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Indigenous Khasi Tribe of Meghalaya and Environmental Sustainability: A Study

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Abstract- In the era of modernization and globalization climate changes and environmental degradation are the big threat for all the species of earth and their sustainability. The indigenous ecological knowledge and behaviour of the tribal people towards nature is generally based on sustainability, productivity and optimum balanced utilization of available land and other natural resource. In India the total tribal population is 8.6% of which 89.97% live in rural areas. This subcontinent is the largest tribal populated country where different ethnic groups co-exist in a same territory with their diversified traditional culture. A Major portion of tribal people inhabits in the northeast part of India and Khasi is one of them. They live in different states of India such as in Meghalaya, Assam, and Manipur but the major portion of the total Khasi population is found in north east forest region of Meghalaya. They are the ecological components of this forest ecology. Their intra and interconnection with nature is always symbiotic. But due to the globalization, the influence of modern culture, intermingling and cultural hegemony, most of the tribal cultures are in the way of extinction. Rural people tend to imitate the modern culture without thinking the effects and want to get shifted in urban areas for better facilities and livelihood opportunities.

Keywords: globalization, modernization, climate changes, ecological culture, khasi tribe, sustainable development.

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Indigenous Khasi Tribe of Meghalaya and Environmental Sustainability: A Study

Dr. Sinchini Kundu

Abstract- In the era of modernization and globalization climate changes and environmental degradation are the big threat for all the species of earth and their sustainability. The indigenous ecological knowledge and behaviour of the tribal people towards nature is generally based on sustainability, productivity and optimum balanced utilization of available land and other natural resource. In India the total tribal population is 8.6% of which 89.97% live in rural areas. This subcontinent is the largest tribal populated country where different ethnic groups co-exist in a same territory with their diversified traditional culture. A Major portion of tribal people inhabits in the northeast part of India and Khasi is one of them. They live in different states of India such as in Meghalaya, Assam, and Manipur but the major portion of the total Khasi population is found in north east forest region of Meghalaya. They are the ecological components of this forest ecology. Their intra and interconnection with nature is always symbiotic. But due to the globalization, the influence of modern culture, intermingling and cultural hegemony, most of the tribal cultures are in the way of extinction. Rural people tend to imitate the modern culture without thinking the effects and want to get shifted in urban areas for better facilities and livelihood opportunities. For sustainable development, ecological behaviour is essential and without ecological culture, ecological behaviour is not possible. Ecological culture is the sets of knowledge, norm and idealism that help to interact with the environment, but cross culture, cultural suicide, culture mixing and acculturation affect the tribal culture. The Khasi people have been struggling to keep their traditional. The ecological culture of khasi tribe, their eco-friendly livelihood and development is very much valuable for sustainability with climate changes and it can be applied in practical life through ecological culture.

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I. Introduction

India is one of the colorful countries in the world where around 705 scheduled tribes are notified with their distinct culture and as per census 2011 they constitute 8.6% of the total population. Among them, 89.97% live in rural areas and most of them, live in hilly forest areas. They experience increased vulnerability to changing weather pattern and climate impacts due to loss of traditional subsistence practices. In India there are 75 vulnerable primitive tribal groups (VPTGs), declared by the government and major cause of their vulnerability is the impacts of climate change because of their dependence on and interconnection with the natural environment for their culture, health and livelihoods. Many tribal communities face difficult socio-economic conditions that may be exacerbated by climate change. Modernization, globalization and environmental changes are constantly changing human life and their cultures. In this context, we need to value the tribal culture and to study the *ecological culture* and *ecological behaviour* of the khasi tribe for environmental sustainability.

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II. Objectives

- To highlight on the changing scenario of socio – economic and cultural condition of the tribal people of the study area.
- To find out the new challenges in the livelihood of the Khasi tribe due to climate change.
- To highlight on the ecological behaviour of khasi tribe.

III. Hypotheses

- Value based socio-economic and cultural conditions of Khasi tribes become changed.
- Khasi tribes face challenges due to climate change.
- Khasi tribes have their own Ecological culture.

IV. Khasi Tribe: A Geographical Identity

In India broadly the tribal people inhabit within two distinct geographical areas – the Central India and North Eastern Area. The Khasi tribes are an indigenous ethnic group of north- eastern India. They are mainly found in Assam, Khasi Jaintia hills in Meghalaya, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur, and Jammu and Kashmir. They are called by the different names such as Khasi Paris, Khuchia, Khashi and Khasa. Most of the Khasi people are mainly located in the north- eastern part of Meghalaya with around 48% of the total population of Meghalaya. It is said that the choices were earliest immigrant tribes who came from Myanmar, and settled down in the plains of east Assam. Location map Of the Khasi tribe and the rainfall and temperature graph of the RI - Bhoi district are shown below:

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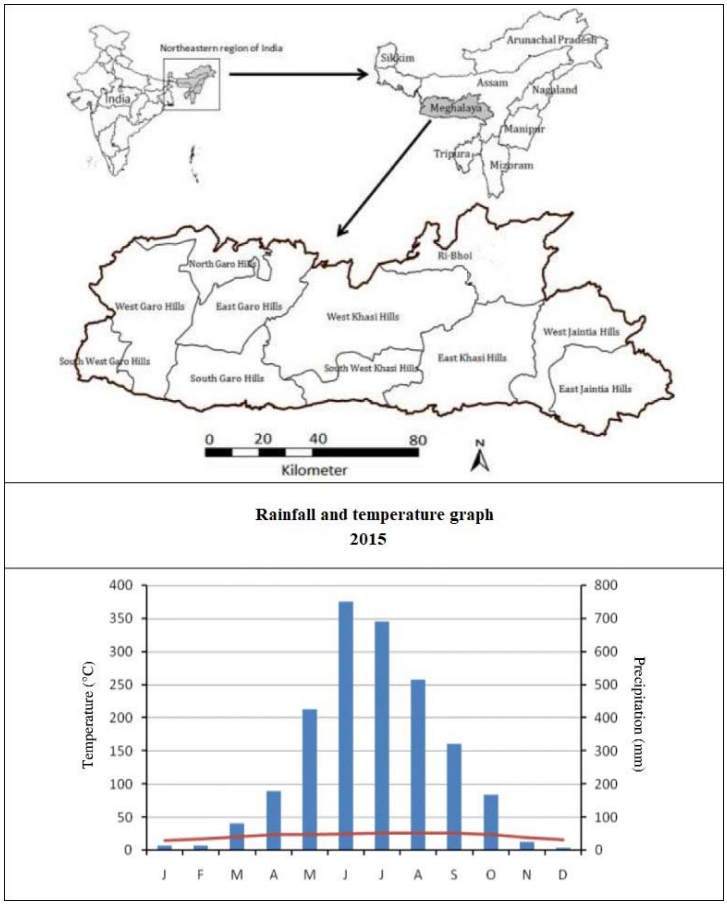

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Geographical-location-of-11-sampled-transects-in-Ri-Bhoi-district-of-Meghalaya-The_fig1_269697899

Figure 1

Though the maximum rainfalls are found in the month of June, July and August but rainfalls occur more or less in all the season and the difference between the highest temperature and the lowest temperature of the year is very little. Khasi tribes are the largest indigenous community with around 48% of the total population of Meghalaya and before the arrival of the Christian missionaries they practiced indigenous tribal religion. Tribes are the worship of nature and their value based religious practices now are in the way of abolishing. Now around 85% have embraced Christianity. Very few of them still follow their age old indigenous religion. Khasi uses English and own Khasi language for communication. Society is Matri-lineal. The main occupation of Khasi tribe is agriculture and tourism but now they are migrating from their primitive habitation area to the outside places for a better job opportunity. The major crops produced by Khasi tribes are betel leaf, Areca nut, deal, local Khasi Rice, vegetables and oranges. Like other forest dweller tribes, they broadly depend on forest resources and their acquired Tribal Ecological Knowledge (TEK) over a thousand and more than a thousand years. This knowledge is transmitted from one generation to another by oral method and play a vital role to develop ecological behaviour.

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Plate 1: and Plate 2: Depict the changing house pattern of Khasi Tribes.

During Survey, it is found that the indigenous building techniques and house pattern of Khasi tribes which are directly connected with nature and climatic condition are now replaced by modern building pattern and techniques. It is said by a village council member that in his childhood days during summer monsoon, it rained at least once for nine days and nine nights without a break and he has an opinion that the change in rainfall affects the quality and quantity of crops. Orange is no longer sweet as it was. Meghalaya is a part of the Indo- Burma bio- diversity and most threatened hot spot areas in India due to climate change. It is the critical or endangered or vulnerable rain forest so the tribes, trees and wild animals who are the part of this ecosystem are also threatened. According to 2017 Indian Institute of Technology declared that the average temperature rose 0.031 degree C every year over 32 years. This is very much significant for the changes in the Meghalaya forest region. Due to migration and cultural contact with modernized and globalized Earth, they have lost their moral values, beliefs and ecological culture. "Ecological culture is a survival ethical and moral imperative of ecological commandments for society as a whole and the individual in particular. It provides support through the process of the formation of ecological world view of every human, his/her self improvement (change the inner nature of the individual) as ecologically conscious and ecological social attitude towards nature." (N. Ridei, Yuliya Rybalko, Yuliya Kycherenko, Svitlana Palamarchuk, 2013: p14-23). The conjunction and filtering process of cultural ecosystem, ecological behavior (ethics, moral values, rituals, etc.) and ecological culture (education, awareness, consciousness), of Khasi tribe that help to protect the environment)"

ECOLOGICAL CULTURE		
ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION	ECOLOGICAL CONCIOUSNESS	ECOLOGICAL AWARNESS
The continuous process of learning, training and development.	Relationship and linkage between environment and society in the modern era.	The knowledge of the laws of nature and the integrity of the system of laws.

The ecological behavior and techniques that they follow in their livelihood, thousands of years, help to grow their ecological culture. In the modern world it is necessary to discuss their ecological culture in the context of environmental degradation and environmental sustainability. Wrapping and taking of food, vegetables in newspaper is a common practice in India. According to Food Safety and Standard Authority of India (FSSAI) the printing ink causes of cancer, severe health problem. Wrapped aluminium foil has more illness causing bacteria like Staph and Bacillus Cereus which are rapidly growing on open air. The tribal people like choices use tree leaves to give food in the replacement of unhygienic newspaper or foil paper. Where most of the people are habituated to throw waste materials here and there, in every small Khasi shop or besides the roads people can watch their handmade eco-friendly dustbins.

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Plate 3: Khasi woen are busy to selling out of their foods in left hand side.



Plate 4: Khasi women serve food in a tree leave in eco- friendly, handmade dustbin besides shop.

Living Root Bridge in Meghalaya is a simple suspension bridge, constructed trough rubber plant and by using ecological knowledge. At the age of modernization and Globalization, when people destroy forests to build cultural landscape and help to increase the temperature of the earth, they produce greenhouse gases. The hanging root bridge is the symbol of traditional tribal Ecological knowledge, and it is necessary to imply these technologies more and more in development and constructional field.





Plate 5 and 6: The Famous living root bridge in Meghalaya, denotes the ecological technique of khasi tribes.

There is a belief among khasi tribes that God had originally distributed the human race in 16 heavenly families. However, seven out of these 16 families are stuck on earth while the other 9 are stuck in heaven because a heavenly ladder resting on the sacred forest mountain area (located in the present-day Ri-Bhoi district). They are enabled people to go freely and frequently to the heaven whenever they pleased until one day they were tricked into cutting a divine tree which was situated at Lum Diengiei Peak, a grave error which prevented them access to the heavens forever. They were tricked into cutting a divine tree which was situated on Lum Diengiei Peak, a grave error which prevented them access to the heavens forever. This mythological story is often seen as a metaphor of how nature and trees, in particular, are the manifestation of the divine on Earth and destroying nature and trees means severing our ties with the Divine. The Cleanest Village Mawlinnong in Asia is also introducing the Ecological behaviour and Ecological Culture of Khasi Tribe and the village is instance of value based culture of tribes in the whole world.

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Plate 7 and Plate 8: Depicts the scenario of the cleanest village of Mowlinnong.

V. Conclusion

Khasi village areas, living root bridge, and beautiful scenario of Meghalaya attracts tourists, but due to lack of ecological culture and behaviour forest region and climate are badly affected by their activity. The environment is also affected by unethical behaviour and development of tourism without following ecological culture. So it is necessary to aware the tourists as well as modern people of the whole world about indigenous culture and technologies of different tribes. In this field the engagement and guidance of tribes may create job opportunity for tribes in Meghalaya as well as a community based activity for developing ecological behaviour make a positive impact on environmental changes and help to change the behaviour of all people in India. It's also necessary to protect the Indigenous tribal culture as well as their Ecological technique has to be followed in the modern construction. The mechanical system of famous living root bridge is must be used in building construction. It's the duty of the all people to protect and follow the tribal ecological culture for the sustainability of the environment as well as for the sustainability of Human civilization.

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