer to Shillong because of better education opportunities. Speaking about the monetary value of land she says "If I buy land here (Shillong, and not in her village) in future it would be good (the prices are expected to rise due to the NST), if I can't then the family would have to go back to their village."

Clearly in this case, the sense of identity or belonging appears diluted as the family does not own any land in her ancestral village, and prefers to buy land in future in this new village where there are better prospects.

"My identity with land would make a difference (only?) if I buy land in Shillong." Barisuk Mawthea (28, Khasi woman, mother of 2 children, works as a cleaner) explains that in future if she has the chance to buy land again, she would do it in Mawdiangdiang even though it is not her village but she sees an economic advantage and prioritises it over emotional and cultural identity of belonging to a village. In future, if required for her children's education, she would sell her land in her ancestral village.She is clearly prioritizing the monetary value of land.

Mrs Renewable Lyngdoh Nongbri (66, retired from government administrative job in Shillong, is a landed widow from Smit village) owns lands, shops and house. She has named one of her shops, on top of which she lives with her family, 'Son and Four Daughters' Shop'. She admits that she is deeply influenced by her faith in Christian values that affect her every day sensibilities and her decision about family inheritance. When it comes to equal division of property between all her children and the customary practice of lion's share to the *khadduh*, Mrs Renewable stated clearly that she did not think the customary Khasi practice is just and hence she would not follow it but ensure that there is just and equal

inheritance for all her children.

We see a conflict of faith and tradition here, which Mrs Renewable in her role as a matriarch in a matrilineal family, seems to tread seamlessly between tradition and rebellion, as long as she as a person is able to take her property related decisions as per her own will. This is exemplary because matrilineal Khasi society does not necessarily vest their women with such powers at decision making, which Mrs Renewable seems to exert as a matriarch in a matrilineal lineage system of society which is essentially 'patriarchal'[32].

In village Smit, Bakmenlang Pyngrop (28, married *Khadduh*, wage worker, lives in her mother's house with her carpenter husband) has inherited nothing more than a small house in the village. None of her 4 elder sisters inherited any land or house after their marriage. The NSSO data may not perceive the family as landless, but in a rural setting when a family does not own any arable land, in Khasi community, the family or clan's social status or political standing in the village councils is deeply affected.

It appears that customary practices are broader guidelines however, in individual cases or in individual villages, these customary practices are followed variedly. Inheritance seems a more malleable practice than direct sale of inherited ancestral house by *khadduh*. There is an example of *khadduh* from urban Shillong, who for some personal reasons sold her ancestral property without consulting her brothers or other siblings. This example was narrated to the author by a friend of this *khadduh*, who although felt sorry for his friend, underscored that this was a 'grave' mistake made by this person. This *khadduh* had to bear the brunt of having broken the custom and had been as a consequence more or less ostracized. It seems that breaking the family hierarchy is met with sterner reaction than merely not following a customary practice. The dividing line between this example and that of Mrs. Renewable seems to be that maternal uncles, brothers were taken into confidence by the former. On the other hand, the role of customary institutions, such as the *dorbarshnong* do not seem to carry much consideration in such cases as land inheritance and its

distribution of *ri-kynti* lands appears to be a private family or clan affair than as something controlled, regulated, by the tribal institution.

Mrs. Nenis Deborah Sintung (84, *khadduh* retired from a prestigious position with the state government from Mawroh, Shillong). Despite being a *khadduh* she did not inherit but asserted that the education her mother gave her instead of the land was instrumental in getting her the job, and allowed her to live in Shillong and acquire land and property from her money; simply put, to self- acquire property.

Another example here is of Mrs. Arabel Kharkhongor (52, not a *khadduh*, runs a small tailor master business from her home in Smit village). Mrs Arabel married an only son and came to live in her mother-in-law's house—an unusual practice amongst the Khasi people. Mrs Arabel asserts that it is important for the couple that their *khadduh* daughter would continue to stay in the house. If she would not stay, then she would not give it to her. And in any case, the *khadduh* would have to share this house with her other daughters.

An almost similar sentiment was expressed by Mrs Jingieit, who was unsure if the daughter would get the house as her ancestral right as she lived in Shillong and therefore would be unable to perform her obligations as a *khadduh* to look after the house, family and parents.

Mrs Arabel tells us that this depends on the family's own background and circumstances—how the land management is changing in present times. She says that "if it is a good family then the property goes to the youngest daughter. But if the daughter is irresponsible it can go to other siblings in case there are other daughters". She adds that she has knowledge of rich and well landed families where it is common for the sons to inherit lands as well. But if the family does not have much land to share, they prioritize the daughters but not necessarily to the *khadduh*.

LANDLESS AMONGST THE KHASI

We have discussed how the Khasi land identity is malleable and fuzzy as rights over lands amongst the landed families are shared between

individual members of a family unit. This primacy of family ties understandably works to the disadvantage of a few who may be interested in asserting their individual rights over lands in strictly legal juridical sense of individual ownership, wishing to sell those lands.

In the face of rising number of landless families, like that of Baiahunshisha Kharkrangwhen, the village does not have any community lands, these are further pushed. Baiahunshisha says that her village never possessed any community land for destitute families as except for the office of the *dorbarshnong* every part of land is private property in the village. It is relevant to know that her village is closer to Shillong. This example shows that traditional customary land security net works only if the village had raid lands left to distribute and if the landless family has stayed within the village. Migrant families lose their rights over raid lands (if any) if they move out, without earning access to parallel rights in their new villages.

In cases where the village shnongs had raid lands to spare for landless families, for instance in case of Mawdiangdiang's Lailang Kharbud (30, housewife with 3 children), receiving the raid land is at the same time empowering but limiting. Community lands were given only to landless daughters and not to landless sons. In case of Lailang however through all the years, the family is not free to construct a bigger house, as her rights over the land are not clearly established unlike the *ri-kynti* lands. The land plot offered is not prime land and is infertile so doesn't supplement household provisioning. It remains unclear how official land records or land survey such as NSSO would consider the land ownership for Lailang.

Phiste Mary Nongbri (24, non *khadduh*, landless small tenurial farmer with 2 small children, Mawdiangdiang),despite having lived in Mawdiangdiang almost all her life, is not qualified to receive raid land as her mother was not born in the village. This case hence points to the limits of raid lands for the poorest. She has lived almost all her life as a village resident and has no other means of subsistence, but rents her house and farm land. Similar is the case of Mr. Ruka Singh (39, male, landless tenurial farmer at village Mawdiangdiang), who is not amongst the 'new wave of migrant families'. He has been asked to vacate his farm and his dwelling

hut, both being plots of lands which he rents along with his wife. He told us that the land owner wishes to construct more dwelling units on these plots for migrant families, who obviously have better rent capacity with their government jobs, compared to Ruka Singh who is merely a marginal tenure farmer.

Since Ruka Singh is not an original settler of the village, despite having lived almost his entire life in the village, he is not allowed to attend the dorbar meetings that involves decision making about the affairs of the dorbar. He tells that he is not invited to attend meetings regarding decisions on electing a headman, also decisions about whom to allot land. However in meetings of general nature which include voluntary work, cleaning drives etc. he is called to attend.

In face of commercial value of lands rising in such suburbs of Shillong or in a rural setting village like Smit, where there are no communal lands left or are priced very high, land is definitely beyond the reach of many. This could be one of the reasons of location and changing values of land in Mawdiangdiang, which is considered as a cusp village between Shillong city and receding rural areas. Mawdiangdiang and its landowner residents have seen a change of their fortunes since, NST (New Shillong Township) was planned and subsequently NEIGHRIMS was built by the state. Here the small farmers, tenurial farmers and marginal families have been pushed the most, while the fortunes of the landed (especially those with documentary proofs of landownerships) have risen, thus resulting in a widening inequality gap.

LANDLESSNESS – POWERLESSNESS AND WOMEN

Khasi customary practice of raid land grants, seems to provide a greater degree of freedom of movement to its men than its women, who as *khadduhs*, in order to receive raid lands or retain their rights over lands including *ri-kynti* lands are expected to stay in the village; otherwise, they face loss of rights otherwise. For men, this seems slightly more malleable because they are supposed to move out after marriage and hence if their

maternal family has received any raid lands, these men despite being away from their maternal village, can have a right over such lands, as long as the land remains in family possession and has some permanent improvements over it.

This particular feature creates a gendered effect in a traditional community. Community ownership and collective land holding practices work for the advantage of those who have the basic resources to keep the land under their possession. But those who do not have these economic or social resources, for example, single landless mothers, destitute people or those who have been abandoned or out-casted, would be at a greater risk of losing their lands and the safety of tribal community net.

From NST areas, we see that land marginalization of people has been triggered by state development initiatives such as the NST, which has pushed the commercial value of the village land. Often women from large land owning clans can be 'owners' of such contested lands or attempts at 'land grabs'[33]. In this sense, it would be a misrepresentation of reality to presume that Khasi customary land practices favour or disfavour women per se, however the inherent socio-economic inequalities often work to the disadvantage of women who are in vulnerable positions in a patriarchal set up of the society. Women cannot participate in village dorbar meetings, let alone the councils at higher levels, thus institutionalized marginality for women narrows the chances for underprivileged women to assert their rights or in cases of conflict, fight for them. It is neither mandatory nor a common practice for Khasi people to register their lands with the state revenue department, often relying upon traditional dorbars to oversee land boundaries and keep some 'semblance' of records. In cases of conflict, destitute women and widows would therefore be in a disadvantageous position especially when they do not belong to landed clans or powerful families. Similarly, it is uncommon for Khasi people to register their marriages especially amongst the uneducated and rural families, thus making women especially vulnerable.

In the cities, the debate is heated about the Khasi Lineage Bill, the girls who have thus moved out, were more likely to be landed by this

logic. They having to miss their rights over lands in the Khasi hills, is perhaps a big affair therefore. However, the loss of land rights of women and families such as those of landless Khasi women from poor rural and semi urban localities have not been discussed or debated as vociferously. At the time of writing this, newspaper reports have suggested the plans by the KHADC to introduce the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Khasi Inheritance of Property Bill, 2021, for "equitable distribution" of parental property among siblings – both male and female – in the autumn session of the Council as of November 8, 2021. This is heating up the civil society debate on the issue of changing nature of land inheritance amongst the Khasi community. The KHADC politics already appears to be on the guard signaling the volatile nature of proposed legislation. The prominent civil society figures of the Khasi community also caution about the genuine nature of women's rights to ancestral inheritance and therefore any legislation should ideally be preceded by public consultations and family debates[34].

LAND OWNERSHIP – A MULTI LAYERED FAMILY AFFAIR

"Inheritance of property was introduced by the British declaring that the youngest daughter has the right to inherit is totally out of tradition... in reality it is neither maternal uncle nor youngest daughter (who) inherit the property. There is no Khasi law for inheritance of land or property amongst Khasis. Nothing can be inherited by anyone because property esp. land belongs to the clan..." (Fabian Lyngdoh, Professor, Martin Luther University, Shillong)

"Now a days everyone is getting equal share but *khadduh* gets ancestral property – everything is dumped on us, it is a dump of old pots and pans we being *khadduh* have to look after everybody. We have to register the land in her (*khadduh*'s) name." Mrs. Mirth Blah, 56, *Khadduh* from Jaiwah, Shillong.

"*Khadduh* is only a caretaker – it is an honour. Now a days they (*Khadduh)* misuse (by selling land) as the owner, actually we cannot do

that... without the consultation of the uncle (actually) he is the owner." Mrs Nenis Deborah Sintung, 84, Shillong.

These observations show that *khadduh* and female ownership practice cannot come to mean female superiority in the society. It should be mentioned that women especially *khadduh* have a relatively better financial starting point since she inherits ancestral lands and house. If the family is landless, the *khadduh* inherits the dwelling unit of the household. If the family is landed, the *khadduh* can be said to inherit the lion's share, which even if not substantial puts her in a more advantageous position in general, over her siblings. Her siblings are relatively freer to manage, control or dispose off (cash out) their shares of family inheritance, but a *khadduh* on the contrary is bound by tradition.

Female ownership practice under Khasi matriliny can not be likened to male superiority in a patriarchal society. Sale of family inherited lands, although owned by *khadduh*, is rarely ever an individual right.

Coming to self-acquired property, it is opined that normally it is registered in the name of menfolk, a phenomenon which is even more prevalent in the Garo hills. (Professor Tanka Subba, Interview with author 2019). Ancestral property is bound by customary rules but self-acquired is often registered and well documented due to the nature of its legalisation. This also can contribute to the greater risk of erosion of women's land right compared to menfolk. While the daughter, the *khadduh* is obliged to prove her merit to the inheritance of ancestral lands, sons may not always be required to do so. Thus, *khadduh*s face the risk of losing their inheritance as they have moved out or if they move out of their ancestral village.

CLOSING OBSERVATIONS

Overall it seems that the absence of absolute proprietorship in clear cut formal legal sense – was the main edifice of common property rights regime in the traditional Khasi land management system. This apparently was the main logic behind the constitutional recognition of common land rights under the Sixth Schedule. Land for Khasi people belonged to the people,

clans, families, and communities. The idea of private property was prevalent too, but only limitedly for self-acquired lands, which too, over a generation would normally come within the ambit of ancestral lands. "Thus nobody was landless and most permanent settlers enjoyed equal access to common property resources of the village.[35]" During our discourse above, most people interviewed by us experienced changes to different degrees to this almost utopian idea of Khasi land system. Development changes brought in by market economy have caused a dent to common ownership of land. Also the role and position of *khadduh* and her ownership and/or custodial rights of property vary as per other social variables applicable to her like: descent, her own status in life, the place of residence, presence or absence of other male siblings etc. It would be wrong to generalize, but the belief that the *Khadduh* upholds an ancestral custom solely on her own, is theoretically wrong as the idea of female inheritance, is complex amongst Khasis. Given the status of women in the socio-political life and decision making, it is difficult to see how an overwhelming spread of responsibilities especially around family land control and management can be placed squarely upon the youngest daughter of the family, unless her ceremonial status is not propped by the dominant role that the adult male members of the family play. Similarly the link between camouflaged powerlessness of women and social class inequalities within customary practices of land management are evident. This aspect of community differences needs to be addressed by policy and legal interventions. I would like to conclude with a narration of an anecdote from the field study: One *Khadduh* from urban city describes the non-Christian Khasi people living in the remote interiorsof Khasi Hills, and following customary religious practices as 'the tribal people who follow the tribal religion'. It was interesting to see how the Khasis themselves view the heterogeneities in the Khasi identity(ies). Ironically, the legal system of India does not currently carry that nuance of addressing these differences.

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   Vikas Rawal, "Changes in the Distribution of Operational Landholdings in Rural India: A Study of National Sample Survey Data, *Review of Agrarian Studies,* Vol. 3, No. 2, 2013 available at http://ras.org.in/.
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   Further, absence of PRI in Meghalaya means that there are no reservations for women in grassroots politics.

Also, the KHADC passed the VAB in 2015 with a purpose to suggest a creation of democratically elected Village Development Councils for including women who have so far been absent from Khasi tribal polity but was criticized for attempting to bring merely cosmetic changes and instead carrying 'a conscious formulation of the Khasi masculine Khasi politics".
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Place Names of Kangleipak (Manipur): Historical Perspective

Moirangthem Suresh Singh

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationships between names, locations, and individuals in the history of Kangleipak (Manipur) from the reign of Taothingmang (264–364 AD) to Pamheiba (Garibaniwaz) (1709–1748 AD). Examining numerous elements such as the dredging of rivers, mounds, the introduction of granaries, streets, fruits, ponds, daring episodes, shrines, and other geographical features results in a novel synthesis of topology, history, and culture. These considerations have inspired the names of locations in Kangleipak and have become landmarks that future generations will remember. The article analyses Kangleipak's practice of naming villages and other locales after historical events that contributed to these names' formation. In addition, the study emphasises the significance of specific Kangleipak locations that historians and social scientists have overlooked. By examining the relationship between characters, places, and people, this article attempts to provide a clearer understanding of the rich historical and cultural legacy of the Kangleipak valley. The status and value of place names, as well as their interpretation and classification, are addressed in this paper. This will contribute to academics and researchers in geography, law, politics, history, and sociology. Additionally, it will interest policymakers, administrators, and the region's general populace.

Keywords: Lilong, Ningthem Pukhri, Bishnupur, Kyamgei, and Lammitlon.

INTRODUCTION

Manipur is a small state in the northeast of India. It is well-known for its breathtaking natural beauty, diverse population, and unique cultural traditions. The Indian state of Manipur was formerly known by the name

Kangleipak, which means "Dry Land" in the indigenous language.[1] Those people living on the hills and in other parts of the Valley referred to the valley's section in the valley's geographic centre as the land of the Poirei Meiteis. The term "Poirei Meiteis" refers to the people who have resided in the central portion of the Valley for many generations. Their culture and manner of life are distinctive compared to their surrounding areas. It is mentioned in some manuscripts under the name Kangleipak, which refers to the elevated portion of the land that was the first to dry after a mythological flood.[2] This indicates that the group had a long history in the area and may have been associated with local myths and legends. The name is noteworthy because it depicts Manipur's one-of-a-kind climatic circumstances and its rich cultural heritage that dates back many years. The people who live in Manipur have a long history and a diverse culture, represented in the customs, music, dance, and art they practice, and it has significant cultural and historical importance.

Both hill and plain people have settled in Kangleipak since time immemorial, though some groups of hill people arrived later. Kangleicha, which means "Kangleipak's sons and daughters," was the name given to the people of Kangleipak. It was a folk singer singing -*Chingna Koina Pansaba Haona Koina Panngakpa*- meaning that hills surround the Kangleipak and the hill people guard it.

The names of places are an essential part of Manipuri culture because they show the history and traditions of the area. They were named after local legends, historical events, and religious beliefs. It symbolises the state's rich cultural heritage and the brave people who have lived in the region for centuries. The name Kangleipak reminds the people of Manipur of their roots and responsibility to preserve their unique cultural traditions for future generations.

In history, not all spears and swords - and often the most mundane things we take for granted – turn out to be just as exciting when they are discovered. The name of a place can shed light on the history of the settlement to which it refers. The study of place names is meant to be referred to as toponomastics.[3] In the fields of onomastics and historical

studies, *Names and History: People, Places, and Things* by George Redmonds[4] is considered a seminal work. Concentrate on the names of fields, streets, pubs, horses, hounds, and cattle; the names of ships in late fifteenth-century Hull; and the economic significance of flora such as broom, holly, bracken, and gorse. He argues that rare linguistic expertise can be applied to local historical research, transforming the study of English surnames and making fundamental contributions to our knowledge of English first names, Yorkshire place names, and the Yorkshire dialect.He reviews the relevance of terms in historical research and demonstrates how names can be used to unearth important information about people, places, and things. P. W. Joyce's *The Origin and History of Irish Names of Places,* Volume 1[5] and similar works demonstrate that the names of places in Ireland are historically and culturally significant and can provide insight into the country's past. By researching the origins and meanings of these names, the author says, it is possible to trace the evolution of the Irish language, comprehend the influence of many civilisations on Ireland's history, and appreciate the country's rich legacy. The book comprehensively researches the etymology and history of various Irish place names and demonstrates the need to conserve and understand them.

Another remarkable work is *The politics of naming: Naming the world* by Houssay-Holzschuch, Myriam, and Frederic Giraut.[6] The authors also investigate the impact of colonialism, globalisation, and technology on naming practices and the role of language, history, and culture in the naming process. The book emphasises the significance of rethinking the naming process, considering the perspectives and interests of marginalised communities, and promoting greater awareness and transparency in the naming process. The primary concern is that naming is a political act with significant power and far-reaching consequences. A more inclusive and democratic approach to naming is required to address these issues. The authors also examine the role of language, history, and culture in naming and the impact of colonialism, globalisation, and technology on naming practices. The author argues that naming is a political act with significant power and far-reaching consequences and that a more inclusive

and democratic approach is needed to address these challenges.

M.N. Katti discusses the history and significance of place names in India in the book *Studies in Indian Place Names.*[7] The author covers topics such as the evolution of place names over time, the cultural and linguistic influences on place names, and the role of place names in shaping a region's identity. It also delves into studying the geographical, historical, cultural, and linguistic aspects of place names in India. Place names are an excellent source of information about a region's history, culture, and language. Place names reflect the region's political, economic, and cultural systems, and changes in these systems have affected place names over time. Using and preserving place names is essential for maintaining cultural heritage and identity. The challenges and methods of safeguarding place names must be addressed to ensure proper usage and representation.

Mapping Place Names of India by Anu Kapur[8] is the first to map the landscape of contemporary India's numerous place names. It studies various place linkages, how locations are named and renamed, and the forces reconstructing the future place names in the map of India. The author examines the connections between name, place, and people by combining topology, history, mythology, and political studies within a geographical expression. The preceding discourses also emphasise the significance of preserving place names to maintain cultural heritage and identity and the difficulties associated with preserving place names for correct usage and representation. Studying a settlement's place names provides valuable insight into its history, culture, and linguistic heritage. These scholars propose the preservation of place names in order to maintain a sense of cultural continuity and prevent future generations from forgetting about these locations. To ensure that place names are used correctly and accurately, it is argued that it is necessary to raise awareness about the significance of place names and to implement education and training programmes that emphasise local dialects.

Place names may be considered the oldest living cultural heritage. Where they were coined, they have been passed down orally for hundreds or thousands of years. They are part of our cultural legacy since they tell

us something about the place and the name givers. As a result, they serve as vital historical linkages to the regions where people settled. Many place names have historical significance and serve as pegs for historical and oral storytelling. Geographic names also reflect the interaction of humans and nature over time. A person with meta-linguistic and historical awareness may also hear place names as voices of the past, strengthening their sense of belonging. In this way, place names might express the historic landscape in an ancient tongue. When several place names were coined to describe the area or place, it became clear that we were dealing with historical material of tremendous importance. Place names evoke memories of past events and activities. Names of recent dwellings, streets, fields, and other micro toponyms are also part of our communal onomastic memory. Even if many individuals are unaware of the historical significance of their local place names, they may feel rooted in the name.

It is a common practice in Kangleipak to name locations after the surnames of the people who live in a particular neighbourhood or village. Even though the technique of naming places based on topographical sites, availability of commodities, historical events, or mythology is practised in other parts of the globe, it is almost identical. Toponomy may concern place names' linguistic evolution (etymology) and the motivations behind place naming (historical and geographical aspects). The present study explores locations and investigates historical narratives and events in the area of these names in Kangleipak.

METHODOLOGY

Interdisciplinary approaches, such as linguistic analysis and other social sciences, can also be used to understand the meaning and context of historical documents. They also help to provide a more holistic understanding of the past and the society that created these historical texts.

Historical studies are a method of understanding and interpreting past events and narratives by analysing written documents, such as

primary historical texts and secondary sources, like the works of scholars and contemporary writers. These documents provide information about the people, societies, cultures, and events of the past, which can be used to piece together a comprehensive picture of history.

In the case of Kangleipak, specific texts like *Meitei Ningthourol Lambuba*, *Lammitlon*, and *Cheitharol Kumbaba* are considered primary sources. They are used to study historical events and the reigns of different kings. These texts are written clearly and in detail and provide information about events during different periods in Kangleipak's history.

To better understand Kangleipak's history, secondary sources such as the works of British scholars, contemporary writers, website articles, and linguistic analysis are required. These sources can provide additional context and perspective on the primary sources to help fill historical gaps.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES AND EVENTS IN THE PLACES' NAMES

Since the beginning of Kangleipak's history, the region has been rich in non-artificial but natural mounds, hillocks, streams, ponds, well springs, and road junctions. There was also a custom of naming these places or localities, which is still present today. Several areas resulting from past events and occasions in Kangleipak have become iconic landmarks for the state and its people. Some of these events might take on a variety of shapes and sizes. These historical events and occurrences are recorded orally in written texts for hundreds or thousands of years. They have a tangible presence in the form of the geographical locations they are associated with. These locations serve as a reminder of the past and can help later generations understand the history and culture of Kangleipak. Place names in Kangleipak to commemorate historical events and occurrences and connect to the region's history and culture. Despite its importance, social scientists and scholars focus on other aspects, such as socio-political aspects, rather than place naming. Due to an absence of attention on the importance of place names in studies of Kangleipak,

numerous stories and contexts associated with these names still need to be studied. Indeed, this topic deserves more attention. Although there are numerous locations, only a few are well-known. These places can reveal much about a location, from the past to the present. In Kangleipak, naming a village or location after historical events is prevalent. Few of them have been chosen for this study.

Lilong /Irillong is located on the Indo-Myanmar route, ten kilometres south of Imphal, where you will find Lilong. According to the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* (A Royal Chronicle of Kangleipak), two royal brothers, Yoimongba and Taothingmang, dug the Imphal beds 264–364 AD, and Iril rivers, two of the most significant rivers in the Kangleipak valley. After a long day of dredging, the two riverbeds finally met at the intersection of the three districts of Thoubal, Imphal East, and Imphal West.[9] The location where the two brothers met also had a river with two mouths. In the Meitei text, Tutenglon was described due to its two river mouths, and the place was named *Iril.* It was initially known as *Irilong* but later changed its name to *Lilong*. *Irilong* translates to "flow of water prongs," and *Lilong* refers to a river with two branches or mouths. This place is known as Lilong.[10] It is where the valley districts of Imphal East and West converge and provide a gateway to the beautiful city of Imphal. From here, one can glimpse the rolling hills and lush green fields surrounding the city, providing a pleasant and peaceful backdrop to explore this remarkable area.

Along with being home to various flora and fauna, Irillong/Lilong is also known for its diverse range of cultural activities. The local population is a mixture of Meitei, Tangkhul, and Pangal communities, each with unique cultures and traditions. However, it is hypothesised that the Kangleipak king was one of the most influential people who devised irrigation and flood control ideas in the kingdom.

Pong Ingkhol, Pong, was formerly bordered on the north by the chain of hills separating Burma from Assam, on the south by Khampat, on the west by the Yoma Mountains, and on the east by the Yunan Mountains. Furthermore, *Inkhol* means "homestead" or "compound" in Kangleipak.

Pong *Inghkol* is historically significant in Kangleipak due to its location and distinct cultural meaning. It is situated on the capital's eastern side of Kangla.[11] That name was not acknowledged earlier. During the reign of King Naothingkhong in 663 AD, as recorded in *Cheitharol Kumbaba*, Samlungpha, the younger brother of Pong King Sukanpha, embarked on an eastward journey in 698 AD. On his return, he visited the kingdom and spent around ten years on the eastern side of the Kangla. At the same time, he returned to his homeland through the Iril *Turel* (River). The area where he stayed became known as Pong *Ingkhol*.[12] The name Pong *Ingkhol* first appeared during the period of his return and can be considered a legacy of his journey. It illustrated that in the historical period, Kangleipak had cordial relations with the neighbouring countries, and there was much cultural exchange. The river was also significant to society and was used as a transportation route. Pong *Ingkhol* was thus seen as a reminder of the kindness, generosity, and hospitality of Kangleipak and its people.

Ayangpali combines two words: *Ayang*, which stands for King Ayangba, and *Pali*, which refers to a long barrier or fence.[13] This barrier was constructed during the reign of Ayangba 821–910 AD. He leads his people to build a mud wall.[14] However, the Kangleipak Royal Chronicle and other literary sources did not provide specific information regarding this barricade. Although the purpose and exact design of the Ayangpali remain uncertain, many believe it was constructed to protect Kangleipak from invaders. The area is situated in the centre of Imphal East, a residential area still known as Ayangpali today.

Keibung is located in the Imphal West district on the eastern bank of the Nambul River, nearly six kilometres south of Imphal. King Yanglou Keiphaba, 969–984 AD, captured a tiger alive from Langthabal and buried it after executing a rite. A mound was constructed there to commemorate the location of the tiger's burial. Keibung was the name given to the site at the time; *Kei* meant tiger, and *bung* or *pung* meant mound. The area where the tiger was buried and a stack stood was named Keibung.[15] According to Kangleipak's recorded history, the valley was infested with wild animals before this heroic activity. This successful endeavour removed the fear of

wild animals from people's minds and created a sense of security among his subjects. During his reign, sawing cleared the dense forest areas for his subjects' settlements and cultivation. It indicates he actively promoted the well-being of his subjects by making it possible for them to cultivate and settle in areas previously occupied by wild animals.

Heingang, according to Kangleipak's ancient text, *Lammitlon* (A treatise of the place names in Meitei), states that hill tribe chief Khayingba of Chingdai gave his daughter Haoreima Pidongnu Nungphabi to Meitei King Irengba in 984–1074 AD. Heingang was a fruit that Chingdai King Khayingba of Chingdai presented as a *Khudol* (marriage gift). Heingang is an important symbol of the firm and unique relationship between the Chingdai tribe and the Meitei community. While on their way to the Imphal palace, King Irengba and Haoreima Pidongnu shared a piece of fruit (Heingang) while taking a break from their journey. Afterwards, the place was named Heingang to commemorate where Irengba and Haoreima Pidongnu ate the fruits.[16] This act represented a long-standing tradition of matrimonial alliance between two tribes, which is why Heingang has become such an essential part of Meitei culture. In addition, Heingang symbolises peace and goodwill amongst the Meitei and has become an important landmark in Imphal and throughout Kangleipak. Heingang is 4 kilometres north of Imphal in the Imphal East District and is a constituency of Manipur's Chief Minister, Nongthombam Biren Singh.

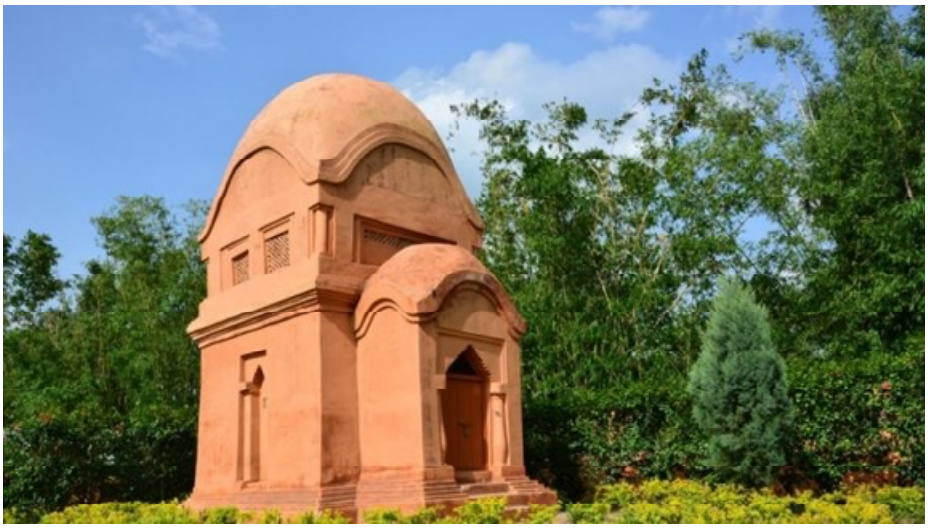
Moirangkhom combines the words Moirang and *Khom*; Moirang, which means "one of the seven clans of Kangleipak," and *Khom*, which means "collect," is located in the heart of Imphal's West District. The Moirang rebelled against the Meitei King Ningthou Khomba from 1432–1467 AD. After the victory, King Ningthou Khomba collected the Moirang people and allocated them to a specific area known as Moirangkhom.[17] After winning the war, the Meitei King celebrated his victory by parading his prisoners of war around the territory, showcasing his triumph to his people. It is believed that Moirangkhom has been a symbol of unity among the seven clans and strength in the face of adversity. The incident has become part of local folklore and is remembered today as an example of

the Meitei Kings' strength and bravery. Despite its small size, Moirangkhom is one of the most happening areas in Imphal City because it houses the Secretariat office and the Kali Mai Mandir.

Kyamgei is located around 8 kilometres from Imphal to the south, in the Imphal East district, and was built as a granary during Kyamba's reign from 1487 to 1508 AD to store rice and paddy. People's necessities were satisfied during the kingdom's poor season by distributing grains and paddy. The *Kei/Gei* granary was named after King Kyamba and renamed Kyamgei.[18] Kangleipak faced natural calamities and epidemics. It demonstrated that to overcome these challenges, the kings of Kangleipak adopted a strategy of preparedness and resilience. This included the construction of granaries, where the harvested produce was kept as a reserve.

The period of Kyamba, from 1467 to 1508 AD, was influential in the history of Kangleipak because it was during this time that Chaoupha Khekhomba, the King of the Pong, race in the Shan State, and Kangleipak formed a good relationship. Through the alliance with Chaoupha Khekhomba, Kangleipak experienced a period of economic and cultural growth. A present delivered to Kyamba by King Khekhomba of Pong is mentioned in the historical record as Bishnu *Chakra Saligan* and a *Kwagok*, a pan container or box made of gold.[19] This presents a fascinating glimpse into the socio-economic relationship between the Meitei King and the Kingdom of Pong. During his reign, it is believed that a faraway kingdom on India's eastern border began to worship Bishnu. This suggests that the relationship between the two Kings impacted both cultures through economic exchange and shared spiritual beliefs. In this context, scholars of the Kangleipak disagree; in some Brahmanical schools, such as Mutua Jhulon, the image of Bishnu originated from the Kangleipak.[20] R. K. Jhalajit claimed, "we had not discovered any evidence of this kind."[21] However, other historians argue that this is not the case. It is more likely that Bishnu was imported from other parts of India during the advent of Hinduism in Manipur. A later interpolation of Brahmanical ideology created a strong link between Bishnu and the Kangleipak society.

Furthermore, Kyamba is said to have built a brick temple at Lammangdong, considered as the first brick temple in Kangleipak, which served as the kingdom's capital for a while. Due to the presence of the Bishnu icon, the place was renamed Bishnupur (Bishnu is a Hindu deity, and Pur is a place). Lammangdong's original name was derived from the name of Bishnupur Bishnu's abode.[22] Bishnupur is about 27 kilometres from Imphal and is located on Tiddim Road.



Bishnupur : Bishnupur District, Government of Manipur 'India'. 2022. Accessed 17 March. https://bishnupur.nic.in/gallery/bishnu/.

Mongsanggei was the site of the granaries, where rice, paddy, and other grains intended for distribution during the state's lean season were stored and built during the Mungyamba reign from 1592 to 1597 AD. Mungsang *Kei/ Gei* is the name of the location where Mungyamba's granaries were situated.[23] It resulted in the suffixing of the terms *Kei* or *Gei* to the King's name, which became a way of identifying the location where the granary of the King was built. The construction of Mungsanggei was highly significant, as it not only became a landmark but also represented the power and authority of the King. Still, the palace is known as Mungsangei. It is on the Imphal Mayang Imphal road, located in the Imphal West district, around 8 kilometres distance. Throughout his 35-year reign in Kangleipak, the King built several granaries to store rice and

paddy for the royal household and their people. The granaries were extremely important as they provided security from famines and other natural disasters.

Hiyanglam is a village located in the Kakching district of South Imphal, about 45 kilometres from the city. The village got its name from a tragic incident during King Mungyamba's reign in 1562–1597. According to recorded history, the King's wife, Queen Thokchom Chanu, and personal attendant, Thongshemba, perished when their boat journey to Sugnu sank in the stream.[24] It is believed that after this incident, King Mungyamba instructed the people to build a new waterway or boat route to enable them to travel to and fro Sugnu more easily. The new route was named Hiyanglam, which combines the words *Hiyang* (a royal boat) and *lam* (a route), as it was the route taken by the King's royal boat, Hiynag Hiren.[25] The village is located about 4 kilometres from Kakching and has become known as Hiyanglam due to its association with the King's royal boat route.

In the reign of Mungyamba's 1562–1597 AD, the Meitei people fought a war with the Kabaw (present-day Myanmar) and emerged victorious, capturing many guns. To accommodate the installation of these heavy weapons, a large mound was built known as Nongmeipung.[26] The name "Nongmeipung" comes from the Meitei words *Nongmei*, which means "gun," and *Pung*, which means "mound or pile," and it honours the Meitei people's victory over the Kabaws.

The Kangleicha used their knowledge of the land to their advantage and created a strategic defensive spot by building Nongmeipung. This mound was an example of a war tactic and showed how well the Kangleicha knew how to use their resources to keep their people safe. Nongmeipung is in the Imphal East district. It is an important historical site that reminds people of the Meitei's rich cultural history and their bravery in hard times.

Pangal Siphai combines two words: *Pangal*, which means Muslim, and Siphai, which means *lalmi* or soldier. King Khagemba, (period 1597–1652 AD), is remembered for a remarkable incident involving his two

younger brothers, Khwairakpa and Sanongba. According to the Nongsamei Puya, Khwairakpa borrowed a boat from Sanongba for a boat racing festival, which was damaged during the event. Sanongba refused to accept the repaired boat and insisted on keeping the same boat intact. Despite the efforts of the King's officers, Sanongba's demands were not met, and he was driven out of Kangleipak. Sanongba fled to Cachar and amassed a large force, including many Muslim soldiers and firearms. This resulted in an uprising or invasion, prompting Khagemba to lead a large force to repel the invaders. After some fighting, Khagemba won a decisive victory over Sanongba's forces.[27] This event draws attention to the political and social tensions during the Khagemba period. It also indicates the Pangal Siphai's strength and shows the Meitei King's leadership qualities and willingness to lead his troops into battle to protect his kingdom personally.

Furthermore, it emphasises the use of firearms and the influence of Muslim soldiers in the region, demonstrating the cultural and religious diversity of the region at the time. The Muslim war prisoners were allocated to a particular area, and their integration into society was a watershed moment in the history of Kangleipak. Therefore, to commemorate the presence of Pangal soldiers in the area, the location became known as Pangal Siphai.[28] It is about 18 kilometres from Imphal on the Imphal-Mayang-Imphal route in the state's Imphal West district. The Pangal Siphai represents not only the Kangleicha's military strength and victory but also their openness and willingness to integrate people of different ethnicities and religious backgrounds into their society. His reign showed remarkable episodes, as numerous development projects benefited the kingdom. The introduction of tobacco smoking in 1610 and weaponry captured from their enemies during successful wars highlight the kingdom's connection with the outside world and its willingness to adopt new technologies and innovations.[29]

Sagolband is a significant historical event in the history of Kangleipak in the reign of Khagemba (1597–1652). *Lammitlon* described the incident as when the Mayang army, led by Yakharok and Bimbol, on the orders of

King Sapradas of Cachar, a part of Assam, invaded Kangleipak and raided the Meitei village of Sekta late at night. The Mayang army took the warhorses, but a brave Meitei soldier went after them and was able to get the horses back. The location where the Meitei army hid and protected the horses is known as Sagolband, which means "staying place for horses" in Kangleipak. According to *Lammitlon*, the name Sagolband is derived from the words *Sagol* meaning horse, and *band/pan*, meaning to stay for a while.[30] This location is close to Imphal city in the Imphal West District.

The Sagolband incident exemplifies the bravery and determination of the Meitei soldiers who defended their land and resources from outside invaders. It highlights the importance of the warhorses for the Meitei army to protect them. It is a site of immense historical consequence and of the bravery and courage of the Meitei soldiers who defended their homeland.

Khagempali, the fence construction by King Khagemba in 1597-1652, is a momentous historical event symbolising the King's bravery and leadership. The fence, built with the assistance of war captives, served as a protective wall against intruders and was essential to ensure the kingdom's safety and security. The term "Khagempali" is derived from the combination of the words "King Khagemba's" and *Pali* fence.[31] The locality was named after the tribute and honour to the King and served as a remembrance of his reign and the events that occurred during that period. It is between Tiddim Road and Imphal Mayang Imphal Road, part of the NH 150 state highway. At a standstill, the name exists in the area.

PrukSoubi (**t**o make a sound that gurgles or splashes) is a location in Uchekon Takhok Mapan in Imphal East District, named after an interesting story involving the snake god Pakhangba. According to the story, Charairongba, who ruled from 1672–1709 AD, visited the Takenaka pond to eat Thamchet (lotus fruits). While there, Pakhangba, the snake god, appeared before him and sank into bubbles, making a gurgling sound. The place was known *PrukSoubi*,[32] meaning "to make a sound that gurgles or splashes" in the local dialogue.

'Heikat-Leikat at Ipudhou Pakhangba Puruksoubi Laifmlen/ :: 28 January 2021, ˘ Pictures from Manipur'.Accessed16March2022.http://www.e-pao.net/epGallery.asp?id=1&src=Arts_Dances/LaiHaraoba/Puruk202101_2.

The incident that led to the pond being worshipped as a holy shrine is steeped in legend and history. According to local tradition, as a result, the pond is now considered one of the most sacred sites in the Kangleipak tradition and is worshipped on full moon days in Wakching (January). The full moon is considered an auspicious time for these rituals, as it symbolises the power of renewal and the healing properties of the water. Over time, word of the miraculous healing properties of the water spread, and the pond became a place of pilgrimage for those seeking relief from skin ailments, pox, and fungal infections. Some people think water has minerals and other elements that are good for the skin, but no one knows what water is made of.

Regardless of the science behind its healing properties, the pond remains a cherished and revered site by the people of Kangleipak. The pond is seen as a living being with an innate healing quality and as an intermediary between the spirits of the ancestors and the community. People have been going to the pond for hundreds of years to bathe in its water and pray for divine blessings.

Despite the formal adoption of Hindu religious customs by the Meitei people of Kangleipak, some British scholars have argued that their observances are merely for appearance's sake and that they have yet to embrace the essence of Hinduism truly. McCulloch heeded the Meitei Hindu religious belief: "In fact, their observances are only for appearance's sake, not the promptings of the heart".[33]

Similarly, Hodson notes that the Meitei have adopted the "festivals, the outward rituals, the caste marks, and the exclusivity" of Hinduism but seem unaware of its underlying spirit and essence.[34] In spite of this, Meitei and Hindu Meitei continue to participate in this holy ritual, and everyone is actively encouraged to observe this religious custom. The full moon day worship at the holy shrine at the pond is evidence of the Kangleipak people's hospitality and respect for all religions. It should be noted that the opinions by McCulloch and Hodson are colonial and may not accurately reflect the Meitei people's complex religious beliefs and practises. The diversity and fluidity of religious beliefs and practices in Kangleipak make defining the Meitei's relationship with Hinduism challenging. Nonetheless, full moon day pond worship remains an influential and revered tradition for the Meitei and Hindu Meitei communities.

In early eighteenth century, the Kangleipak, like the Ahoms of neighbouring Assam, reached the pinnacle of her power; culture, economy, and state structure were also fully developed. Furthermore, Kangleipak ruled many kings and was a magnificent monarch, with Pamheiba (Garibaniwaz) from 1709 to 1748 AD, being the greatest of all kingdom rulers. His period was a turning point in social, cultural, and religious change, affecting the whole social and cultural landscape. Kangleipak was converted to Hinduism during a transition period, and the people of Kangleipak were presented with a decision to keep them rooted in their ancient traditions or accept the new order of faith. He adopted Hinduism as the kingdom religion.[35] It is claimed that the name "Manipur" was derived from the Hindu divinity Lord Mani (also known as Lord Shiva) and the word *pur*, which means "city."

According to Sanamahi Laikan, the kingdom converted to Hinduism during King Pamheiba's (Garibaniwaz) reign. Afterwards, it renamed the kingdom name "Manipur." Previously, the kingdom was known by indigenous names, including Kangleipak, Poireipak, and Meitrabak.[36] At the same time, he was credited with undertaking various development works, such as digging ponds, building new temples, promoting trade and commerce, and strengthening the kingdom's administrative system.

However, historical accounts demonstrated that he built river bunds along the entire length of the Imphal river in order to control floods. This was an essential piece of development work that helped to protect the people of Manipur from the devastating effects of floods and allowed for more consistent crop production. King Pamheiba also dug up the old stream of the Nambul river through Sagolband and transformed it into a suitable boat transportation route. Perhaps it helped enhance the region's transportation system and make trade and commerce more efficient. Manipur's people also got much of their food from fish from the Nambul river, which flowed through a large part of the Valley. In 1725 AD, King Pamheiba also built a 600-foot-long pond in Imphal, known as the Ningthem Pukhri, *Ningthem*, which means "king," and *Pukhri,* which means "pond" or "royal pond".[37] The pond was located near Wangkhei, 3 kilometres from Imphal, and is still in excellent condition. It serves the people in the surrounding area with daily water for household consumption and remains an essential resource for the community. These development works undertaken by King Pamheiba demonstrated his dedication to enhancing his subjects' lives and the infrastructure of his kingdom. Remarkably, the Ningthem Pukhri is a memorial to his legacy and continues to serve the people of Kangleipak today.

'NINGTHEM PUKHRI, IMPHAL EAST. 2022. *Mapio.Net*. Accessed 17 March. https://mapio.net/pic/p-55386491/

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussions demonstrated continuity throughout Kangleipak's (Manipur's) history. This has been going on since the beginning and continues. The society in a particular location has a tradition of naming places after the source of work, events or episodes during their time, and other causes that may have historical ties. The study of place-naming traditions offered a clear image of the community's identity, customs and traditions, administrative structure, economic status, and components of its language. Furthermore, it meant that the King of Kangleipak was a significant leader in his kingdom's development. It also shows that measures taken as enemy protection or flood control were used to clear dense forest areas for better settlements, such as agriculture. Simultaneously, Manipur was at war with its neighbouring kingdom and was plagued by natural disasters and epidemics. To safeguard against these natural disasters, they also engaged in development initiatives. In addition, it demonstrates that the trading connection with the outside world was prevalent.

There was a tradition of naming places following the constant and unending societal changes, historical beliefs, and the value attributed to their functions. What people call their environment reveals much about their cultural values, ideas, and history. Several locations in Manipur that

are the product of historical events and circumstances have become iconic for the state or its people. Future generations will view such locations as unforgettable historical events. In general, the paper argues that the geographical locations of Kangleipak are a vital part of its history, economy, politics and culture, as they serve as tangible memories of the past and help to understand the history of Kangleipak. This paper also discusses the status and value of place names and their interpretation and classification. It highlights the connection between the characters of locations and the historical, geographical, and cultural connotations associated with those names.

Additionally, it will interest policymakers, administrators, and the region's general populace. A better understanding of the diversity of people and their cultures will help ensure fair and equitable services for all community members. The paper examines the numerous functions of place names, such as cultural identity and expressing a sense of belonging. Place names provide a vital source of identity to those who inhabit a region, and the study of their origins can tell us much about the heritage and history of an area. Place names are an important indicator of regional culture and identity dynamics, but they have been largely neglected in academic research.

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PEASANT AWAKENING IN COLONIAL CACHAR (1935-1947)

SUBRATA SARKAR

ABSTRACT

Peasant discontent against colonial rule is a familiar feature throughout the colonial period all over India, and Cachar is no exception. The colonial rule had adversely affected the economic life of the peasantry in Cachar too. After the annexation of Cachar by the British on August 14, 1832, the peasants initially welcomed the colonial rulers and supported their efforts to improve and increase cultivation. Slowly, attempts were made by the British to increase the land revenue and imposition of new land taxes to bear the cost of administration and fulfill the greed of the exploitative colonial government. This led to the impoverishment of the peasantry, and slowly, with the formation of the Kishan Sabha in Cachar in 1937, it led to the organization of the peasant protests. This paper analyzes the causes and impact of the peasant movements of North East India in general and Cachar in particular.

Keywords: Peasant, movement, land revenue, colonial period, Cachar.

INTRODUCTION

India has always been predominantly an agricultural nation with an economy focused on agriculture, with the vast majority of people involved in agriculture. India underwent several fundamental changes as a result of colonial authority, including alterations to land ownership, increased land revenue, and agrarian class relations. With the Battle of Buxar and the British acquisition of Diwani in 1765, they assumed the authority to extort money from the populace. From that point on, they gradually

engaged in systematic peasant exploitation throughout the country until Independence.[1]To collect the increased agricultural tax, the colonial government increased land revenue, imposed new levies, and used coercion. The agrarian system in the entire nation was altered by British economic policies, the colonial administrative structure, their judicial system, the destruction of indigenous industries as a result of colonial government policies that caused overcrowding in the agricultural sector, and other factors.[2]The colonial authority established revenue-collection intermediaries (*zamindars*), who gradually gained significant economic and political significance over time. In order to preserve good ties with the colonial authority and remain in the new power, the *zamindars*, in turn, mistreated the peasants, levied a variety of new taxes, and employed unlawful methods to collect the revenue. High land taxes were imposed by the colonial administration in some regions where the Ryotwari system was in place. The traders, money lenders, and wealthy peasants were required to lend money to the peasants. As is typical, the peasants were unable to repay the loan, and the *zamindars*, traders, moneylenders, etc. took their land, crops, and livestock. Consequently, when the peasants became unable to bear the exploitation, they rebelled first against the middlemen and then against the colonial government in various locations around the nation. The Indigo Rebellion (1859–1860), Pabna Movement (1870–80), Deccan Riots (1875), Champaran Satyagraha (1917), Tebhaga Movement (1946–1947), and other significant peasant movements occurred during the colonial era.

PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN NORTH EAST INDIA

Assam came under British control with the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, and the British also recognized the rights of the kings of the Jayantiya Kingdom and Cachar. In the case of Manipur, Gambhir Singh was also put back on the throne. The British annexed lower Assam in 1828, but upper Assam was only annexed ten years later.[3] Peasant movements were mainly concentrated in Assam in northeastern India.

Regardless of caste or class, the Assamese people at first embraced British rule because it brought them a sense of tranquilly and security. The colonial authority gradually established a new administrative structure, as well as a new kind of land tax and other charges on the peasantry. The increased land revenue rates and other taxes placed on the peasants, as well as the forcible collection of these taxes, caused the peasants to suffer. The people assemblies known as *raijmels* took the initiative to bring the peasants under their control. Apart from the increased land revenue and other taxes, the peasants suffered huge losses economically because the opium eaters had to depend on the supply of opium from the government, as there was a monopoly on opium sale by the government.[4]. Thus, the peasants fell into the trap of traders and money lenders, who lent money at a high rate of interest, and sometime, the peasants' land, cattle, etc. were taken away by these money lenders. Therefore, slowly the grievances of the peasantry built up, which gave rise to popular peasant uprisings in Assam.

i) **Phulaguri Uprising**: -The Phulaguri Revolt, also known as Phulaguri Dhawa, which took place in 1861 was the first major peasant uprising in Assam. This was the first time that farmers acting under the aegis of *raijmels* (popular assemblies) took a staunch position against colonial rule. The increased taxes had already angered the peasants, and in the Nowgong district there were rumours that the colonial administration intended to impose new taxes on homes, *baries* (gardens), as well as the cultivation of *pan* (betel leaf), as well as a new type of licence tax for cutting timber, reeds, etc. All this contributed to widespread unhappiness among the Lalungs and Kacharis, two tribes who reside in Phulaguri. On October 15, a five-day gathering of *raijmels* would start in order to allow peasants from the furthest communities to participate in the discussions. On the first day, police broke up the 1,000-ryot gathering and arrested several leaders, but the crowd was able to overwhelm the officers and rescue their leaders.[5] Next day, Lt. Singer, the Assistant Commissioner, showed up with a police team to use force to scatter the crowd. Lt. Singer was killed

in the ensuing fight and was dumped into the Kalang River after being battered to death.[6]The colonial government received assistance from military force the very next day, and the peasant resistance was put under control.

ii) **Rangiya Uprising**: -Peasant unhappiness in Assam as a whole reached new height in the final decade of the 19th century. Peasant protests of various kinds took place all over Assam. In the Kamrup district's Rangiya, the anti-tax movement was fierce. Sir William Ward increased land tax by around 70 percent in some cases and even 100 percent in some cases, under new assessment rules imposed in 1892.[7] The peasants demanded withdrawal of unjust assessment laws. On December 24, 1893, hundreds of people rallied through *raijmels* in morning and evening, marking the beginning of the Rangiya popular uprising. On December 30, almost 3,000 people gathered in Rangiya once more and vowed to demolish the bungalow of the tehsildar, the post office, and the thana. On January 6, 1894, the colonial administration demonstrated their strength and might, but it could not dissuade the peasants. Rather, on January 10, about 3,000 peasants demonstrated on the open field near the thana at Rangiya. The mob refused to disperse as R.C. McCabe, the Deputy Commissioner, ordered them to do, and they attempted to free their detained leaders by breaking into the thana. Unable to escape, the police opened fire on the peasants, resulting in several deaths and numerous arrests. Following the event, more troops were dispatched from Tezpur and Darrang, and all government buildings and offices were well-guarded using every available means.[8]

iii) **Lachima uprising**: -The ryots (peasant cultivator) of Lachima in the Sarukhetri *mouza* (revenue circle) took the flag of peasant resistance after Phulaguri and Rangiya. A *mouzadar* (revenue officer in charge of a *mouza*) and a *mandal* (party/team) travelled to the village of Kapla near Lachima on January 21, 1894, to

forcibly collect revenue; the *mouzadar* eventually perished in the struggle with the locals.[9] But on the day of the incident, the government detained close to 75 persons for questioning and inquiry. The government's rest house was encircled by over 3,000 furious peasants after the imprisoned individuals were freed. The authorities detained 59 additional persons in this round. The *raijmels* compelled the peasants to write a petition in which they requested the release of the detained people and refused to pay the increased land revenue. Following McCabe's refusal, the assembled peasants moved closer to the Deputy Commissioner camp. The sepoys then opened fire on them, and after several scuffles with them, the peasants were scattered and kept under control.[10]

iv) **Patharughat upirsing**: -A notable peasant rebellion in Assam was the Patharughat insurrection, also known as the Patharughat Ran. Patharughat lies in the Mangaldoi subdivision of Darrang district. The local *raijmels* also voiced their opposition to the increased land revenue.[11] A police party led by Lt. Berrington arrived on January 28, 1894, to seize the property of a nonpaying peasant. Shortly, a 200-person mob surrounded the police party, forcing Berrington to flee. Soon many peasants arrived and everyone moved in the direction of Anderson's rest camp, the Deputy Commissioner. Berrington was given the order to start shooting at the gathered peasants. Even after the police started shooting, numerous peasants continued to advance and engage in combat with sticks and earthen clods. However,the police guns overcame the sticks leading to death of three people and injuries to many more peasants. According to an unofficial estimate, 150 individuals suffered serious injuries, while 150 people died. Because of the bravery and heroism displayed by the peasants using sticks and earth clods, the Patharughat revolt is also known as the Pathrughat Run.[12]

PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN CACHAR

Cachar is a district located in southern Assam (Barak Valley) and is situated between longitudes 92.152 2 and 93.152 2 east and latitudes 24.82 2 and 25.82 2 north. It occupies an area of 3,786 square kilometers (at present). The district headquarters is in Silchar. Cachar is bounded by the North Cachar Hills of Assam (presently Dima Hasao) and Jaintiya Hills district of Meghalaya on the north, on the east by Manipur, on the south by Lushai Hills (presently Mizoram), and on the west by Tripura and Sylhet district of Bangladesh.[13] During the colonial period, Cachar had two sub divisions, namely Hailakandi and North Cachar hills. The plains areas of Cachar are geographically, historically, and culturally an extension of Gangetic Bengal. River Barak is the principal river which flows through Cachar. In ancient times, Cachar valley, Sylhet and Chittagong were colonized by Aryans and was known as Pratyanta Desha (bordering country). In the 13th century, the Barak valley was ruled by the Tipperahs, a section of the Bodos.[14] During the medieval period, the region of North Cachar hills and along the south of river Brahmaputra was ruled by the Dimasa Kachari kingdom, which, after a prolonged clash with the Ahoms (who ruled Brahmaputra valley for 600 years), had to shift their capital from Dimapur to Maibang (in N.C. Hills) in 1536, and later from Maibang to Khaspur (in Cachar plains) during the 18th century.[15]Advent of the British in Cachar took place in 1824 after the Burmese invasion of Cachar in January 1824. Though the Burmese were defeated by the Raja of Cachar in a battle fought near Badarpur and were forced to retreat, there remained the possibility of a re-invasion by the Burmese in Cachar, as it was a strategic region. On March 6, 1824, the British government, realizing the importance of Cachar and its strategic location, concluded a treaty with Raja Govinda Chandra, ruler of Cachar, at Badarpur. By the terms of the treaty, Raja Govinda Chandra agreed to pay a sum of 10,000 rupees as an annual tribute, and in return, the British government would provide protection from all external threats; he thus became a vassal ruler of the British government.[16]Govinda Chandra was assassinated on April 24, 1830, by a gang of Manipuris collaborating with some officials of the Raja, as planned

by Gambhir Singh, king of Manipur. After the death of the Raja the British annexed Cachar on August 14, 1832.[17]

In the pre-British era, in Cachar, the per-head area for cultivation was greater, and the people in south Assam rarely attempted to produce more with a view to becoming wealthier. The land contained huge mineral deposits and tusked elephants. In the pre-British era, though certain areas were depopulated due to the Burmese and Manipuri invasions and misrule, Cachar always yielded surplus production.[18]Cachar had superior soil quality; the average production of *bighas* in Cachar is higher than that of neighboring Sylhet. In Sylhet, there were 5 maunds of paddy grown per *bigha* (a measured area of land, 1/3rd of an acre), but in Cachar it is 7 maunds.[19] Natural calamities were infrequent; therefore, peasants generally had good harvests. The main crop in Cachar was rice, and other crops covered a small area. Sugarcane was grown abundantly in the district and came second in terms of production. The homesteads produced large quantities of bamboo, vegetables, and fruits. Mustard, chillies, and vegetables were grown in the land around the homesteads and on the river banks.[20] Each family grew enough to supply all its modest wants, and the small quantity of surplus mostly went into the neighboring areas, especially the hills, as the age-old jhum cultivation had very low productivity.[21] After the British annexation of Cachar, the position of peasants was fairly good, and they used to enjoy an advantageous position. As the population in Cachar was scanty, the British encouraged large-scale immigration from Bengal, and the newcomers were settled in several colonies and granted waste lands. As Cachar always had a surplus production of rice, a good quantity of rice was exported to Sylhet and to neighboring districts of Bengal. The traders from Sylhet used to purchase rice from Cachar and carry it by boats to lower Bengal.[22]In rural areas, there were hardly any unemployed agricultural labourers in the district. The peasants initially welcomed the colonial rulers and supported their efforts to improve and increase cultivation.

The following table shows the increase in area under cultivation in Cachar district under British rule.[23]

Year	Area under cultivation in Cachar district
1830	29,000 acres
1841- 42	70,000 acres
1868	1,47,917 acres
1875 - 76	2,57,285 acres

Though there was an increase in the area of cultivation, bare minimum benefits reached the peasants, and the colonial administration took maximum profit in the form of taxes. The peasants became conscious of their deprivation. The colonial government, in order to bear the expenses of running administration, increased all kinds of taxes and land revenue in the district. The new revenue settlements that were being undertaken by the colonial rulers increased the revenue from the resources of Cachar. With the enhanced land revenue, grievances and social tension started growing among the peasants in the rural areas of Cachar.[24] Sometimes the colonial administration used to increase the land revenue without considering the low productivity of the soil in the district. By early 20th century, the condition of peasants of Cachar, who were once self-sufficient, started deteriorating.[25]As a result, the peasants were unable to pay the increased amount of taxes, and this led to indebtedness among the peasantry. Traders and money lenders exploited this situation of the peasants and derived maximum profit by lending money to the peasants in distress. The peasants had to sell their land at a cheaper rate, and in some cases, they had to sell their houses and household items to pay the debt.[26]By 1937, most of the peasants were trapped in the vicious circle of indebtedness. Though Assam government formed a debt conciliation board to give relief to the peasants, the situation did not improve. With the passage of time, the peasants also started to protest against the illegal exactions done by the *mirasdars* (superior land holder, a petty *zamindar*) of Cachar district. The initial protests of the peasants ended in their defeat. Though a nonpolitical organization, namely Cachar Zilla Krishak Sammelani existed in Cachar, there was no clear ideology or an organized

organization of the peasants. The third annual conference of Cachar Zilla Krishak Sammelini was held on February 1, 1931, with Khan Sahib Rashid Ali Laskar, Member of the Legislative Council, chairing the meeting. This was also a non-political gathering. The meeting was attended by some three thousand people.[27]The formation of the Kishan Sabha in Cachar district in 1937, under the leadership of Lala Saradindu Dey, paved the way for a new beginning in the peasant protests. Branches of the Kishan Sabha were formed all over the district, in Bualijur, Ramnagar, Udharbond, Chatla, Joypur, Lakhipur, and Sonai of the Silchar subdistrict. After the formation of the Kishan Sabha, a new level of peasant consciousness became apparent. Its first secretary and president were Dwijendralal Sengupta and Paresh Choudhury, respectively. The organization was helped by Monmohan Bhattacharjee and Mohitush Purkyastha. The organization was further strengthened by the joining of other important members like Achintya Bhattacharjee, Gopendralal Roy, Motilal Jagirdar, Moni Roy, etc., which consolidated the Kishan movement.[28]This Kishan Sabha gave the peasants an organized way of protest and increased their awareness and confidence. The tussle between the peasantry and the colonial government became inevitable. The communist party was organized in Sylhet and its class organization under the banner of the banned communist party. However,the ban was withdrawn in 1943 and it was allowed to function properly. The first conference of the Sylhet Communist Party's conference was held in Dakadakshin, Sylhet. But the leaders of the communist party in Cachar could not attend due to some constraints. The Communist Party was also formed in Cachar in 1943, leading to the growth of various peasant movements all over Cachar with an organizing committee consisting of Digendra Dasgupta, Ajoy Bhattacharjee, Tarapada Bhattacharjee, and Mohitush Purkayastha. Achintya Bhattacharjee, also an important member of communist party, was earlier Secretary of Cachar Congress, and joined the communist party in 1939. Though a core group of communists was formed in Cachar in 1938–39, formal organization was formed only in 1943.[29]

In 1938, Kishan Sabha, in collaboration with the Congress and

Socialist Congress, organized a procession against the Zamindar of Hailakandi, the Chakraborty family, who ruthlessly exploited the peasants. led a procession in Hailakandi and went to the house of the Zamindar and demanded redressal of their grievances of the tenants and also the resignation of Hirendra Chakrabarty, who always nursed anti-peasants' feelings and was a minister in the government led by Sir Saidullah. The procession was attacked by the mercenary forces of the Zamindar's family, injuring many activists from Congress and the Krishak Sabha.[30]

In 1938–1939, the Kishan Sabha led a peasant movement against zamindar Bairab Roy in Jamalpur–Kamalpur against the Zamindar, Vairab Roy. The Zamindar, Vairab Roy, ignored the Tenancy Act of 1935, used to evict the peasants, and also did not give receipt of the rent after getting it from the peasants. The peasants continued their agitation until their demands: a demand for providing rent receipts in return and to stop illegal evictions indiscriminately, were fulfilled. Nitai Patni gave legal assistance to the agitating peasants.[31]

The peasants not only fought for themselves; but also helped the tea garden labourers in their protests. When the laborers of the Ornabond tea garden organized a strike for fulfillment of their demand, which continued for 45 days, the peasants of Udharbond and nearby areas came to their aid and extended all kinds of help, including money, food, and shelter. Communist leaders like Sudhangshu Ghosh, Haridas Bhattacharjee, Gopen Roy, etc. played important role in the movement. The Cachar District Congress Committee supported the cause of the workers' strike and promised to extend all help.[32]

In 1940, the first conference of Kishan Sabha was held at Silchar, Cachar, under the leadership of Abdul Momin. Several decisions were being taken in the conference: a) Land to the tillers; b) putting stop to evictions and resisting it any way way; c) giving receipts or *Farooq* after payment of rent; d) opposition to the second world war, etc.[33]

In 1943, when there was famine in Bengal, a similar situation arose in the northeast. The prices of rice, cloth, and other daily necessities like salt, fuel, oil, coal, vegetables, etc. became costly. The Kishan Sabha

organized a protest movement against the Rice Syndicate, which grew up in the district. In Hailakandi in 1942–43, 5,000 people took part in the protest movement against the rice syndicate, demanding their dispersal. On seeing the violent mood and organized strength of the Kishan Sabha, the government of Assam decided to disperse the rice syndicate, and people were thus saved from a disaster. Along with the movement against the Rice Syndicate, the Kishan Sabha also organized a co-operative movement in Cachar due to shortages of some items, viz., salt, cotton, fiber, mustard oil, sugar, etc., and provided necessary daily items to people in all parts of the district through fair price shops with the help of the government. Important centers of the co-operative movement were Lakhipur, Attarotillah, Harinagar, Udharbond, Borkhola, etc.[34]

HijamIrabat Singha, a famous leader of Manipur, came to Cachar during the 1940s, and his arrival gave a new life to the Kishan Sabha. In Manipur, Irabat Singh participated in the freedom movement and gave leadership to the people of Manipur on the lines of Gandhiji. In Manipur, in 1939, there was a movement against the smuggling and hoarding of rice, which created an artificial scarcity of rice in the state. Manipuri women started a massive movement against rice hoarding, and Irabat Singh led the movement. Unable to bear the pressure, he was sentenced to three years imprisonment by government.[35]In prison, Irabat Singh was influenced by communist ideas, and after he was set free on March 20, 1943, he went to Bombay to attend a conference of the communist party, where he was instructed to stay in Cachar, where a large number of Manipuri people lived. After reaching Cachar, Irabat Singh immediately joined the peasant movement. He soon became the most popular peasant leader in Cachar. He also mobilized the artists into the movement.[36]As the Manipuri community was the second largest community in the district, its presence had great impact on both the Manipuri community and the Bengali community. Manipuri peasants joined the Kishan Sabha in large numbers. He used cultural shows as an instrument to arouse the consciousness of the peasants while urging them to join the peasant movement. Irabat Singh, along with others, had built a cultural squad,

singing patriotic and democratic songs, both in Manipuri and Bengali, and in the language of the tea garden laborers. These activities were popular among the common people and were popularly known as *Swadeshi Gaaner Dol* (patriotic song group). Irabat Singh not only worked with Manipuri people but also aroused other downtrodden classes in various other communities, including Barmans and Hindustanis of Cachar district.[37]

During the Tebhaga (three parts of produce) movement in 1946, the main center in Cachar was Attarotillah. The village is situated near the Silchar police station, about 20 to 25 miles away. Peasants joined the protest in large numbers. There were some tea gardens in the area, and the composition of the population was Manipuri and Nath (Bengalee), Muslim and tea garden workers. Sitaram Baroi was the principal leader of the movement and was helped by others; important among them were Abdul Wahid, Krishna Charan Nunia, Bechan Misra, etc. All of them gave leadership to the peasants. Sitaram Baroi was in favor of *bhagchasi* (share cropper) against his father Mahadev Baroi, who was a *Mirasdar* (superior land holder, a petty *zamindar*). When his father lodged a complaint with the local Thana, his son went underground in order to evade arrest and to carry on the agitation against the exploitation of the peasants.[38]The peasants were inspired by the activities of Sitaram Baroi, and they continued the agitation. The peasants cut the paddy forcibly from the field and took it to their *kamar*, and they fought unitedly against the police atrocities.

In the Tebhaga movement, a member of the Kishan Sabha, namely Madhav Nath, became the first martyr in Cachar. During the movement, he was arrested on August 8th, 1948, and he died in jail on August 11th, 1948.[39]Apart from Attarotillah, other important centers were Lakhipur, Dholai, Barjalenga, Kabuganj, Narshingpur, Banskandi, etc. The principal leaders of Lakhipur were Jiban Banerjee, Mukta Singh, Madan Singha, etc., who refused to give half their paddy to the landholders. In Borjalenga area, the peasant movement was organized by Srin Kar, Jitesh Kar, Jogesh Deb, etc. In Kabuhanj and Narsinghpur, the movement was led by Wahid

master, Madhav Singh, Nilmoni Singh, Lakhsman Goala, etc. In Bagbahar Basti areas, Dinesh Gour, Katiram Mora, and in the Banskandi area, Narain Singh, Mujair Ali and others devoted themselves to organizing the peasant movement.[40]

The largest and intensive peasant agitation took place in Udharbond, under the leadership of Gopen Roy. Landlords of this area used to take away major portion of the paddy, after harvest. People demanded that two thirds share should remain with them, and one third for the land holders, on the logic that as the owner of the land provided only land for cultivation, and all other ingredients for production were given by the peasants, therefore the peasants should get two thirds share. Though in the beginning there was some dialogue between the *Mirasdars* and the *Bhagidars* (share-cropper), but at last due to constant pressure from the police and the *Zamindars*, the peasants were forced to abide by the terms of the Bhaginama (agreement between *mirasdars* and *bhagidars*).[41]

CONCLUSION

Discontent among all classes of people was a common feature during the British rule in India. The peasants suffered due to the enhanced land revenue and various other new taxes that were imposed on them. Most peasants lost their lands, houses, and other properties on account of the vicious circle of the traders and moneylenders. In Assam, too, during the 19th century, there were many peasant movements. Phulaguri uprising, Rangiya uprising, and Patharughat uprising were the prime examples of peasant movements. The economy of Cachar was mainly an agriculture-centric economy. After the British annexed Cachar, there was an increase in the area of cultivation,but the profit did not reach the peasantry, and the profit from surplus production was taken away by the British through enhanced land revenue and imposition of various new taxes. Excessive increase in revenue by the colonial government led to impoverishment of the peasantry. Increasing discontent of the peasants led to peasant unrest in Cachar. After the formation of the Kishan Sabha in 1937 and the

Communist Party in 1943 in this region, the peasant protests gained momentum and got a new direction in an organized way. Kishan Sabha and the Communist Party did their best to awaken the peasantry about their rights and about the exploitation done by the *Zamindars*. Subsequently, in the decade preceding independence, there were peasant movements in Cachar. The peasant movement got connected to the freedom struggle, and ultimately, the peasants came into conflict with the British government.

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Urbanisation in Shillong and its Impact on Water Bodies

F Phibawanlang Kharpran and *Subrata Purkayastha*

ABSTRACT

Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya located in North East India is situated in the highest part of Meghalaya plateau, Shillong as an urban centre had its inception in the colonial period, built with a vision to house a population of less than a 0.1 million. Shillong was then a cluster of a few scattered hamlets, the Cantonment and the Municipality which at present has grown tremendously with 12 contiguous units forming the Shillong Urban Agglomeration (SUA). The population induced haphazard urban growth in this hill station leaves its impact on the environment, as overcrowded residential areas, traffic congestion, water shortage, poor sanitation and waste disposal leading to pollution of the numerous streams are common. The paper attempts to assess the pattern of growth of SUA in the recent decades, using Remote Sensing (RS) and Geographical Information System (GIS) and discusses its impact on the city's environment.

Keyword: Urban growth, RS and GIS, spatio-temporal analysis, environmental issues.

INTRODUCTION

Urban growth is a dynamic process where the boundaries of the urban area keeps growing due to expansion of urban functions reflected in space. The change in land-use/land-cover (LULC) in the periphery of the urban area creates a suburb where the rural settlements with open space, agricultural fields and forests gets sucked up within the urban area. In this process of urban expansion the land of the peripheral villages often change hands and are put into urban uses followed by furthering the

administrative limit of the urban area. In the initial phase often the settlement part of the villages in the periphery retains its features and keeps integrating to the urban area where people may retain their rural characteristics before they ultimately merge into the urban milieu leading to a contiguous urban growth termed as urban agglomeration. Shillong is also an urban agglomeration which consisted of seven units in the census year 1991 that has increased to twelve units as per 2011 census, viz. Shillong Municipality, Shillong Cantonment, Mawlai, Pynthorumkhrah, Nongthymmai, Madanriting, Nongmynsong, Umpling, Mawpat, Nongkseh, Umlyngka and Lawsohtun.

URBANISATION IN NORTH EAST INDIA

North East India comprising of eight states occupies about 7% of the geographical area of the country and supports about 4% of the total population of India. The proportion of urban population to total population was around 28% during 2001 census for the country, which was 15.66% for North Eastern region; this has increased to 31.16% for India in comparison to North East, i.e. 18.36 % as per 2011 Census. Though the rate of urbanisation is not very high for the whole country in general and North East in particular, yet it is interesting to note that India is the second largest urban system in the world with almost 11% of the total global urban population living in Indian cities. In absolute numbers the urban population in India is higher than highly urbanised countries like Japan, Sweden, and USA[1]. This is because India is the most populous country of the world having a share of more than 17% of the total population of the globe. A few decades later, 50% of the population of India will live in urban centers and this can transform India including North Eastern region into a global power; as cities usher in greater economic growth and generation of wealth, raising people's standard of living but unfortunately most urban centers of India in general and North East in particular suffer from multiple problems like overcrowding, lack of basic infrastructure, inadequate housing, sanitation, rising inequality reflected in growth of

slums, and rising crime rates along with pollution of the water bodies, land and air. Efforts are being made by government agencies both at the center and state level to address these issues. In India the large cities which greatly contribute to the economy of the country, are usually the centers where urban policies and programme are concentrated, whereas the smaller towns where majority of the urban population resides are mostly neglected. North East India has a larger share of smaller towns, which needs proper policy intervention as most of them are mainly administrative centers which have overgrown without much development process. It is interesting to note that for the country in general, in 2011 census, out of 7,935 urban centers more than 3,000 are medium to small towns. In 2001 out of 5,161 towns, 3,800 are statutory towns and 1,361 are census towns. The number of statutory towns and census towns in 1991 was 2,987 and 1,702 respectively. This reflects a gradual increasing trend of growth of medium and small towns. Significant proportion of the urbanisation of the country in general and North East in particular are neither acknowledged nor addressed as lack of basic urban amenities, poverty, higher rate of unemployment and underemployment are concentrated in these small towns of India. Almost half of the 7,935 urban settlements of India are census towns which continue to be governed as rural entities.[2] The census towns contribute to over 30 % of the net increase in urban population in between 2001 to 2011 transforming India from a rural to a quasi-urban economy. This poses challenges for sustainable development but at the same offers great opportunity to reap the benefit of urbanization that demands a creation of robust system in place. It is in this context that the present paper focuses on the spatio-temporal growth of Shillong urban agglomeration (SUA), At present SUA consists of a Municipality (Statutory town), a cantonment and 10 census towns whose haphazard growth is posing serious challenges to the environment especially the streams which drain Shillong. This needs to be addressed on a priority basis if we are to reap the benefit of urbanization in this small state of Meghalaya in particular and the country in general.

SHILLONG'S GROWTH AS AN URBAN CENTRE

Most urban centres report concentration of population within the town which starts in a small way but later spreads in different directions[3] and Shillong is no exception to this. The urban growth of Shillong like many other urban centres has taken place in a definite time and geographical setting and the factors associated with this growth are political, demographic, economic, socio-cultural and technological development. Urban growth is related to demographic changes. "Demographic changes are among the most direct influences on urbanisation and urban change. Movement of people, into and out from the cities, shapes the size, configuration and social composition of cities"[4] and Shillong is no exception to this. From a tribal settlement it has grown into a cosmopolitan urban centre in the midst of a tribal enclave where people have migrated with the expectations of improving their living standards, job opportunities and access to better facilities like education, health etc. This population induced urban growth of Shillong leaves its impact on the environment, as Shillong has a hilly terrain being located on the highest part of the Meghalaya plateau, where numerous streams originate and are the source of water for the population living in Shillong and downstream. Urbanisation demands clearing of forests, as more land is brought under built-up, this increases runoffs and reduces percolation of the water. As all streams of Shillong and its adjacent areas are rain fed, the growth of Shillong results to not only drying up of the streams especially in the dry season but also pollution of the streams as the waste generated by the city is washed into the rivers, in the absence of proper waste disposal. This has serious repercussion on both the quantity and quality of the rivers in the city. It is in this context that the present research paper addresses the growth of SUA that had its inception in the colonial period in the late 1800s, when the British administration shifted their headquarters from Sohra to Shillong because of its location in between the Surma valley in the south and Brahmaputra Valley in the north. The salubrious climate of Shillong also played its role in this shift. Soon Shillong emerged as the station and sanatorium and later as the capital of undivided Assam.

OBJECTIVE

- To analyse the population growth and urban expansion of Shillong Urban Agglomeration.
- To investigate the impact of urban growth on the water bodies of Shillong Urban Agglomeration.

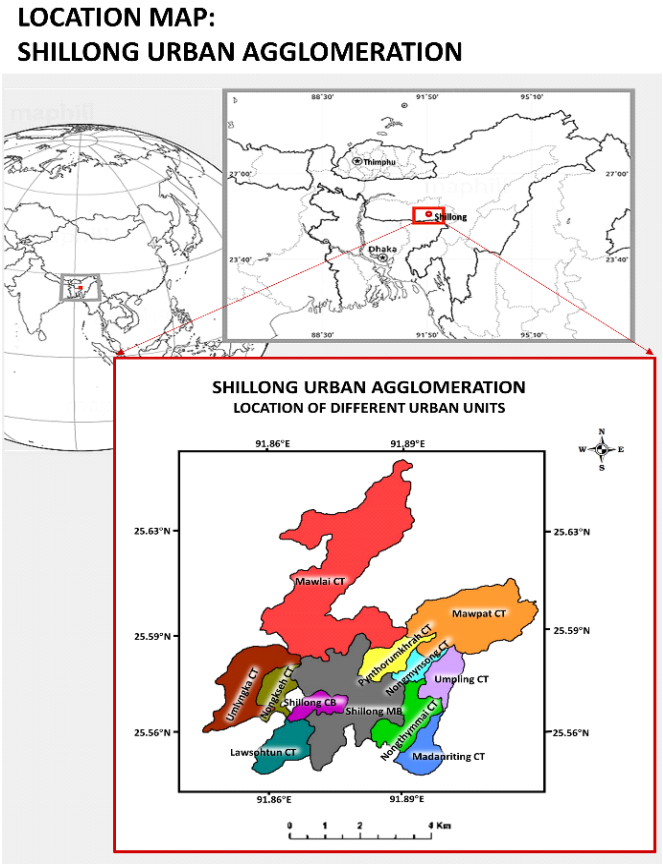

Figure-I: *the map shows the location and spatial extension of the Shillong Urban Agglomeration and its constituent urban units.*

STUDY AREA

Shillong Urban Agglomeration at present consists of 12 contiguous units, has an area of 60.82 sq.km with an extension of 25°66' N to 25°55' N

latitude and 91°86' E to 91°95' E longitude. The city is located in the central upland zone, the highest part of Meghalaya plateau which is fragile in nature limiting urban growth, yet SUA is a class I city supporting 96.68 % of the urban population of East Khasi Hills of Meghalaya.

As Shillong is a hill station, land becomes more scarce in this hill station characterised by moderate to steep slopes. Further infrastructural development is often restricted in a hilly terrain which in reality cannot support higher population size thereby affecting the quality of life of the people. There are two major rivers flowing through Shillong city which originate from the foothills of Shillong peak. They are: The Umkhrah River and The Umshyrpi River.

DATA BASE

This research paper is based on remote sensing and GIS technique in conjunction with analysis of secondary data. Secondary data on population, housing and other socio-economic data has been derived from Census of India which include District Census Handbooks for the year 1981, 1991, 2001, 2011 and relevant reports from different government agencies. Survey of India Toposheet No 78 O/14 at the scale of 1:50,000, was used to identify the boundary. Satellite imageries used for analysing the spatio-temporal growth of SUA includes Landsat-5, Landsat-7and Landsat-8 imagery USGS Earth explorer for the year 1991, 2001 and 2011.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for realising the objectives are as follows;

1. The population distribution and growth analysis of the SUA and its different units from the year 1981onwards, has been computed from the data provided in Census reports.
2. ArcGIS-10 and MapInfo-8.5 software has been used to assess the spatial and temporal growth of SUA. For this the following steps have been followed.

i. The boundary of SUA has been identified from the Toposheet no. 78 O/14 Survey of India.
ii. Its growth has been generated using the base map downloaded from USGS Landsat imagery for the year 1991, 2001 and 2011.
iii. Using different tools of analysis, change detection of built-up area in SUA has been observed from the year 1991 onwards.

3. The impact on the environment has been discussed using reports from The Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) on water quality status and by conducting a Rapid visualization survey on multiple sites along the Umkhrah and Umshyrpi River.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Contribution of census towns in the overall population growth of SUA

The SUA has grown extensively from a statutory town of less than 50,000 population since the time of India's Independence, till the present time where it forms an agglomeration of 12 urban units with a population of more than 350,000 persons. Its extensive growth is the result of a population spill into the peri-urban areas surrounding the Shillong Municipality. Figure-II shows the share of population among the different units of the SUA from the year 1901 to 2011 as reported in Census of India[5]. From the census year 1901 to 1921 Shillong Cantonment was the only urban unit that recorded a population size of 17,203 persons (1921 census). The 1931 census records Shillong as an agglomeration consisting of the cantonment and the municipality. Till 1951 the SUA consisted of two units, i.e. Shillong municipality and cantonment with a population size of 58,512 which was way below the 1 lakh population mark.

The population of SUA touched the one lakh population landmark in 1961 with the inclusion of census towns of Mawlai (8,528 person) and Nongthymmai (10,084 person) and for the first time population size crossed the one lakh mark, i.e. 102,398 persons. This landmark population was recorded as a result of a continuing population spill into the two villages,

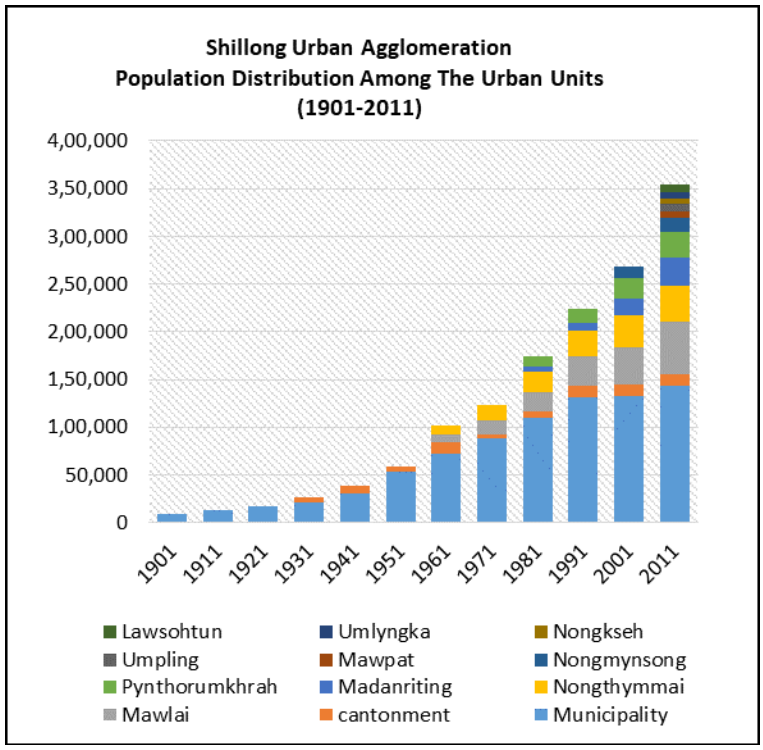

***Figure-II**: the composite bar diagram shows the changing distribution of population across the urban units of Shillong urban agglomeration from one census year to another since 1901. Data source: prepared by author based on Census of India 2011.*

located at the vicinity of the Shillong Municipality, viz. Mawlai in the north and Nongthymmai in the east as these villages achieved census town status as per 1961 census.

By the census year of 1981, SUA further expanded comprising of six urban units with a population of 174,703 persons. The census towns which were included during this period were Pynthorumkhrah and Madanriting with a population size of 10,711 persons and 6,165 persons respectively. In the census year 2001 another adjacent village achieved town status, i.e. Nongmynsong having a population size of 11,371 persons. By this census year the population of SUA had already crossed the 2.5 lakhs. The maximum contribution of census towns into the overall population growth of SUA, was in the census year 2011. In 2011, five adjacent villages achieved town status, which increased the population size of SUA to 354,759 persons. These newly added census towns are Mawpat (6,184),

Umpling (8,529), Lawsohtun (8,214), Umlyngka (7,381) and Nongkseh (4,842).

Shillong municipality being the core city of the SUA, has a maximum population share (Figure-II). The high concentration of population has contributed to various problems such as congestion, scarcity of basic urban amenities, growth of slums and encroachment of settlement into marginal areas. As a result, population spill into the peri-urban areas occurred through the years and new census towns have emerged with successive census years which are outside the administrative limit of the municipality governed by traditional tribal bodies and are basically rural entities with an urban tag. Over time the census towns are having concentration of population. Consequently the share of Shillong municipality's population is declining. Among the census towns, the maximum share of population within SUA, is in Mawlai.

TREND OF POPULATION GROWTH IN SUA

The urban growth rate for the country as a whole, indicates a highly fluctuating trend and a similar trend is observed for SUA as well. It is interesting to note that the landmark changes in urban growth rate coincides with major political events and changes in socio-economic policies which took place in the country. For the past three decades India has shown a declining trend in its urban decadal growth rate. The latest census 2011, records an urban growth rate of 29.68%.

The decadal growth rate of population in SUA shows a fluctuating trend since the census year 1901 till the present census; the linear trend shows a declining growth rate which is similar to the country's growth trend (figure-III). However when looking into the growth rate of the past three decades i.e. from 1981-2011, it shows a different trend from the country's urban growth pattern; the decadal growth rate of population still fluctuates but with an increasing trend. The increasing decadal growth rate of population is noticed during the census year 2011, this can be attributed to the addition of five new urban units to SUA, viz. Mawpat,

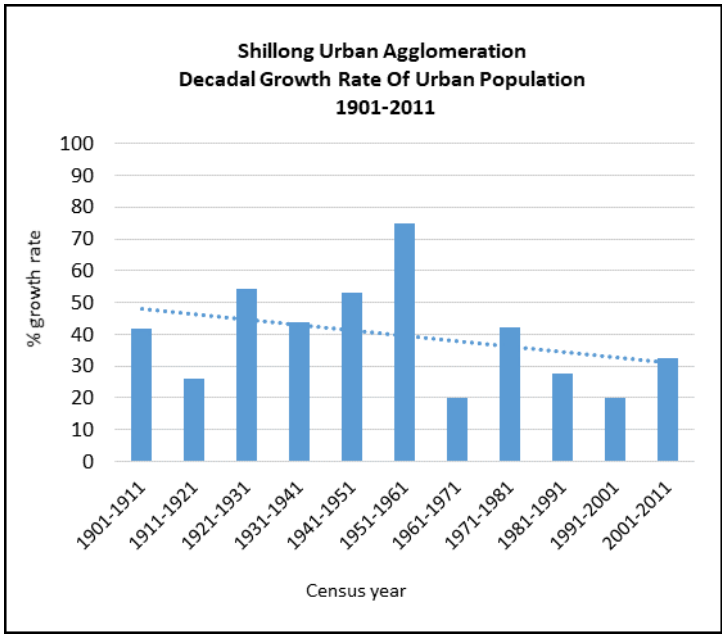

***Figure-III**: the decadal growth rate of Shillong Urban Agglomeration from 1901-2011 is presented in percentage by the author. Data source: Census of India, 2011.*

Umpling, Lawsohtun, Nongkseh and Umlyngka.

The population growth rate of different urban units forming the SUA is shown in Figure-IV. The Shillong municipal area supports the largest share of population shows a declining decadal growth in the last three decades. In 1981-1991 the growth rate of population was 20.57%, which declined drastically to 0.89% during the census year 1991-2001. This decline is likely due to the fact that the Shillong Municipality has reached a saturation point and there is hardly any land to support the extra population. In the same decade we also see a sharp increase in the decadal growth rate of Madanriting and Pynthorumkhrah from the previous census year. This can be attributed to the ongoing population spill from the Shillong Municipality and migration.Shillong municipality seems to have reached its saturation point in the census year 2001; in the following census i.e. Census 2011, it records a decadal growth rate of 7.8% (which is 7% more than the previous decadal growth rate). This change coincides with the implementation of the Meghalaya building byelaws 2011 which keeps a check on the construction of multi-storey building in hill towns.Prior to

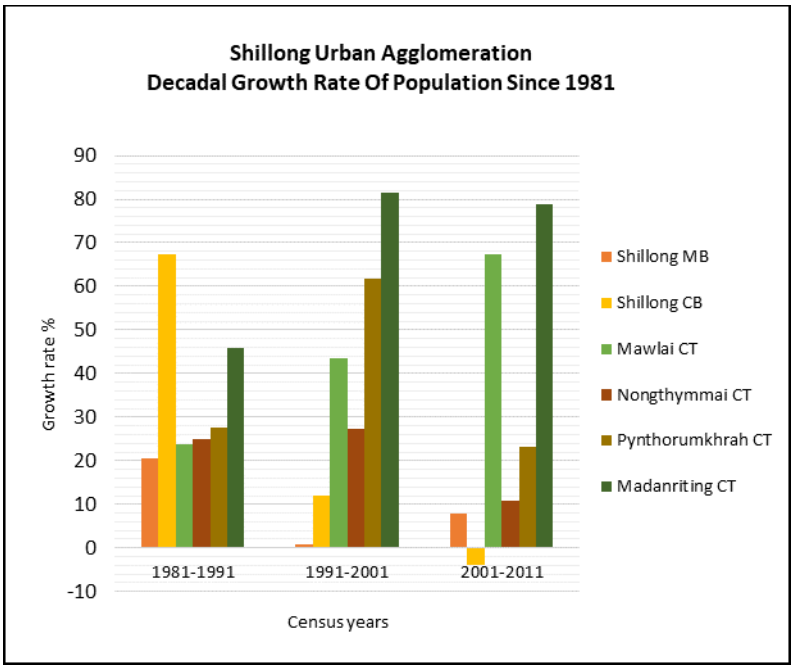

***Figure-IV**: the decadal growth rate in percentage of urban population from 1981 to 2011 among the different urban units of SUA. (Note: the new urban units achieving census town status in 2011 census were not included for the analysis.) Data source: Census of India 2011*

the implementation of the building byelaws in Meghalaya several multi-storey construction became the medium for accommodating more migrants into the city. The population density in Shillong Municipality during 2011 census was 13,825 person/km^2, which increased from the previous census, 12,825 person/km^2 (2001 census) and 12,714 person/km^2 (1991 census). This can be partially attributed to the vertical urban growth of Shillong Municipality.

PATTERN OF URBANIZATION AMONG DIFFERENT UNITS OF SUA

The structure and composition of urban units in SUA have been changing from one census year to the other. A clear understanding into the pattern of urbanization lies in the classification of the urban units into different class-size based on population size and their level of urbanization.

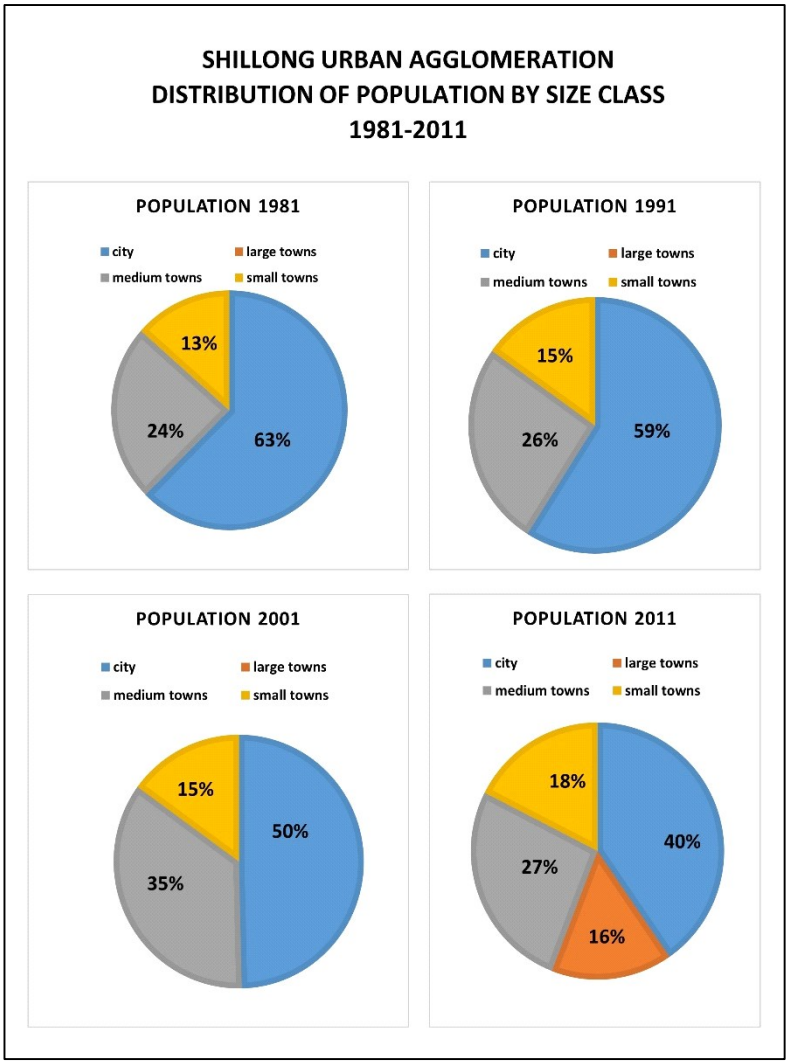

Figure-V:*The chart shows pie diagrams for different time periods, depicting the distribution of population among different town size /class of SUA. Data source: Census of India, 2011.*

Census of India have classified Towns/urban-agglomerations into six categories or size-class based on population size: Class I towns/city (population of more than 100,000), Class II towns (50,000 to 99,999), Class III towns (20,000 to 49,999 population), Class IV towns (10,000-19,999), Class IV towns (5,000 and 9,999) and towns with less than 5,000 population are Class VI towns. The urban area in the class I category is considered as a city. The class II towns are considered to be large towns and the class III towns are medium towns. The towns belonging to a size-

class; class IV, class V and class VI are called small towns.[6]

SUA became a class I size town/city as per 1961 census when the agglomeration recorded a population of 102,398 persons. The different urban units of SUA belong to different categories or size-class of towns. The distribution of population among the different town categories for the past three decades is depicted in Figure-V.

Across the size-class, it can be seen that there has been a trend of increase in the composition of medium towns; which were only 2 in 1981 and 1991 census but increased to 3 in the census years 2001 and 2011. The composition of small towns was relatively few in number in most of the census years but the number grew to 7 in 2011 census; with the inclusion of new census towns into the SUA (viz. Mawpat, Umpling, Lawsohtun, Umlyngka and Nongkseh). In 2011 census, Mawlai census town gains the status of a class II town size. In the last three decades there were no large towns. The emerging changing composition of size class towns through the census years indicates that the pattern of town composition in the SUA has become more diverse. Out of the total population of the SUA, the maximum share of population is recorded in the Shillong Municipality which is the only class I city; but the population share of this unit is declining from 1981 onwards which has drop by about 23%.

From this analysis one can derive that the pattern of urbanization for SUA is mainly driven by the increasing number of small towns particularly in 2011 census which are but overgrown villages supporting the surplus population without much development activities as associated with urbanisation that can usher in the much needed economic and social development transforming a rural economy into a modernised vibrant economy. An increasing concentration of population in the medium towns as seen in 2001 and 2011 census, is another reason which fuels the urban growth of population within the SUA. Hence these census towns are more of rural units with an urban tag having very little urban infrastructure and contributing marginally to the revenue of SUA as they lie outside that administrative boundary of the statutory urban area and are mere

outgrowth of Shillong.

SPATIAL GROWTH OF SUA SINCE 1991.

Any urban growth is a process which involves two parameters: the growth in the concentration of population in an urban place and the development and growth of the built-up area (buildings and infrastructure) of the surrounding urban place. The built-up area is generally considered as the important parameter to measure the urban growth[7]. The relationship between urbanization and population growth is correlated as increasing agglomeration forces result in towns and cities which merge into huge continuously built up areas[8]. Population growth in urban areas is often reflected in the expansion of the built-up area. As discussed, Shillong has expanded in size from just a cluster of a few villages and hamlets to a vast continuous spread of urban area.

The total geographical area of the SUA has been recorded since 1961 census of India. The census of India figures suggest an increasing pattern of growth in the geographical area, which was 21.27 km^2 in 1961 census, 25.4 km^2 in 1981 census, 27.05 km^2 in 2001 census and 60.82 km^2 in 2011 census. The geographical area increased by about three times since 1961 census. Table-I indicates that in the last three census years the expansion of the geographical area has increased by 139.44%, whereas the built-up area has increased by only 36.24%. The population has increased by 58.82 %. This suggests the unsustainable growth of SUA. The increase in the geographical area of the SUA is associated with the creation of new census towns.

NATURE OF SPATIAL GROWTH OF SUA

Initially the spatial growth of the entire SUA was towards the fringe of the Municipality and Cantonment. However with further expansion of the built-up area which spreads continuously from the city centre outwards; the adjoining villages were engulfed by the SUA and emerged

TABLE I

SHILLONG URBAN AGGLOMERATION: EXPANSION OF GEOGRAPHICAL AND BUILT-UP AREA FROM 1991- 2011

Year	*Total geographical area (sq. km)*	*Increase in total geographical area (sq. km)*	*% increase in geographical area*	*Built-up area (sq. km)*	*Increase in built-up area (sq. km)*	*% increase in built-up area*
1991	25.4	-	-	18.29	—	—
2001	27.05	1.65	6.49%	21.25	2.96	16.18%
2011	60.82	33.77	124.84%	24.92	3.67	17.27%
1991-2011	—	35.42	139.44%	—	6.63	36.24%

Source: *Geographical area: Census of India, 2011.* Built-up area, obtained from satellite imageries using GIS processing tools.

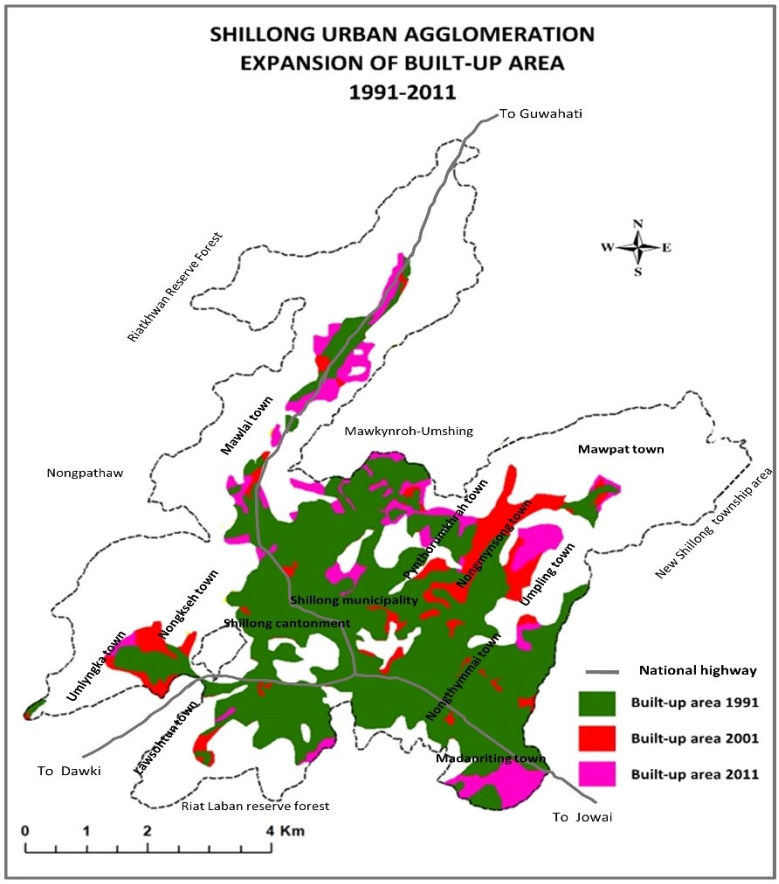

***Figure**-VI: the map depicts the spatio-temporal expansion of built-up area within theboundary of the Shillong urban agglomeration from 1991-2011. Data source: maps digitized and processed from USGS EarthExplorer landsat imageries using ArcGIS and MapInfo software.*

as census towns to be included into the SUA, thereby increasing the total geographical area.

Figure-VI visualises the expansion of the built-up area from one decade to another. The area under built-up was 18.29 sq. km in 1991, which increased to 21.25 sq. km in 2001 and 24.92 sq.km in 2011 indicating an increase of 36.25 % in the built up area within two decades. At present, the built-up area has spread along the major arteries; towards Mawiong (Mawlai) in the north, where NH-40 connecting Shillong to Guwahati (the largest urban centre of North East) has served as a growth impetus. Growth of built up area is also observed towards upper Shillong (parts of Lawsohtun, Umlyngka and Nongkseh) in the southwest and towards

Madanriting in the southeast.

Before 1990, concerns were raised towards the further expansion of built-up area in the southern part of the city, as it is an ecologically sensitive zone; being the highest part of the plateau where Shillong peak (1960m above mean sea level) is located, streams originate here to flow either towards the Surma valley in the south or Brahmaputra valley in the north. In response to this issue the New Shillong Township was initiated, rightly so by the Government of Meghalaya, which redirects the growth of SUA towards the north.

IMPACT OF URBAN GROWTH ON THE WATER BODIES

Water is one of the most vital components on earth, not only responsible for life but also for the total balance of environment. Degradation of rivers is a worldwide phenomenon and it is mainly due to pollutants and pollution caused by dumping of domestic waste, commercial waste, industrial effluent, agricultural effluent etc. When such wastes are being discharged in the rivers, it makes the rivers impure damaging the entire ecosystem. The present study attempts to identify the sources of water pollution of the two river systems, Umshyrpi and Umkhrah flowing through Shillong city.

WATER POLLUTION ACROSS UMSHYRPI AND UMKHRAH RIVER IN SUA

The Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) has established a network of water quality monitoring stations in the state under the National Water Monitoring Programme (NWMP). As per the latest data reported: Twenty Four sampling stations including Ground Water were located in East Khasi Hills. In all the monitored locations the pH was observed to be in the normal range of 6.5 to 8.5. The dissolved Oxygen was found to be very low in Umkhrah and Umshyrpi rivers with the minimum value 0.5 mg/l recorded at Umshyrpi River (Law College) and

Umkhrah River at Slaughter house Mawlai during the dry winter months of February and March, whereas its concentration in other rivers was always above 4mg/l, which was the minimum oxygen requirement for propagation of wildlife fisheries etc. The Bio-chemical Oxygen Demand was observed to be above 3mg/l in Ward's lake, Umkhrah and Umshyrpi Rivers. The total coliform count was observed to be above 5000mpn/100ml in Umkhrah and Umshyrpi Rivers. The monitoring results indicated that organic and bacteria were the main pollutants in the water bodies. This was mainly due to direct discharge of waste water in an untreated form from the residential and commercial centres. The amount of waste received by the two rivers, viz. Umkhrah and Umshyrpi Rivers was much beyond their assimilative capacity and thus has deteriorated the water quality to the extent that the water of these two rivers cannot be put to any beneficial uses[9].

CAUSES OF WATER POLLUTION IN UMKHRAH AND UMSHYRPI RIVERS.

The areas surveyed along Umkhrah and Umshyrpi rivers gives us a first-hand information on the main causes of water pollution in Shillong city. During our survey, conducted in the month of December 2022, several points from both Umkhrah River and Umshyrpi River have been taken to observe the causes of river pollution and how the pollutants hamper the quality of the river. The observations are discussed below:

***Rapid Population Growth and Unplanned Growth of Urban Settlement*:**

In the last couple of decades there has been a rapid but haphazard development of the city of Shillong and its suburbs. The growth in the number of buildings was simultaneous with the ever-increasing growth in the population density. The population of Shillong Municipality has grown tremendously from just 17,203 population in 1921 census to a population of 143,229 during 2011 census. The population growth is chiefly because of the growth in workplaces created by various developmental activities. In order to house the growing population, a lot of encroachment

Plate1*: encroachment of buildings into Umkhrah River at a site near Demseiniong.*

of buildings have been observed along the bank of both Umkhrah and Umshyrpi River which becomes the source of pollution into the rivers.

POOR SANITARY CONDITIONS

The new settlements in and around Shillong city have poor sanitary conditions. In Shillong city proper sewage system and sewage treatment facilities are absent. From our study we have observed that, there is an uncontrolled damping of domestic effluents (liquid waste or sewage

Plate2*: Drains adopted by Municipal authorities, releasing sewage to river Umkhrah, at Wahiingdoh.*

Plate3*: Picture of buildings with poor sanitary conditions at a site in Laban, polluting Umshyrpi River.*

discharge into the river from various houses) into both the rivers. The discharge of waste from various houses increases the concentration of phosphates which is the major ingredient of most detergents. The high concentration of phosphate in the river favours the luxuriant growth of algae which forms water bloom or algal bloom which in turn reduces the oxygen level in the water.

Improper Solid Waste Disposal and Illegal Site Dumping

The inhabitants of the city not only use open sewers for disposal of wastewater but they have become the most convenient sites for dumping all kinds of domestic and industrial solid waste. Site dumping of solid waste have been observed in many localities which are densely populated, viz. Laban, Malki, Demseiniong area, Wahiingdoh, to name a few. Site dumping of solid waste in Jaiaw area is relatively less. Consequently, the drains as well as the streams carry a heavy load of all types of solid waste and wastewater which eventually pollutes the entire stretch of Umkhrah and Umshyrpi rivers which drain down to the Umiam lake located at a lower elevation of Shillong proper and create problems for the population living downstream.

Plate3:*Illegal Dumping of solid Waste in drains flowing to Umshyrpi River.*

CONCLUSION

It is observed that the spatio-temporal growth of SUA is the result of population growth leading to spatial expansion of Shillong towards the

fringe villages which gets designated as census towns in different census years having hardly any urban infrastructure to support the urban population. The growth of built-up area at present is mainly towards the north-eastern (due to planned growth of New Shillong) and north-western direction due to Shillong Guwahati highway which acts as a growth impetus. In the last two to three decades there has been rapid population growth leading to haphazard constructional activities of the city of Shillong and its suburbs. To provide more houses and work places for the people, new settlements are built some of which encroach into the banks of rivers. It is a common practice of the people living by the stream or river to dispose of the toilet drain into the water bodies. In Shillong city proper, sewage system and sewage treatment facilities are absent. The inhabitants of the city not only use open sewers for disposal of wastewater but they have become the most convenient sites for dumping of all kinds of domestic and commercial solid waste. Consequently, the drains as well as the streams carry heavy load of all types of solid waste and wastewater. Worst is that these streams have been adopted officially by the municipality to serve as sewer lines which ultimately leave a negative impact on the water quality of not only Umkhrah and Umshyrpi rivers but also lake Umiam as these rivers flow to the lake Umiam and is the source of water for the population living downstream. Hence the waste generated by the SUA is being consumed by the population living downstream, this needs immediate attention. To conclude, if we are to reap the benefits of urban growth of SUA we need to focus on the mentioned issues for which policy intervention along with proactive planning needs to address on a priority basis along with technological intervention.

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Socio-cultural Values of Sartang- the Himalayan Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh

Dinky Mishra, Monalisha Mili, Arani Saikia

ABSTRACT

Sartang tribe is one of the obscure tribes of West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh exhibiting unique culture and tradition. Unlike other tribes, the Satrangs of West Kameng district are facing an identity crisis due to refusal of the concerned authorities to acknowledge their unique identity and culture and consider them as sub-group of Monpa tribe. The people of this tribal community are struggling to gain official recognition to safeguard their unique identity. They are mainly confined in the two sub-divisions of West Kameng District, i.e. Nafra and Dirang circle and having a population of 5,000 persons approximately. Very limited research has been done to study the Sartang tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The culture of a tribe is the representation of unique identity of tribal population. The present study is an attempt to demonstrate the rich culture and tradition of this unfamiliar Himalayan tribe of the Arunachal Pradesh.

Key Words: Obscure, Identity crisis, Culture, Recognition, Sartang tribes

INTRODUCTION

There are 25 tribes and many sub-tribes living in the eastern Himalayan region of Arunachal Pradesh. They have preserved a strong kinship and special harmony with nature since time immemorial. The state of Arunachal Pradesh is considered 'peerless' from the anthropological point of view[1]. Out of 16 districts, West Kameng District is home to the lesser-known Sartang tribe. Until recently, the Sartangs belonged to the Monpa Scheduled Tribe and were sometimes referred to as *Maichhopo* or *Matchopa* and *Butpa* or *But Monpa* but later on they changed their nomenclature as

Sartang[2]. The term *Butpa* is derived from the Tibetan language meaning the blowing air from the top of the hills. Simply it means the inhabitants residing at the top of the hilly areas. The term "SAR" is referred as eastern region from where the sun rises and "TANG" refers to the almighty God. Thus, the term *Sartang* is defined as the inhabitant of eastern region and is the worshipper of nature, i.e. earth and sky. There are very few accounts regarding the Sartang tribe. The Sartang people believe that their ancestors descended from heaven. According to popular myths, they first settled at Siri-Thangli (Mount Gourichen), when Ashu Zeng descended from the heavens. Four sons of Ashu Zeng dispersed from Siri-Thangli in two distinct paths. The four brothers Rongra-Dingla, Mijen-Mina, Jeri-Jeson, and Thonso-Bruson eventually met and started moving together to Rahung, Khoina, Jerigaon, and Salari. The Sartang tribe acquired their name from the *But/Boot Monpa* to protect their ancestry. With a definite common territory, endogamous group, common dialect, ties of blood relationship, indigenous knowledge system and a sense of unity, the Sartangs have a typical tribal culture. They have affinities with the neighbouring tribal societies. The dialect of this ethnic group is similar with the Sherdukpen of Rupa, Shergaon and Jigaon areas whereas their traditional attire is similar to the Monpas of West Kameng District.

LITERATURE REVIEW

William Robinson's *A Descriptive Account of Assam* (1841) has unquestionably become a classic in the fields of history, geography, sociology and anthropology, yet, there is no mention of the Sartang tribe. There is no discussion on the Sartangs among the major tribal communities of North East India in another significant writing[3].

The tribe, once known as *But Monpa* eventually adopted the name Sartang. The Tibetan word *But* means air from the hill tops. It stands for the people who live in hilly locations. The term "Sartang" refers to those who love nature and live in the eastern part of the world. They mostly reside in the Dirang and Narfa circles having four villages namely Rahung,

Salari, Jerigaon, and Khoina[4]. This study seeks to study the socio-economic and demographic profile of Sartang tribe and find out major issues behind emerging identity crisis of Sartang tribe.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is both descriptive and empirical in nature which is based on primary and secondary data. Secondary data is collected from journals, magazines, newspapers and books, documents, pamphlets, and reports published by the Department of Agriculture and Department of Economics and Statistics. Besides, existing literature available in various journals, books, etc. has been consulted with a view to develop a broad theoretical framework of the present research in right perspective. Necessary primary data has been collected from 100 households from four sampled villages with the help of a well-designed survey schedule. The simple purposive random sampling technique is used for the study. The data obtained from primary sources has been processed and analyzed using SPSS and MS excel for logical interpretation.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The tribal communities represent an important social category of Indian social structure. They carry forward the legacy of rich and distinct cultural traits for many decades. The intangible heritage in the form of traditional knowledge among tribes contains many positive and productive elements that are really invaluable for the entire humanity. Despite its significant role to integrate the society, this intangible heritage faces serious threats to its existence. The rapid process of globalization, urbanization and pervading influence of western culture is threatening their existence. It is the need of the hour to preserve the rich cultural inheritance of tribal societies in its multiplicity of forms and manifestations in order to contribute to the development of mankind.

STUDY AREA

The West Kameng district falls under the physiographic division of Western Arunachal Pradesh. The district is endowed with high mountains, peaks and valleys. There is a wide variation in topography. The headquarters Bomdila is located in 8,000 feet above the mean sea level. It extends approximately between 91° 30' to 92° 40' East longitude and 26° 54'to 28° 01' North latitude. The name of the district is derived from the river Kameng, a major tributary of the river Brahmaputra. The average height of the district is about 9,000 feet. The district occupies an area of 7,422 Km^2 and shares an international border with Tibet region in the North and Bhutan in the West (Fig.1). It also shares state border with Sonitpur and Darrang district of Assam in the Southern part and towards its east lies Tawang and East Kameng district. There are total 18 sub-divisions in West Kameng district. The total number of villages is 263 including both urban and rural[5]. The Sartang tribe is confined to mainly two subdivisions, i.e. Nafra and Dirang[6]. The district is also inhabited by other tribes like Akas, Buguns, Monpas, Sajolangs and Sherdukpens. The total population of Sartang tribe has increased from 1,596 in 2001 to 4,000 in 2011[7].

SPATIAL CONCENTRATION OF SARTANG TRIBE

The villages of the Sartang tribe are situated at the bank of river Kameng (tributary of Brahmaputra river). The largest village is Rahung which consists of more than 250 households. In general the four villages consist of more than 463 households (Survey, 2020-2022). All these modifications emerged with the social transformations due to socio-economic, cultural and political developments in the society. The Sartang villages are not well defined units. The villages have both compact and dispersed type of settlement. All the villages are known by distinct name but not by their clan name. The villages are permanent. All the villages are connected with the metalled road and transport and communication facilities are available. The following are the four villages with their respective sub-villages:

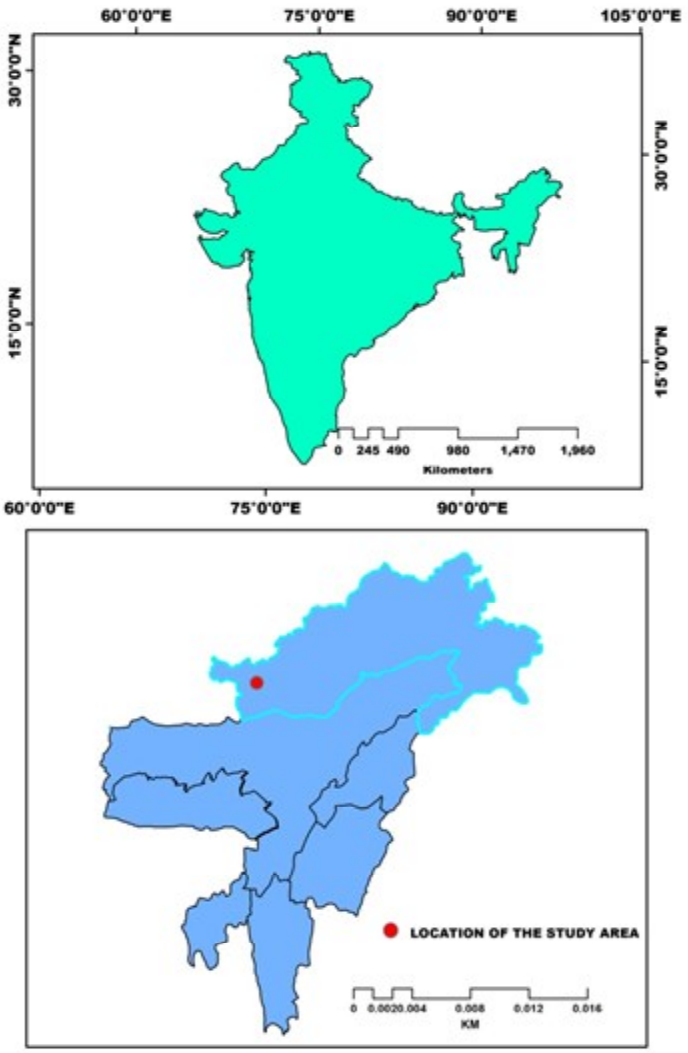

FIG.1: LOCATION MAP OF THE STUDY AREA

BRIEF HISTORY

Compared to other tribal groups residing in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, little is known about the history of the Sartang people. There are no written records about their origin. Despite the lack of any historical record, the Sartang people have a rich oral history about their origin, settlement, migration, and relations with their neighbours. Only a

TABLE: 1
SARTANG TRIBES DOMINATED AREAS IN WEST KAMENG DISTRICT

Sl No.	*Villages*	*Sub-Villages*
1	Khoina (Local Term-KhunuThuk)	1. Saddle 2. Bachlunbo 3. Dingchhang
2	Jerigaon (Local Term ChhichinThuk)	1. Kira Farm 2. Mijengthung 3. Singjon
3	Salari (Local term-khatanthuk)	1. Khoitam
4	Rahung (Local term-RifingThuk)	1. Dangsing 2. Darbu 3. Tingha 4. Warjung 5. 6 Mile (Bi-Brang) 6. Tongsong 7. Chhandan 8. Khodru 9. Stu 10. Tingchung

Source: *Field Survey 2020-2022*

few of these histories have been recorded and translated so far. The prevalent folk tales narrate the stories relating to their origin. They believe that their ancestors migrated from the east. The Sartang as a local tribal group were never numerous or powerful. On the contrary, they were loosely brought under the control of other local communities and superseded by the Tibetan administration. Due to imposition of tax by the Tibetan authority, the Sartang people had to weave bamboo mats and baskets and collect madder dye (Rahung and Khoitam) or produce earthenware pots (Jerigaon), and carry those produced items to the regional

administrative centre at Dirang. However, the Tibetan administration was relatively weak in the north of the Gongri River and east of the Monpa villages of Thembang and Lagam, and often did not include Khoina, Jerigaon, or the Miji and Hruso Aka dominated areas. In the early 20th century, the Hruso Aka tribe emerged as another regional force in the region and the Miji often joined them as their allies. Both the Hruso Aka and Mijis conducted yearly raids on the Sartang villages to collect taxes, in which they took food grains, woven cloth, live animals, salt, cooking utensils, and whatever else they might need. This dual pressure of taxation greatly affected the Sartang villages economically and was threatening their existence.

For the first time in history, the British Captain Nevill described the Sartang Tribe residing in Konia village as extremely deprived and poor tribal people. According to his report, this situation was due to exploitation by the Mijis, who forced the people of Konia to cultivate for them. Evidence from the local oral history shows the precarious living conditions in the Sartang villages, which greatly influenced their survival on account of steadily decreasing population and erosion of the social fabric and cultural practices. However, the situation of Sartang villages slightly improved in the 1940s when the British established an army outpost to check the raids by the Miji and Hruso Aka, and an army outpost in Dirang to limit the influence of the Tibetans. After Indian independence, the situation worsened again, as in the year 1962 China invaded the region and the Sartang villages again witnessed the ill effects of Miji raid. But in subsequent years, there were some changes and improvement in the area as the Indian administration extended its developmental activities. However, because of the administrative setup, it was mainly the Miji of Nafra and the Monpa of Thembang who greatly benefited from this sort of development by Indian administration. The Sartang villages still continued to remain deprived and marginalised until 21st century. In the early years of the 21st century, there was a growing ethnic consciousness among the Sartang people as they wanted to be recognised as separate social tribe rather than being considered as sub-tribe of Monpa.

They realised that the four Sartang inhabited villages, i.e .Khoina, Jerigaon, Salari and Rahung shared a common linguistic origin, customs, history, and religious heritage. They realised that their submergence as sub-tribe under the Monpa Scheduled Tribe has severely curtailed their access to resources under India's Scheduled Tribes legislations. Until recently, most of the Sartang villages did not have access to education, healthcare, agricultural inputs and subsidies, infrastructure, electricity, and the mobile network. So since 2004, the people of Rahung, Khoitam, Jerigaon, and Khoina have been demanding recognition as a separate Scheduled Tribe. In 2017, the then Union Home Minister, Kiren Rijiju, who is a member of the Miji tribal group from Nafra, assured the Sartang people of inclusion of their tribe in the Union ST list (*Arunachal Times* 2017). However, in 2019, the central government approved the introduction in parliament of the 'Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2018'. Then, on 13th February 2019, the part of the bill applying to Arunachal Pradesh was passed by the Rajya Sabha (Council of States, the Upper House of India's bicameral Parliament) as the 'Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Third Amendment) Bill, 2019 which recognised the Sartang tribe as Scheduled Tribe with separate ethnic entity.

POPULATION STRUCTURE

In West Kameng district, among the four surveyed villages from two circles, the total number of population belonging to Sartang tribe is 2,256. It has been found that among the total surveyed households 1,149 are males and 1,107 are females. So, it is seen that male population outnumbers female population among Sartang tribe in the district. Table 2 depicts the population characteristics of Sartang tribe of West Kameng district. It is observed that the maximum number of individuals come under the category of adolescent and adult or child bearing age group, i.e.,15-19 years (10.87 percent male, 9.93 percent female), 20-24 years (8.70 percent male, 8.31 percent female),25-29 years (6.78 percent male, 6.77 percent

TABLE 2
AGE AND SEX COMPOSITION OF SARTANG TRIBE OF WEST KAMENG DISTRICT

Age	*Male*	*Percentage*	*Female*	*Percentage*	*Total population*	*Percentage*
0-4	102	8.87	110	9.93	212	9.39
5-9	155	13.48	158	14.27	313	13.82
10-14	150	13.05	140	12.64	290	12.85
15-19	125	10.87	110	9.93	235	10.41
20-24	100	8.70	92	8.31	192	8.51
25-29	78	6.78	75	6.77	153	6.78
30-39	176	15.31	162	14.63	338	14.98
40-49	147	12.79	145	13.09	292	12.94
50-59	68	5.91	64	5.78	132	5.85
60^{+}	48	4.17	51	5.14	99	4.38
Total	1149	100	1107	100	2256	100

Source: Household Survey, 2020-2022

female), 30-39 years (15.31 percent male, 14.63 percent female), 40-49 years (12.79 percent male, 13.09 percent female), viz. on an average 52.64 percent population belong to above mentioned category. It is observed that the individuals coming under the category of infant, childhood and later childhood are comparatively more than old age, i.e. infant 0-4 years (8.87 percent boys, 9.93 percent girls), childhood 5-9 years (13.48 percent boys, 14.27 girls), later childhood 10-14 years (13.05 percent boys, 12.64 percent), old age 50-59 (5.91 percent male, 5.78 percent female) and above 60 (4.17 male and 5.14 female).Men outnumber women in most age groups. Large chunk of population (52%) belongs to younger and adolescent age groups, possibly due to high fertility rates and a lack of family planning measures. Fewer persons over age group 60 and above (4.38%) may be due to poor life expectancy. Due to lack of proper medical services, high

death rate prevails among the aged population in the region.

SOCIO-CULTURAL PROFILE

Housing designs

Earlier the houses were mostly constructed in three floors by stone, wood and bamboo. In the first floor, the domestic animals were kept such as pig, hen, goat, sheep etc. The second floor served as living room of family members and there was no partition in this floor. The most significant feature of the house was the fire places which were made at the center of the house and a tripod iron stand was used in the hearth. The hearth has four corners and except the uppermost corner all the three corners can be occupied by the family. It is believed that the almighty God exists in the uppermost corner. So, while sleeping any member of the household has to ignite (*Dhuna*) or the leaf of a religious tree in an earthen pot which is always kept in the uppermost corner of the hearth. Many wall racks were made in the room for keeping utensils and other eatable items and have a locked system made of wood. At the entrance of the house, the door is erected with thick wood and the floor of apartment is also made of thick wood. Earlier the doors and verandas were constructed on both sides of the house with small windows. The third floor served as a store room for keeping valuable items, meat, vegetables and wine. A long wooden stairs is made between second and third floor so that people can get things from the top of the apartment. Earlier, there were no facilities of CGI sheets (tin) so the roof of the houses was made of only bamboo. The toilet and bathroom are not attached and constructed outside the house. Nowadays, the construction of the house pattern has totally changed. Most of the houses now are built of cement and timber with tin roofs. Bamboo houses are found very less in number nowadays. Before construction of any house, the Sartang people consult with the village priest by taking handful of soil from the proposed site to start construction for wellbeing and prosperity.

TABLE 3
EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF SARTANG POPULATION OF WEST KAMENG DISTRICT

Education Level	*Male in %*	*Female in %*	*Total Population (%)*
Primary (I-IV Standard)	69.23	69.52	69.35
Upper Primary (V-VIII Stand.)	12.43	22.86	16.42
Secondary (Up to X Standard)	13.61	7.62	11.31
Higher Secondary & above	4.73	0	2.92
Total	100	100	100

Source: *Household Survey, 2020-2022*

Status of Women and Educational Attainment

The term status is concerned with the comparative degree of prestige, rights, duties and role etc. in the society. Similarly it deals with the position of women in the family as well as in the society. The women's prime role in the society starts with her responsibility towards her family. To make an overview of the status of women of Sartang tribe, an effort has been made to cover various aspects of women in the society such as occupation, education, property ownership, political activity, religion, family, and health.

Men conduct physically arduous work such as cutting down of trees, obtaining building materials from the jungle, ploughing, carpentry, building houses, hunting, and fishing. Women have lighter duties. During the agricultural season, rural women get up early to prepare tea, breakfast, lunch, and other meals before heading to the field. Women equally participate with men in ploughing, sowing and also in harvesting but fencing works are carried out by the male members only. The widow gets full rights over her husband's property until remarriage. A wife has every right over the ornaments she brought from her parents. In Sartang society women were denied of political rights in the past. The decisions of the male members were regarded as the final decision. Unmarried girls could not have share over their parents' property. Parents and other family members give her gifts or presentations during her marriage. There is no

restriction over the girls and are allowed to move freely in the society. She can choose any life partner, even if they're married. The Sartang people give a high status to women in society. The women are allowed to attend the village councils but are not allowed to interfere unless she is involved with the case. Women have some religious and societal limits. Hunting and fishing are banned among women. As priests, they rarely engage in religious ceremonies.

The household survey conducted during 2020–2022, revealed that the gender wise literacy rate of Sartang Tribe is 54 percent male and 46 percent female are literate.In other words female literacy rate is low in comparison with male literacy rate (Table 3). It is observed that among total literate people of Sartang tribe, majority have only primary education and very few have secondary and higher educational qualification. 69.23 percent male and 69.52 percent female have primary level education, but in case of upper primary level education (V to VIII standard) the proportion of females is quite higher (22.86 percent) than male (12.43 percent). Again in case of formal education up to matriculation level, the share of male population is higher (13.61 percent) than female population (7.62 percent). From the surveyed community it is evident that the percentage of enrolment of girls up to secondary level education and above is low and the sole cause behind this is underage marriage of girls. Due to parental illiteracy, women were unable to pursue education. A recent survey found that 80% of parents want to enroll their children in a good school, regardless of gender but their economic backwardness obstructs their aspirations.

Village Council

The political organization in the Sartang society is the village community as a whole in the form of a village council. The village council consists of the headman (*thukakho*), the informer (*gomi*), and two persons from each family. The headman presides over the village council and decides petty disputes, thefts, border disputes, and property division[8]. The village headman is essential for welfare tasks. No educational qualification and family status are required for selection to a headman. The headman

is known as *Thuk-Akho* in local term, where *Thuk* means village and *Akho* refers to the head. The post of village headman is permanent till death or voluntary resignation. The village headman is appointed by the villagers based on his influential qualities as well as experience. The person who files a case, approaches the headman by offering a *khata* (a linear piece of finecloth used for ceremonies) along with a bottle of wine.

Family Structure

The family set up is patriarchal and the father is the head of the family. On his death the eldest son succeeds him. A typical Sartang family as a unit consists of husband, wife and their children. Joint families are common in the society. Frequency of divorce is not very high and the widow's remarriage are permitted. It has been a tradition that the sons stay with their parents till the death of parents. The eldest brother has the responsibility to look after their parents. Except the elder brother, other sons separate from their parents and construct another house after getting married. The daughters go to live with their husband after getting married. Father is the supreme authority to maintain and conduct the children in his family. The eldest brother who looks after the old aged parents gets additional share of property. In case of the common shares of land, younger brothers are not permitted to sell the land without consulting the elder brother after the father's death. The head of the family has important responsibility. He looks after the economic needs of the family, marriage of the family, various social and religious activities, disputes, loans, agricultural activities, etc. After the death of father, the elder brother takes the charge as guardian and even his mother cooperates in every matter. The younger brother and sister do not take any steps regarding marriage, sale of household items and education, etc. without the consent of elder ones. In family, women always have light task as compared to the males in terms of any work.

Dress and Ornaments

The dresses of Sartang people are same for all the age groups and similar with the Monpas. The common dress for both the male and female

is *Shenko* and *Khanjre*. *Shenko* is a sleeveless and collarless garment which is fastened tightly around the waist by Sash (locally known as *Makhak*. It covers the body from shoulders to calf than put on a full sleeved jacket (*Chulo*) made of endi / silk cloth. Jacket may be black, white and red in colour. The black colour coat can be worn single over *Shenko* but white and black cannot be worn separately. A black or red woollen cloth is hanged at the backside from the waist known as *Kaftha*. *Shenko* is a traditional dress which is kept reserved and is used only in the festivals and other social functions.

Man wears the jacket known as *Khanjre* in local term. Earlier, male used to wear the half pant but people do not use it now. Thus, man can wear any type of pant and shoes. The women folk are fond of ornaments mainly made of silver, such ornaments are bangles (*thrin*). Necklace (*Rugo*), earrings, fingers rings, etc. The silver bangle is studded with the red and green stones. *Nayu* is a green stone which is used to wear in the ear as well as studded over the necklaces. It is the tradition that all necklaces are removed from the body after death. There are no ornaments for the male. Thus, the dress and ornaments of both men and women are very simple.

PHOTO 1: TRADITIONAL ATTIRE OF SARTANGS OF WEST KAMENG DISTRICT

Religious Belief

*Lossa*r is one of the major festivals. It is the festival of the celebration

of New Year in the month of February and March every year. The term *Lossar* is derived from the Tibetan language where *Lo* means the year and *Sar* refers to the New. No particular date is fixed for the festival. It is celebrated according to the date of local calendar. *Lossar* is celebrated for 15 days. One month before the arrival of *Lossar* festival, people prepare the things necessary for the *Lossar*. One of the important features of the *Lossar* is making of *Khafse* (eatable items prepared through the flour/maida). People make *Khafse* with the cooperation of each member of household known as *Brompu* in local term. Thus, in the first day of *Lossar* festival, people celebrate individually in the house and from the next day they invite each other as well as outside the village in the house which is compulsory. At present, Buddhism is dominant in the region. Before the emergence of Buddhism and Christianity, they only worshipped Tang - the God of nature. The survey of 2012 showed 78% Buddhist, 16% Tang and 7% Christian households in the area. The Buddhists go to Gonpa and pray there by igniting *chhomi* (Lamp), *poitang* (agarbatti) and offering *khatha/dorkho* (a linear piece of white silk or cotton cloth with different colors usually used only during the religious ceremonies and marriage ceremonies.) In the festival of *Lossar*, people decorate the God's room in systematic manner. Religious flag (*fan*) is hoisted usually in the 15th day of *Lossar* festival for long life. Still about 16% of the people worship Tang. Apart from few Christian households, rest of the people follow both the Tang and Buddhist religion together. However, during the *chhiksakhen* festival every household must be involved in this celebration. *Chhiksakhen* refers to the festival of God and it is celebrated for 10 days in the months of January or February every year. Before the arrival of *chhiksakhen* festivals, about three or four women do the fasting and are restricted to take food from outside. They are considered as the sisters of God (La-miring). Earlier *Lossar* festival was not celebrated widely but later on people have been celebrating it and now it has became a major festival. In the last day of the festival, i.e. 15th day every household hosts the *fan* (flag) for long and prosperous life.

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PHOTO 2: A SARTANG COUPLE DURING THE MARRIAGE CEREMONIES

Customary Laws

Customary law is unwritten indigenous rules. Customary regulations encompass chieftainship and ethnicity in addition to birth, marriage, death, festivals, ceremonies, and rituals. In case of any murder, the village heads work as messenger between the two persons or groups, whereas in other cases any other member can become messenger[10]. According to the customary laws, the case must be solved within a week. In case of intentional murder, the murderer has to perform and bear the expenses of all rituals and ceremonies. In case of unintentional murder, the punishment is bit lesser. The majority of the Sartang people still practice pre-Buddhist rites such as yak, cow, lamb, and chicken sacrifices, worship of regional deities, and spirit possession[11].

ECONOMIC PROFILE

Agriculture

The Sartangs of West Kameng are primarily engaged in farming. They do not have surplus for trade. The agricultural products are for self-subsistence. They practice jhuming, or shifting cultivation. Agriculture is mainly done manually and by traditional methods. Oak leaves and cow

dung are used for enhancing land fertility. After clearing a tract of forest or jungle, the trees are left to dry and then burned, preparing the ground for ploughing. Principal agricultural equipment includes axes, small spades, spades, daos, sickles, winnowing pans, threshing mates, and baskets.

PHOTO 3: A FIELD WITH COW DUNG, OAK TREE LEAF AND GRAIN AFTER HARVEST

Groups of villagers cultivate the lands by rotation. In local term, this group of villagers is known as *Brompu*. For the fertility of agricultural field, the oak leaves are collected from the forest and dropped over the agricultural field especially for maize cultivation.

Occupational Pattern

Agriculture, services, contract jobs, and pensioners comprise the region's workforce. Primary, secondary and tertiary job levels divide society. 72% of total population is engaged in agriculture and allied activities, 21% are engaged in service sector, 5% are engaged in business

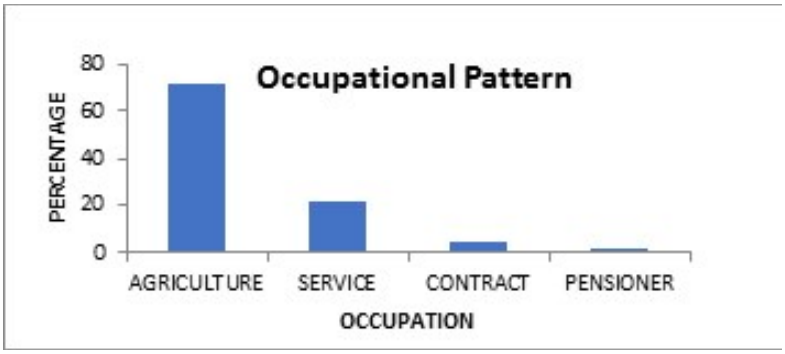

FIG 2: OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN OF SARTANG TRIBE

Source: *Household survey, 2020-2022*

and contract and remaining 2% of the households are getting pension.

The region's economy is predominantly agricultural, according to the field survey report. The data shows that the economy of the region is mostly based on agriculture. The agricultural production is not surplus for trade purpose; it is only for self-consumption in the area.

CONCLUSION

The Sartang tribe along with other tribes residing in Arunachal Pradesh at present is going through the critical stage of transformation[12]. Fast changing elite society due to rapid modernization has tremendous impact in tribal societies which has brought rapid transformation in their whole socio-cultural milieu. The tribal people have in their possessions the rich traditions, culture and heritage with unique life styles and customs. Today the rich cultural heritage of the Sartang tribe manifested in its folklore, costume, jewellery and lifestyle, is under serious threat, and may fade into oblivion in future as there is no authentic documentation of the traditional tribal lives, history and cultural heritage in India. At present there does not exist any centre of excellence or information centre, which holistically deals with the tribal folklores, customs and traditions and its application for promoting its development.

After Indian independence, the Sartang was divided between the Miji- and Monpa-dominated Nafra and Dirang circles. Due to small population, limited resources, and other issues, they remain disadvantaged. This may explain why the Sartang didn't split from the Monpa until 1997. Since then, educated Sartangs and religious leaders from Khoina and Jerigaon have fought legally to add the Sartang as Scheduled Tribe to the Indian Constitution's Third Schedule. They have developed "traditional" dress, made untiring attempts to write their language despite internal variation. The Sartangs are now in a developmental stage but they need attention for survival and safeguarding of their rich culture and tradition.

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Forest Cover Change of the Reserve Forest of the Foothill of Kokrajhar District of Assam, India

Ringcher Basumatary

ABSTRACT

Forest as a resource contributes directly and indirectly to the welfare of human beings. But the forest cover has changed in recent years and deflated around the world from 31.6 per cent of the global land area to 30.6 percent between 1990 and 2015[1]. This study assesses the forest cover change of the Kokrajhar district by using data from the State of Forest Reports (SFRs). The study observed that 266 and 181 sq. kms. of the total forest cover have changed in 2001 and 2003 due to large-scale encroachment in the district. This negative change in forest cover continued up to 2015. However, positive change has been witnessed from 2017 to 2021 due to an extensive forestation drive in the district.

Keywords: Assessment; Encroachment; Degradation; Forest cover; Reserve forest.

INTRODUCTION

Forest is defined as "land with tree canopy density of more than ten per cent and an area comprising of more than 0.5 ha"[2]. According to the Indian Forest Act of 1927 (ISFR, 2011),[3] the term 'forest area' or recorded forest area is the term used to describe all the geographical areas that are officially registered as 'forests' in government records. On the other hand, the term 'forest cover' in the ISFR report means any land that has at least 10 per cent of trees in its area of one hectare or more. Thus, the term

'forest area' is used for the legal status; whereas, the term 'forest cover' refers to the area of land that is covered by trees, regardless of who owns or manages it[3].

Forest as a resource contributes directly and indirectly to the welfare of human beings. Directly, it produces wood products such as timber, fuel wood, bamboo and NTFP like fodder, honey, gums, resin, dyes, medicinal herbs and edible forest leaves. Indirectly, it protects the environment, supports wildlife diversity and offers scientific and recreational opportunities[4]. Thus, the forest is a valuable resource for humanity, as it offers various kinds of benefits. It also plays key role in protecting the environment and maintaining the diversity of life on land. But, in recent years the global forest cover has declined from 31.6 per cent to 30.6 per cent of the total land area between 1990 and 2015. However, India has seen an increase in its forest cover from 19.45 per cent to 21.34 per cent of its geographical area in the same period. This is attributed to massive afforestation programme initiated by the government to reach the target of 33 per cent forest cover in the country. On the contrary, some Indian states or districts have experienced a loss of forest cover due to factors such as encroachment, biotic pressure, logging and shifting cultivation, conversion of forest land to other uses and development projects[5]. The rate of change in forest cover in India has also slowed down in recent years.

The forest cover in Kokrajhar district of Assam India has shrunk during the last three decades due to encroachment in forest land for anthropogenic pressure, geo-political, rehabilitation of riots and floods affected peoples and other developmental works. This study is expected to help directly and indirectly to the government with the policy implementation in the management of forests and benefit of the community by ensuring the enhanced sustainability of the forests[6].The study assesses the change of forest cover in Kokrajhar district from 1991 to 2021, and also examines the causes of forest cover loss in study area.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The study is based on secondary sources of data mainly from the Indian State of Forest Report (ISFRs) and also personal observation. Altogether, fifteen biennial reports of the Indian State of Forest Report for the year 1991, 1993,1995,1997,1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2021[7], and Forest Department, Government of Assam's statistical data are also incorporated. The *Statistical Handbook of Assam* (2018)[8] and *District Census Handbook of Kokrajhar District, Assam*, 2011[9] are used for determining geographical area of the district. The secondary data on forest covers and their loss and gain are evaluated by simple statistical calculation of the district for the pre-1999 and post-1999 periods.

This paper focuses on the Kokrajhar district of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam, India. The district lies in northern part of the Brahmaputra valley, between $26^0\,07'\,36''$ and $26^0\,51'\,10''$ North Latitudes and $89^0\,50'\,58''$ and $90^0\,25'\,15''$ East Longitudes. It covers a total area of 3,269 sq. km., which is 4.16 per cent of the total geographical area of Assam (78,438.00 sq. km). Nearly 35.46 per cent of its total geographical area is under forest-cover, which constitutes the tree forest systems: the naturally grown forests, plantations and scrubs[10]. The Himalayan range of southern Bhutan forms the northern boundary of the district, creating a gradual slope from north to south. The total population of the district is 886,999 people, out of which 93.83% (832,249) reside in rural areas, and 6.17% (54,750) in urban areas. The district has 3.33 % Schedule Caste (SC) and 31.41 % Schedule Tribe (ST) out of its total population. The total literacy rate in the district is 65.22 % of which 75.45% are males and 56.53 % are females, respectively [11]. As per Census of India 2011, there are 1,068 villages in the district, of which 145 are classified as forest villages in official record.

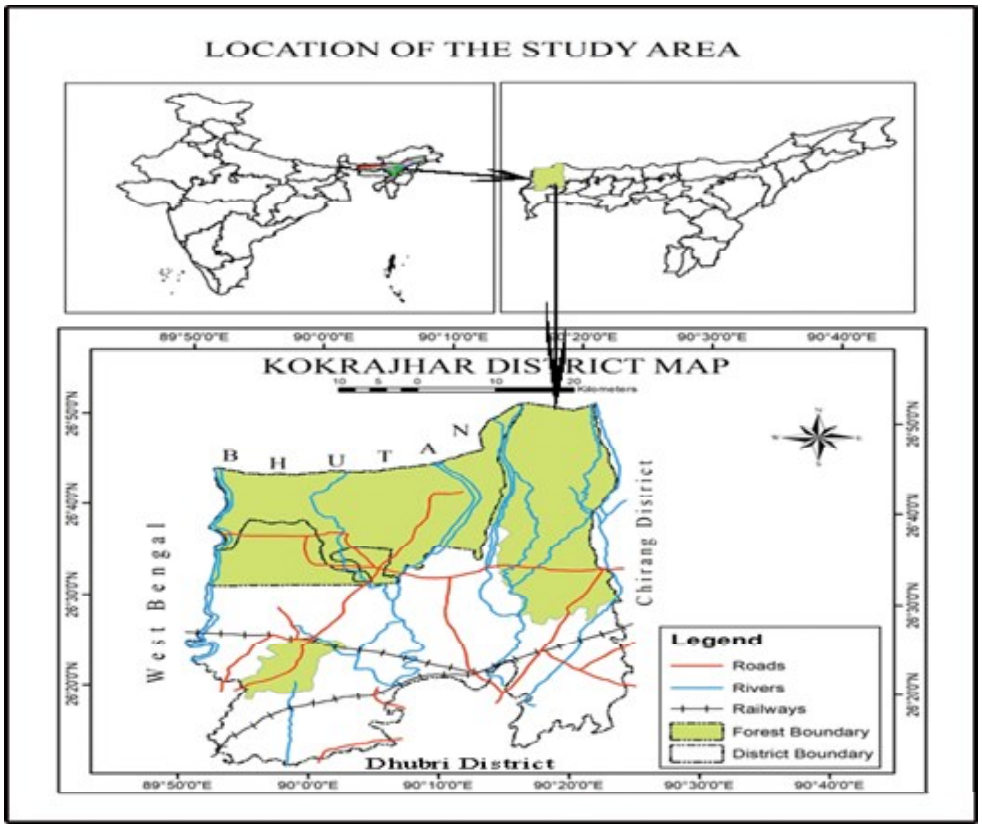

FIGURE 1: GEOGRAPHICAL MAP OF THE STUDY AREA

Source: Adapted from PhD thesis, Basumatary, 2021

BACKGROUND OF FOREST

As a contiguous and foothills of Bhutan, Kokrajhar district is blessed with rich natural forest wealth. This region boasts remarkable diversity of life forms that remain largely unexplored and undocumented, particularly those with potential medicinal and economic benefits. The entire northern belt of forest is located in the Sub-Himalayan alluvial tract of a typical formation known as "Bhabar tract" characterized by below the normal water table or low water table and deep boulder stocks with an underlying sandy loom with humas varying from almost nil to 30 cm[12].

VEGETATION TYPES

The natural forest of the Kokrajhar district lies on the borders between the Indo-Gangetic and Indo-Malayan bio-geographical realms and is part of the Brahmaputra Valley Biogeographic Province. This region has a high biodiversity value due to the presence of the Sub-Himalayan Bhabar Terai formation and riverine succession that culminate in the Sub-Himalayan mountain forest. These ecological features create a diverse range of habitats for flora and fauna in the world. As per the revised classification of Indian Forest type by Sri H.G. Champion and Sri S.K. Seth (Champion & Seth, 1968),[13] the forest types present in Kokrajhar district are as follows:-

Sal Forest

i. Upper Bhabar Sal Forest (Eastern Himalayan)
ii. Lower Bhabar Sal Forest (Eastern Himalayan)
iii. Eastern Terrai Sal Forest
iv. Heavy Alluvium Plain Sal Forest(Eastern)
v. Hill Sal Forest(Eastern)

The Mixed Deciduous Forest

The Evergreen Forest

Savannah

i. Dry Savannah
ii. Wet Savannah

Riverain Forest

Khair-Sisoo forests

Some of the above forest types are not prominent nowadays, due to heavy biotic interference and extensive damage caused to the forests. The district has experienced severe deforestation over the last four decades, which has reduced the *Sal* trees to a few scattered patches in Jharbari forest Block of Haltugaon forest division, and Ride IV and Ride VI in Kachugaon forest division[12]. The existing *Sal* trees are also facing a high risk of extinction due deforestation in the area[13].

THE FOREST OF KOKRAJHAR

The reserve forest of Kokrajhar district is part of the then-undivided Gaolpara forest division. The Goalpara Forest Division was first created in 1857 by the British Imperial Government of India. W.R. Fisher was the first Divisional Forest officer of the undivided Goalpara Division. In 1934, the Division was bifurcated into Haltugaon and Kachugaon Divisions. Names of the Haltugaon and Kachugaon Divisions were changed to Goalpara East and Goalpara West respectively sometime between 1946 to 1948[14]. Further, in 1986, Goalpara West Division was bifurcated into two-Dhubri and Kachugaon Division. The Kachugaon Division with HQ at Kokrajhar, was subsequently changed to Gossaigaon. Goalpara Division was created by bifurcating Haltugaon from the Goalpara East Division.

Therefore, reorganisation and reconstruction of reserve forest of the undivided Goalpara district has taken place over the years. At present, there are three forest divisions in the district viz. Parbathjhora, Haltugaon and Kachugaon forest division. Partbathjhora division was created out of the part of Dhubri forest division. According to the Indian State Forest Report the actual area under forest cover in the district is 1,168.86, which constitutes 35 per cent of the district's total geographical area[15].

The British built the 2nd Tram line in India in the Kachugaon forest division of Kokrajhar district to transport the timber from the forest. This marked the beginning of forest degradation in the district and continues until today. The main causes of forest cover change in the district are - encroachment on forest land for agriculture and residential purposes, illegal logging and infrastructural development, rehabilitation of erosion by floods and riots etc.

The importance of forest is increasing as it provides resources for human use and also maintains the ecological and environmental balance of the planet[16]. So, accurate and updated forest information is essential for planning and management of forest resources effectively. It also helps decision-makers and stakeholders to monitor forest conditions, assess environmental impact, and design sustainable policies.

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL VALUE OF THE FOREST

The forest of Kokrajhar district, Assam, has a significant social, economic and cultural value for the indigenous tribal and other marginal sections of people who live in and around it. The forest provides them with various resources and services that enhance their livelihood and well-being. Forest also plays a crucial function in preserving and maintaining the ecological balance and biodiversity [17].

Although the main source of income of the tribal community comes from agriculture, but forest resources are widely used for their daily requirements such as fuel-wood, fodder, food, medicine and varieties of forest products. Besides, tribal people of these areas still believe in their tradition, customs, religion, faith and legends, as well as the ancient practice of using herbal remedies from wild plants. These practices reflect their values of respecting and preserving the forest and its biodiversity. The area under forest was estimated to be 70% of the total land area in 1977, but it reduced to 40% by 2007[18]. The indigenous tribal people who depend on forest for their traditional medicine have experienced a negative impact on their knowledge and practice due to deforestation and loss of biodiversity. Therefore, the forest of the district is important for its social, cultural and economic value as well as for its environmental significance.

Demographically, the district has a diverse population of different ethnic groups. The Bodos, an indigenous tribal community of Assam, form the majority of the district. They are followed by other tribal groups such as Rabhas, Garos and others. The district also has a significant presence of Adivasis, Koch Rajbangshis, Bengalis, Muslims, Assamese-speaking Assamese, Marwari's, Nepalese, Biharis etc. According to the 2011 census of India, the district's population is composed of 3 per cent Scheduled Caste, 32 per cent Scheduled Tribe and 65 per cent General category. Table 1 below details the population composition in the district.

TABLE 1
COMPOSITION OF POPULATION, KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT (AS PER CENSUS, 2011)

General	*Scheduled tribe*	*Scheduled caste*	*Total population*
578907	278,665	29,570	887,142
65.26	31.41	3.33	100 %

Source: *Census of India, 2011.*

The forest legacy of Kokrajhar district goes back to the British Colonial rule. The district boasts of many precious trees, such as Sal, Teak, Titasopa and others. These trees offer environmental and economic advantages to the area. However, they have faced several difficulties in the management of naturally grown forests due to shortage of labour. So to ensure the availability of labour for extraction and management of naturally grown forest led to the establishment of forest Village inside the forest during the British Imperial rule in Assam. The creation of forest village was discontinued in 1931 due to various reasons. However, after India gained independence, the scheme was revived and implemented without proper regulation. This led to widespread deforestation and environmental degradation, until the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 put an end to it[19]. Prior to the 1980s, extensive portions of forest land were deforested and allocated to the landless members of the local community. However, the 1980 Act prohibits the conversion of forest land for human settlement purposes. But, encroachers have illegally cleared and occupied the forest land, hoping to get the allotment of the land they seized. In the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), this problem affects more than 30 per cent of the forest area[20].

FOREST SCENARIO BEFORE 1999

The forest scenario of Kokrajhar district before 1999 was that of rich biodiversity and natural resources. The district has large area of very dense and moderately dense forests, which provided various social, economic and ecological benefits to the forest-dwelling people of the locality. The forests hosted diverse plant and animals, and also performed vital roles

for the preservation of environment. However, forest cover in the district has declined sharply in the last four decades due to anthropogenic pressure such as illegal logging, encroachment in the forest land, conversion of forest land to agriculture, and other development activities.

The Forest Survey of India (FSI) was formed in 1987 to check out the rate of forest cover change in the districts as well as the whole of the country by using remote sensing technology. The first district-wise forest cover assessment report was published in 1991, but it was not available in all the districts of Assam until the SFR of 1999. The independent figure on forest cover assessment report of Kokrajhar district is available only in 1999.

Kokrajhar district is the part of the erstwhile undivided Goalpara District of Assam. Though it was created as independent district in 1983, still the State Forest Report (SFR) used geographical area of the undivided Goalpara district for its assessment of forest cover until the assessment year of 1999. Even though, the SFRs use geographical areas of the undivided Goalpara district, still the independent figure on forest cover of Goalpara district of Assam was not available until the SFR of 1999. The status of forest cover of the seven districts including Goalpara district of Assam before 1999 is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
STATUS OF FOREST COVERS OF SEVEN DISTRICTS OF ASSAM, 1991-1997

Districts	*1991*	*1993*	*1995*	*1997*
Geographical areas of Cachar, Darrang Goalpara,Kamrup, Nagaon, North Cachar and Karbi Anglong.	56733	56733	56733	56733
Actual Forest	22337	22140	21756	21560
Percent of actual forest to GA	39.4	39.02	38.34	38
Dense Forest	14028	14187	13905	13771
Open Forest	8309	7983	7851	7789
Mangroves	0	0	0	0
Area under scrublands			604	614

Source: *Forest Survey of India (FSI) reports 1991, 1993, 1995 and 1997*

From Table 2, it is observed that forest cover of the seven districts including Goalpara district has declined from 39.4 percent to 38 percent from 1991 to 1997. As reported by the SFR, forest cover is declining due to anthropogenic pressure, such as illegal logging, conversion to agricultural land, encroachment, tea gardens and other development activities. However, SFRs of forest cover assessment before 1999 do not represent the independent forest covers neither of the undivided Goalpara district nor of Kokrajhar district.

According to Narzary G (2013), forest cover loss detected in the Kokrajhar district by using remote sensing coupled with GIS techniques found that forest cover loss was highest during 1977-1987, with a loss of 353.41 sq km of forest cover. However, during the middle decade of 1987-1997, there was a sudden decline in deforestation, losing an area of 111.5 sq km of forest. Then during the last decade of 1997-2007, deforestation rose again to 228.16 sq km.[21] The forest cover loss was highest in the very dense class of forest (46.73%), followed by moderately dense forest (31.84%) and open forest (27.78%).

FOREST COVER AFTER 1999

The vast forest resources of Kokrajhar district have been shrinking over the years due to heavy biotic interference and extensive damage caused to the forest. However, proper assessment of the area under forest cover was not available until the Indian State of Forest Report (ISFR) of 1999. The detailed assessment of the forest cover of the district as reported by the respective SFRs is given in the following Table No. 3.

Table 3 shows the biennial trend of the forest cover under Kokrajhar district, Assam, for the period from 1999 to 2021. During this period, the actual forest cover in the district is reduced to 1,168 sq km from 1,630 sq km indicating a loss of 461.14 sq km (28.29 per cent). However, the forest cover loss is 523 sq km in the period from 1999 to 2015 (32.09 per cent). The total forest area of the district has declined from 49.45 per cent in 1999 to 35.44 per cent in 2021. The percentage of actual forest cover to

total geographical area of the district is continuously declining from 49.45 per cent to 33.59 per cent in the period of 1999 to 2015 followed by a positive increase of forest cover to 35.44 per cent in 2021. This shows the loss of actual forest cover area due to encroachment and rehabilitation of flood-affected people in the reserve forest areas of Kokrajhar district.

In the district, the area under Moderately Dense Forest (MDF) cover is recorded at 270.40 sq. km in 2021 from 709 sq km in 2003; as such no classification of Moderately Dense Forest (MDF) is recorded in 1999 and 2001. The Dense Forest (DF) cover is recorded at 437.60 sq. km in 2021 from 1,401 sq. km during the year of 1999. Similarly, the district recorded 460.86 sq km of Open Forest (OF) in 2021 from 229 sq km in 1999. The percentage of forest cover of the district is higher compared to both the state's 34.21 per cent and the central 23.58 per cent in 2021. Out of the total geographical area of the district 35.46 per cent is under forest cover in 2021, out of which 13.28 per cent is Very Dense Forest (VDF), 8.20 per cent is Moderately Dense Forest (MDF) and 13.98 per cent is Open Forest.

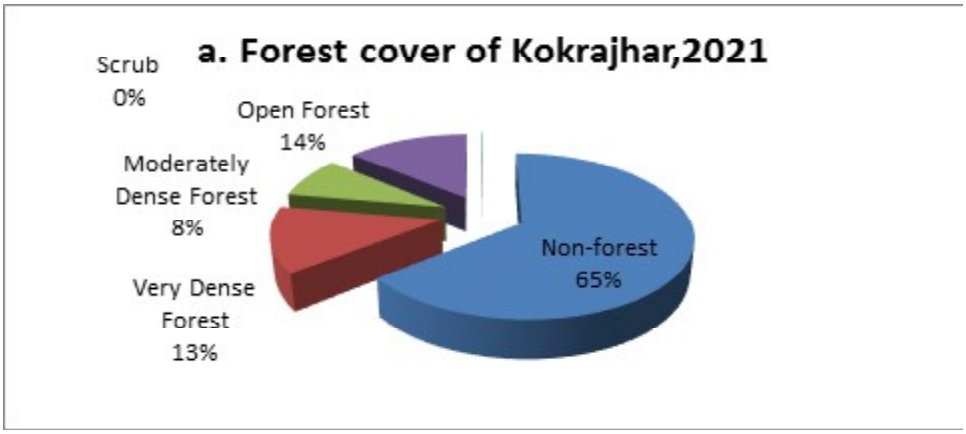

FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF FOREST COVER UNDER KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT, 2021

FOREST LOST IN KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT

Rapid encroachment for agriculture and human settlement inside the reserve forest is regarded as the main cause of forest area loss in the district. The subsistence and poor socio-economic condition along with the lack of livelihood opportunities among the tribal and marginal sections of the

Table 3
Biennial trends of forest cover, Kokrajhar District (1999 -2021)

Parameters(Area in sq. km)	*Years*										
	1999	*2001*	*2003*	*2005*	*2009*	*2011*	*2013*	*2015*	*2017*	*2019*	*2021*
Total Geographical Area	3296	3296	3296	3296	3296	3296	3296	3296	3296	3296	3296
Actual Forest cover	1630	1364	1183	1183	1163	1144	1120	1107	1158	1166.57	1168
Percent of actual forest cover to GA	49.45	41.38	35.89	35.89	35.29	34.7	33.98	33.59	35.13	35.39	35.44
Dense Forest	1401	1203	207	207	208	208	208	208	438	438	437.60
Moderately Dense Forest	-	-	709	709	738	716	701	678	267	270.19	270.40
Open Forest	229	161	267	267	217	220	211	222	453	458.38	460.86
scrubs	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	15	1	1	4.08

Source: *Forest Survey of India (FSI) reports 1999 to 2021.*

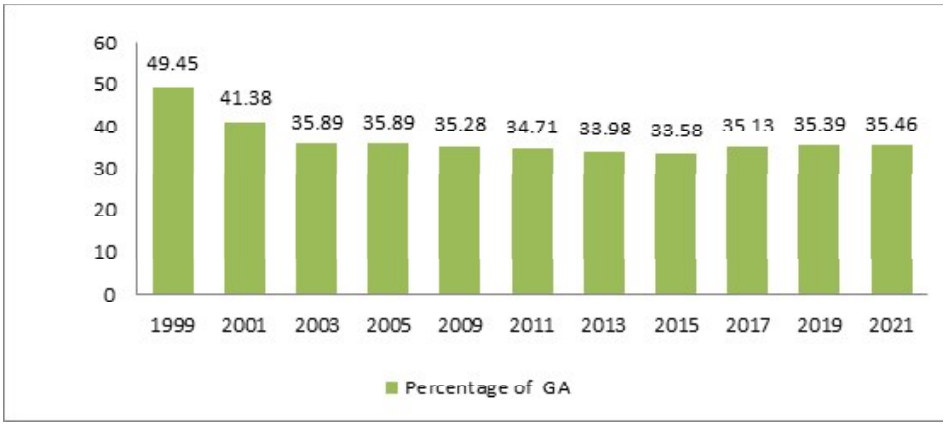

FIGURE 3: FOREST COVER AREA UNDER KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT FROM 1999 TO 2021(IN PERCENT)

community enhance the widespread destruction of forests in the district. The poor and marginalised communities living in the vicinity or inside the forest are highly dependent on forest for their livelihood[22].

Thus, this section of the paper highlights the biennial change of the actual forest cover area in the district and aims to find out the causes of its change.

From the above (Figure 3 and Table 4), it is revealed that there was gradual shrinkage of forest cover area from 1999 to 2015, whereas from 2017 to 2021 witnessed a gradual increase of 61.86 sq km of forest areas in the district compared to the previous assessment period of 2015. While overall total forest cover loss in the district is 461.32 sq km from the period of 1999 to 2021, which represents 14 per cent change of forest cover of the total geographical areas of the district. In 1999, the district had 49.45 per cent of its total geographical area under forest cover; however, this figure dropped sharply to 35.46 per cent in 2021, indicating a significant loss of greenery and biodiversity. During the period from 1999 to 2021, the district has lost 20.96 sq km per year of its total forest cover.

Further, the study also revealed that the highest percentage of forest cover was recorded as loss in between 1999 and 2003. Within the period of 5 years, 13.46 per cent of forest cover was lost in the district. Moderately Dense Forest (MDF) cover is highest in between 2003 to 2015 and becomes lowest between 2017 and 2021. At the same time, both the Very Dense

Forest (VDF) and Open Forest (OF) cover are the smallest compared to the moderate forest cover in 1999 and 2015, whereas both very dense forests followed by open forest cover are highest between 2017 to 2021 (table 3). From the above information, it is clear that the degradation and deforestation of forest areas in the district have been continuous over the years and little effort for reforestation has been undertaken in recent years. Besides, encroachment for agriculture and human settlement, there is biotic pressure, illegal and commercial logging, firewood, grazing, tea and rubber plantations etc. were regarded as the causes of degradation and loss of forest cover in the district.

CONCLUSIONS

State of Forest Report (SFR) of forest cover assessment prior to 1999 does not represent the independent forest covers neither of the undivided Goalpara district nor of Kokrajhar district. So, independent data on forest cover prior to 1999 is not available for the Kokrajhar district. However, the assessment of forest cover for seven districts of Assam including Goalpara district has witnessed a decline from 39.4 per cent to 38 per cent from 1991 to 1997 (table 2).

Forest cover loss detected in the district by using remote sensing and GIS techniques found that forest cover loss was highest during 1977-1987, with a loss of 353.41 sq km of forest cover. However, during the middle decade of 1987-1997, there was a sudden decline in deforestation, losing an area of 111.5 sq km of forest.[23]

The forest cover after 1999 is still healthy in terms of ecological point of view; although forest cover is gradually declining from 1999 to 2021. From the biennial reports for forest cover matrix (Table 4), it is clear that the forest cover declined from 49.45 per cent to 35.46 per cent of its total geographical area in the district. In 1999, the district had 1,401 sq km of very dense forest, and 229 sq km of open forest, whereas there is no classification of moderately dense forest. It was only in 2003 onwards that the classification of the Moderately Dense Forest (MDF) was made by the Indian State of Forest Report (ISFR). In 2021 substantial change in

TABLE: 4

BIENNIAL FOREST COVER CHANGE MATRIX, KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT (1999-2021)

Years	*Total GA(sq. km)*	*VDF(in %)*	*MDF (in %)*	*OF (in %)*	*Total(sq. km)*	*Percentage of GA*	*Net change (in %)*
1999	3296	42.51	~	6.95	1630	49.45	~
2001	3296	36.50	~	4.88	1364	41.38	-8.07
2003	3296	6.28	21.51	8.10	1183	35.89	-5.49
2005	3296	6.28	21.51	8.10	1183	35.89	0.00
2009	3296	6.31	23.39	6.58	1163	35.28	-0.61
2011	3296	6.31	21.72	6.67	1144	34.71	-0.57
2013	3296	6.31	21.27	6.40	1120	33.98	-0.73
2015	3296	6.28	20.57	6.74	1107	33.58	-0.40
2017	3296	13.29	8.10	13.74	1158	35.13	1.55
2019	3296	13.29	8.20	13.91	1166.57	35.39	0.26
2021	3296	13.28	8.20	13.98	1168.86	35.46	0.07
Total					- 461.32		-13.99

Source: *Census of India, 2001, 2011 & FSI, India State Forest Report, 1999 to 2021.*

NB: Geographical area (GA); very dense forest (VDF); moderately dense forest (MDF) and open forest(OF).

forest cover of the different classes of the forest has been recorded. Of the district's total geographical area, 35.46 per cent of forest land is under forest cover.Thus, it is clear that the Kokrajhar district has lost 13.46 per cent (461.32 sq. km) of its total forest areas in the period between 1999 and 2021.

The study observed that during the pre-1999, the forest cover was very good in terms of ecological points of view, even though SFR did not have independent assessment data on forest cover of the district until the assessment year of 1999. However, the assessment of forest cover of post-1999 shows that it has lost 266 and 181 sq. km. of forest cover areas in 2001 and 2003 due to large-scale encroachment, conversion to agricultural land, and illegal logging in the reserve forest areas in the district (Table 3).

If negative change of forest cover areas continues due to excessive exploitation and use of forest land then the ecological imbalance is imminent. This will affect not only the soil quality, water supply, nutrient cycling and greenhouse gas regulation etc. but also affect the social, economic, cultural value and most importantly livelihood of the tribal and other forest-dwelling community in the district. Therefore, it is imperative to conserve and restore the forest of Kokrajhar district for its social, economic and cultural value as well as for its environmental significance.

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