

Livelihood and Gender: Marginalisation of Khasi Rural Women in Land and Forest Rights

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Abstract

The role of women in natural resource management has acquired a new dimension with the increasing focus on decentralization of community resources specially in developing nations. In recent times due to changes in human-nature relationship and increasing pressure on land and other resources, there is invisibility of women's livelihood strategies, marginalization of women's rights over NTFP's (Non-Timber Forest Products) and other resource base leading to 'feminization of poverty'. Amongst the matrilineal Khasi of Meghalaya, women are known to have heavy familial and nurturing roles besides being the basic providers of subsistence needs. Their indigenous ecological wisdom of edible and medicinal plants and herbs, water conservation, maintenance of sacred groves, village forests etc. has for centuries enhanced their roles as 'resource managers'. However, in recent years, issues such as pressure of population, development, land acquisition and alienation, legislative policies of the Government, have undermined the role of Khasi rural women in resource management thereby denying access to, control over and decision-making power in livelihoods. This paper discusses the indigenous natural resource knowledge of Khasi rural women and at length attempts to examine their livelihood interventions.

Keywords: Livelihood, Forest, Women, Marginalised, Khasi, Rural

Introduction

The livelihood needs of men and women are not always the same, due to their differential roles, responsibilities and resources. Therefore, the impact of different livelihood interventions will also vary according to gender. That women are biologically different from men is often emphasised with reference to their child bearing and nurturing capacities. What is generally being ignored is that gendering of tasks is based on many other socio-cultural factors and process of socialization, rather than on natural, biological differences between men and women (Krishna, 2004). Gendered division of work in all societies of the world is based on the naïve argument that women's tasks are less physi-

cally arduous than that of men, which is why when it comes to livelihood patterns, women tend to undertake roles that suit their physical strength, unlike men who undertake the more labour-intensive and managerial tasks. Thus, comparing the quantum of work, it reinforces the notion that women only supplement the family income and are not engaged in productive labour. However, this notion should not undermine the significant role of women in economic pursuits such as the collection, processing, consumption and trade of forest products which traditionally have played a vital role in supplementing the income of rural families. There is no denying the fact that their 'green fingers' are not simply gifted to them but a result of their traditional, social and familial roles.

Women's centrality to resource management can hardly be underestimated. The traditionally demarcated roles that women perform in their domestic domain such as washing clothes, collecting firewood and farming, tending animals, growing vegetables and collecting NTFP (Non-Timber Forest Products) are considered 'natural' and as such contribute greatly to resource conservation. The conserving and sustaining roles that women perform has been glorified in the pages of history to the extent that women are valorised as 'resource managers'. No one can forget the historic Chipko Movement that took place in 1973 in Mandal, a small hamlet at Chamoli district of Garhwal where women activists staged protests against tree felling by literally 'hugging' the trees. That was the starting point of a conservation endeavour that was 'pro-poor' and above all 'women-centred'. What message did the Chipko movement have for its forerunners? Firstly, the word 'Chipko' itself which means 'to hug' in Hindi evoked pathetic images of poor village women desperately trying to protect their forests from the axes of greedy contractors, by hugging the trees which was their only means of economic survival. Secondly, Chipko has become an environmental icon to the world today that inspired 'eco-feminism'¹ with a strong message 'Our lives before our trees'.

To many of us, the landmarks of the Chipko movement may have left behind a legacy of a well fought battle, a women-centred movement for natural resource conservation, but today 46 years after its inception, questions remain: What role do women have in natural resource management today? What are the challenges that constraints them from their accessibility to forest resource? Let us start first by understanding the inextricable link between natural resources and rural livelihoods, in particular the increasing role of tribal women as household providers in declining rural economies. Tribal economy is inextricably linked with forest livelihood wherein a major source of their income is derived

from dependency on forest related activities. However, what is distinctive about tribes in India is their poor socio-economic condition. Poverty has been one of the most serious problems plaguing the country. Studies have also revealed that dependency on forests and common property resources increases as a tribal household becomes economically marginalised. And there is no denying the fact that as poverty increases, the tasks of women become more prominent in ensuring the survival of households by assuming greater responsibility to provide resources from forests and common lands. The importance of women in collection of forest produce is borne by data from almost every country in Asia, Africa and Latin America. For instance, a study in North West Frontier Province of Pakistan showed that 78 per cent of morel mushrooms are collected by women and children, which have supplemented their daily requirements for food and other basic necessities. Similarly, in west Bengal, tribal women gather Sal (*shorearobusta*) leaves for six months in a year and earn about Rs. 72 per month under the best circumstances. Like most of the tribal Indian women many Naga women depend on the forest and its resources for their livelihood, spending most of their labour and time tending their agricultural field and foraging the forest to meet the subsistence needs of their families and also for income. They have a very close relationship with the environment they live in and can be called the “guardians of their biodiversity” and caretakers of most agricultural and livestock resources (Nagaland Environment Protection and Economic Development and International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, 1999, p. 168).

The Khasis are a matrilineal tribe inhabiting the Khasi Hills in the North Eastern state of Meghalaya. While there are many interpretations of the origin of the Khasi race, the term ‘Khasi’ is believed to have derived its meaning from the terms ‘*kha*’ meaning ‘*born of*’ and ‘*si*’ meaning ‘*ancient mother*’, which when interpreted means ‘*born of the mother*’; thus bringing out the matrilineal character of the Khasis who trace their descent from the mother. The Khasis follow the principles of matrilineal descent where ancestral property is passed from the mother to the daughter, preferably the youngest daughter or the ‘*khadduh*’. The matrilineal Khasis of Meghalaya believe in the ideology-‘*Long jait na ka kynthai*’ which means ‘From the woman sprang the clan’. This ideology is so deeply rooted in the Khasi ethos that it has brought to light the role of women in perpetuating the clan from one generation to another. Descent line in a Khasi family is reckoned only from the mother’s clan or ‘*kur*’² as a result of which the children belong to the descent group of the mother. Therefore, it is customary for them to speak of a family of brothers and sisters

who are great grandchildren of one great grandmother, and identify themselves as '*shikpoh*' which literally means 'one womb' 'that is the issue of one womb'. Significantly, the Khasi ideology of human reproduction describes the father as the provider of stature and form (*U kpa uba ai ka long rynnieng*), while the mother contributes flesh and blood (*ka kmie kaba ai ia ka doh ka snam*) to the child. This filial bond between the mother and the child is strongly reflected even in familial relations and kinship ties where the term *para kur* (mother's kins) is used more significantly than the word *Bakha* (father's kins).

A woman is central to the family in Khasi ideology. She has the responsibility of nurturing and continuing the matrilineal descent line through reproduction. The Khasi woman has numerous familial and kinship roles to perform. Besides being the custodian of family property the '*Khadduh*' or youngest daughter's role is all the more heavy and burdensome. She has to look after the aged members of the family, and other members of the matrikin, she inherits the family property and continues tradition of carrying out the religious rites and ceremonies from time to time although with the help of her mother's male relatives. The Khasis believe in the saying '*Ka kynthai ka bat iaka niam*' meaning, 'It is the woman who holds the religion' which signifies her responsibilities in the religious domain. However, the exclusion of Khasi women from having any say in village durbars and meetings is noteworthy. They are not allowed to speak aloud in public meetings and village council meetings. Perhaps because of her domesticated role and nurturing skills she is expected to confine her duties to the home and family matters, leaving the others to the male.

Right from the time of recorded history Khasi women are known as free to participate in economic activities outside home. They move freely in market place, participate in trade and business, festivals, dances and the like. The society is free from social norms and evils of bride price, stridhan, child marriage etc. It could also be categorically said that Khasi women are very industrious. On this P.R.T Gurdon writes that the Khasis carry very heavy burden, the men in particular who travel long distances carrying heavy loads on their back while women carry almost as heavy loads as men. They are devoted to their offspring, and the women make excellent nurses for European children."

The Khasis have a deep-rooted affinity with nature. The earth which is symbolized as 'mother' or 'meiramew' is looked upon as the caretaker of all the natural resources. Thus, forest holds an important place in the social, economic and religious life of the Khasis. It is looked upon, as a well-loved home, a game sanctuary and an abode of

worship all rolled into one, around which their social, cultural and religious activities revolve. It is a familiar sight to see women and children setting off into the woods to collect edible fruits and roots. A typical day out for an average Khasi village woman would be best described as follows:

‘She carries her baby on her back, climbing the hills she sets off for the woods with a *ja-song* (cooked rice packed in a leaf) salt and some dry fish (*ktung*). Going to the forest virtually takes her the whole day. So besides collecting twigs and fuel wood and other forest products, she also spends the day washing clothes on the riverside in the foothills’ (Shangpliang, 2012:26).

As nurturers of family line, Khasi women have had a significant role to play in the domestic sphere (Uberoi, 1993:180). Her familial roles are well defined and her ‘glorifying status’ as a mother has furthered her roles and responsibilities towards meeting the immediate needs of the family. These roles include some burdensome duties and responsibilities which are part of their household chores such as carrying water, fetching firewood, washing clothes, collecting twigs and edible plants and roots which are carried out in the jungle skirting the village. This has partly been borne out of the fact that women have had a closer interaction with nature and this has enhanced the emotional bond with nature since it has helped them cope up with a number of economic hardships.

Khasi rural women and Indigenous Ecological Wisdom

From a gendered perspective it is a well-known fact that women’s indigenous knowledge of eco-systems has contributed to ecological sustainability, and is illustrative of the strength of their eco-system-based learning and commitment to non-violative uses of nature. A cursory glance over the Khasi rural eco-system reveals the extent of relationship between women and ecological sustainability. Their wisdom and knowledge about certain species of edible and non-edible plants, food culture and regenerative process of soil fertility has been extremely instrumental towards judicious use of the resources. A study conducted by the author in Lawbyrwa village of Ri-Bhoi District of Khasi Hills revealed that 80 per cent of the time spent by the women of this village in a day was mainly to fulfill the subsistence needs of their family and these activities included collecting fuel wood, water, edible roots and tubers, broom shrubs and other NTFP (Non-Timber Forest Products). ³Since most villages are located in the forested regions and fringe forest areas, they have properly defined gendered work patterns and responsibilities. While men are actively involved in agriculture, daily wage labour and farming activities, women are

seen to spend more time in the woods and are the main providers of basic needs such as fuelwood, food, medicinal and Non-Timber Forest Products to the family.

There are many Khasi folktales, and legends that have played a very important role as narratives in focusing the close relationship between women and nature. The Khasi folklore and legends, '*Khanatang bad Puriskam*' are mostly woven around the various forces of nature such as the hills and vales, rocks and caves, the flora and fauna. These elements of nature are personified in the legends as the mother and son, husband and wife and friend and foe according to their natural behaviours, their love, hate, jealousy, pride and vanity which are projected out before the listeners with the sole purpose of teaching moral and spiritual values. The ecological wisdom of the Khasis is a wisdom that is solidly based on 'experience' and they depend on this knowledge to fulfil most of their day to day needs (their economy). Through agriculture, hunting, fishing and gathering a huge range of forest foods and materials with which they make most of their articles of daily use, from houses to ploughs, baskets to leaf-plates. Majority of the Khasi households are built with thatch roof, plank floor, bamboo or stone walls which are all obtained from the forest. Fire always keeps burning on a stone hearth in the centre while the smoke finds its exit as best as it can. The amount of firewood burnt by each family is not known. They possess an ancient lore of herbal medicine as well as knowledge about many aspects of nature and human life. Much of this ancient wisdom is today the result of oral tradition. Forest wisdom has enabled the Khasis to live in harmony with nature besides elevating them to such a high pedestal that no animal or living creature could compete with. Medicinal plants are a category in itself whose knowledge is confined at the indigenous level to both men and women.

It is also interesting to note the use of simple objects of nature in their day to day activities that reflect the importance of nature in their cultural and religious life. The naming ceremony of a new born infant '*Kajer kathoh*' is an important occasion for the mother and the whole family where the pounded rice flour is placed on a bamboo winnower called '*Ka prah*.' When an expectant mother delivers her baby, a sharp splinter of bamboo is used to cut the umbilical cord. No metal objects or even a knife can be used on this occasion. When the umbilical cord, after being tied falls off, a ritual is performed by offering worship to certain water deities or '*Ka Blei Sam Um*'. Singing and dancing form an important component of Khasi culture. There are many Khasi traditional dances that are of ecological significance-harvest dances that are performed during harvesting,

another well-known dance is ‘*Ka Shad Kynthei*’ where only women take part in the religious dance invoking God and thanking him for a good harvest. There are also dances exclusively meant for women connected to fertility. It is called ‘*Ka shad Nohsakyriat*’ which is performed by the women folk who spin themselves on a traditional pole round and round in order to symbolize their strength and femininity of motherhood.

Forest Livelihood and Khasi rural women

Like most tribal communities, land and forest are the two most important natural resources to the Khasi. However, they have to be dealt as separate entities. Land locally known as ‘*Ri*’ by the Khasis has a deep attachment to their pattern of social organization and permeates every aspect of their socio-economic life. Land to the Khasis is a ‘gift of nature’ that belongs to the community, therefore access to land not only ensures economic security for the individual, but control over it symbolizes territorial integrity for the community as a whole (Nongbri, 2003).

One of the most important sources of livelihood of the Khasis is the forest which is their well-loved home, an abode of worship and a store-house of their daily necessities of life, like food, water, fodder and fire-wood. The Khasis assign a deep sense of awe and reverence to the different elements of forest in their natural abode, which conjure up to them as matters of life and death. This symbiotic relation between the Khasis and the nature has been appropriately defined by a Khasi author H. O Mawrie in the following words – ‘*U Khasi u im bad kamariang, bad kamariangkaim bad u*’, (Mawrie, 1978:78) which means – A Khasi lives with nature and nature lives with him. The Khasi rural women venture out into the forests and engage themselves everyday cutting fuel-wood, and collecting fruits, vegetables, broom grass etc, drying and processing them and, at the fall of the day, return back home with heavy bundles on their heads. The hill slopes and deep gorges remain, throughout the year round, covered with wild banana trees, cane and bamboos, innumerable varieties of edible and non-edible mushrooms, varieties of tubers and succors etc. The tender bamboo shoots are one of the tribal delicacies consumed as a curry or pickle after processing with mustard oil and spices. Every Khasi stall located along the Shillong- Guwahati National Highway, sell these bamboo shoots and other wild fruits and vegetables gathered from the forests. The Khasi Hills forests are home to many unknown plants and herbs of great medicinal value with which Khasis have developed an indigenous system of medicine that is widely used among them as an alternative to the costly allopathic medicine. The wild grown broom grass collected by the Khasi women

and children are bound into bundles of broom-sticks and sold locally or exported out of the state which fetch Rs 20 to 50 per each broomstick depending on the market and the quality of workmanship. Some of the NTFPs gathered from the forest of Khasi Hills such as cinnamon, sandal wood, pepper, fruits and plants and herbs are of very high economic and medicinal values in the nearby urban markets.

Of late, the Government of India has introduced a number of schemes through which regeneration and development of degraded forest are sought to be rejuvenated for the augmentation of the forest resources and development of environment. It is imperative that the institutions responsible for forest management for creating livelihood opportunities must work closely with women, since the womenfolk in Meghalaya are major players in this aspect. While it is understood that the strength of the village community among the Khasi is their 'social capital', where all members of the family are actively involved in building up subsistence economy, the women play a singular role as gatherers of NTFPs. Thus, the policy framework must give an emphatic thrust on the involvement of women in planning, implementation, monitoring and review of any activity (Darlong, 2008). However, the fact of the matter remains that during the past five decades of Indian planning, women have been thoroughly marginalized in the process of development, implementation and reorientation. Needless to say, the constraints faced by the women in controlling and managing land and forest resources have to a certain extent deprived them of their claims on sustainable livelihood. The scenario in respect of the Khasi women who claim to belong to matrilineal society is no better either. Though in principle the matrilineal rule of female inheritance and descent is followed, their customary practices and usages are certainly not gender egalitarian. The overall administration and superintendence of the domestic matters are vested in the mother's brother. The Khasi women inherit property but lack the power to manage it. The woman is the central figure in the household organization but when it comes to the allocation of the rights over land, a sharp distinction is maintained between 'ownership' and 'control'. While ownership of land is transmitted through women, control invariably lies with men (Nongbri, 2003).

In the case of community forests (*Khlaw Raid and Khlaw Adong*) greater autonomy in management and control of forests lies with the traditional institutions, clans and authorized individuals. In matters relating to forest up-keepment and decision making the Khasi women have no right whatsoever. The village council (*Durbar shnong*) which is traditionally empowered to deal with the overall development works of the village does

not recognize a woman as its member nor does it entertain any views or opinion from her. Problems faced by women are mostly voiced through the adult male members of their households.

The following Table 1 throws some light on the indigenous strategies evolved by Khasi women in various areas of social, economic and cultural life that have indirectly contributed towards natural resource management.

Table 1: Distribution of work between male and female in forest related activities

Sl. No.	Activities	Sex	N u m b e r of Persons Engaged	Percentage to Total	Remarks
1	Cultivation and labour etc.	Male	41	22.78%	45%
2	Making Charcoal	Male	40	22.22%	
3	Collecting Firewood	Female	37	20.50%	55%
4	Collecting NTFP	Female	31	17.25%	
5	Selling Vegetables/Fruits etc	Female	31	17.25%	
Total			180	100.00	100%

SOURCE: Shangpliang Rekha M “Forest in the life of the Khasis” Ph.D. Thesis, 2007.

The above table shows that approximately 55 per cent of the rural Khasi Womenfolk are engaged in forest activities while 45 per cent males are engaged in non-forest activities. This reveals the preponderance of Khasi women engaged in forest as their primary source of livelihood.

KHASI RURAL WOMEN AND FORESTS: INTERVENTIONS BETWEEN FOREST RIGHTS AND MANAGEMENT

In the matrilineal Khasi society, the issue of equitable distribution of benefits in indigenous management system has often been challenged. Though in principle the matrilineal rule of female inheritance and descent is followed, but customary practices are not gender egalitarian, as authority is vested in the mother’s brother (maternal uncle). Women can inherit property such as land but they lack the power to manage it. The woman is the focal point of the household organization but when it comes to the allocation of rights over land, a sharp distinction is maintained between ‘ownership’ and ‘control’. While ownership of land is transmitted through women, control invariably lies with men (Nongbri, 2003:199)

Making the plight of women worse is the system of forest management operating

in the Khasi Hills. Here, the management of forest lands falls under three (3) agencies: -

- (1) Autonomous District Council (Green blocks, Protected forests, unclassified forests, private forests owned by clans, domestic groups, individuals and organizations)
- (2) State Government (Reserved Forests or National Parks)
- (3) Community (*Khlaw Raid* or community forests and *khlawadong* or community protected forest).

The diarchical form of control and management of forest in Meghalaya by the State Forest Department and the Autonomous District Councils has contributed to dual forest policies, lack of co-ordination and division of accountability. Both the authorities formulate their own forest policies and follow a separate set of forest rules and regulations in their respective areas of operation. The main reason for such a diarchy is that, while the State Forest Department maintains a well-qualified team of skilled technical staff, it has a comparatively meagre area of 1127.23 sq.km of forest under its jurisdiction. The district Council on the other hand, has a large forest cover of 6250.68 sq. km under its management and control and yet it suffers from inadequate technical manpower which has resulted in the lack of enforcement of rules. Forest being the principal source of revenue the District Councils could not afford to stop forest operation under prevailing fund constraints. The private forest owners who own substantial areas of forests indulged freely in sale of timber from their forest. A cursory glance at the available statistics of Meghalaya shows a steep rise in the process of forest exploitation resulting in sharp fall in the area under forest cover. Out of Meghalaya's total geographical area of 22,429 sq.km (23,06,069 hectares) she now has only 9,41,823 hectares of forest area which comes to barely 42.03 per cent (2001 Census). These issues have had a serious impact on people's livelihood thereby leading to infringement on their traditional rights over forest resources.

In the case of Community Forests (*Khlaw Raid* and *KhlawAdong*) greater autonomy in management lies with the traditional institutions, clans and individuals. As per customary practices, only the permanent residents of the villages have the right to access and use of community forests and other common property resources. They can collect fuelwood, cut trees for construction of houses, collect wild vegetables, orchids and medicinal herbs and quarry sand and stones from permitted sites (Nongkynrih, 2006:55).

It is here that one finds an invisibility of women's role in forest management and decision making. Although women shoulder heavy economic responsibilities and spend

long and tedious hours toiling in the field, trudge large distances through rugged forests in their struggle to meet the survival needs of the family, they have little to say in village administration or in the management of their natural productive resources. Many times, women become silent observers of the changes around them with little or no voice in decisions taken at the council meetings. Their problems are mostly voiced through the adult male members of their household. Added to this is the problem of infringement of land ownership. There has also been an unhealthy trend of gradual shift over of *Ri-raid* (community land) to *Ri-Kynti* (private ownership) as large tracts of land and forest has been taken over by a significant decline in the quality of communal land and forest but also marginalized women's role in the use of common property resources.

While delving on the issue of the decline in the quality of communal land and forest, Supreme Court Order on Timber Ban has also had an effect on women and forest livelihood. On December 12th 1996, the Supreme Court passed its historic judgments on the ban of felling of trees, removal of timber and wood-based activities in the region. However, the judgments had a conservationist aim in mind, it caused unexpected miseries to the tribal population who were totally dependent on forest livelihood. The effect of the ban fell heavily on women by imposing an additional burden on them to meet the economic needs of the family and increased their domestic chores manifold (Nongbri, 2003: 1898).

Agriculture and sale of forest produce used to be the mainstay of the rural Khasi economy. Over the years, with the decline of forest cover, the Khasi rural women have been forced into local and migrant wage employment. Livelihoods today have to be balanced between availability of forest produce, landownership and wage employment. As forests have dwindled, women still depend upon the remaining forests as supplementary source of livelihood for survival, especially in the lean summer months. They have to walk longer distances to the forest for collection and carrying back the produce as head loads. For marketing these products, they are bound to depend on bus services which are quite irregular and poor due to inaccessible roads to the interior villages. This leaves the marketing and sale of produce to the men folk. This has reduced the women's transport burden and time pressure but the negative consequence is that they have lost control over the income from selling the firewood and NTFP that they collected. This is further compounded by the fact that the women are primarily involved only in the lower stages of the value chain such as collection, cleaning, processing and sorting of forest produce but they

lack access to or control over marketing of the produce which is mostly monopolized by men. Despite their important role in the value chain, men's marginalization has led to an increase in the burden of economic hardships thereby bearing upon the brunt of poverty.

Conclusion

The conflict of interest between the Government and the tribals over the forest wealth that was begun by the Colonial rule continued unabated long after India's independence. The Government of India tightened up its grip over the control and management of forest through introduction of a new set of laws and rules while the traditional tribal rights over land and forest of the Khasi was slowly eroded. This impacted on the Khasi rural women who were the main actors in the field.

While it is a fact that customary laws with regard to land and forest and the working plan of the government have all come in the way of women, it would not be wrong to conclude that women in particular and indigenous people in general have seriously been affected by a number of issues which revolve around the use of resources and the struggle for rights over these competing issues. The conclusive evidence thus highlights the following harsh realities faced by the Khasi rural women who are dependent on forest livelihood.

Firstly, there has been a visible transition in Khasi society with regard to the state of dependence on forest resources like food, fodder and shelter to other means of living. The depletion of land and natural forest cover which was an important base for their primary economy has resulted in paucity of forestlands for livelihood. It is interesting to note here that the worst victims are women who not only have to bear the brunt of depleting natural resources but also the subordination of their gender. This issue can also be approached in terms of a new concept that has arisen in recent times 'feminization of poverty' which supports the claim that poverty is becoming increasingly feminized, that is, an increasing proportion of the world's poor are female.⁴

Secondly, we find an invisibility of women's role in forest management. This is largely due to prevailing Khasi customary laws where women have little to say in village administration or even management of their natural productive resources. Added to this is the unhealthy trend of a gradual shift over of *Ri-raid* (community) forest lands to *Ri-kynti* (private) land owners thereby marginalizing women's role in the use of the CPR's or Common Property Resources.

Thirdly we are often lead by the 'self perception 'that women are merely 'helpers'

and not ‘workers’ when it actually comes to demarcating the flow of work within and outside the household. Activities like collection of NTFP, cleaning, sorting processing of forest products are often considered to be part of their household chores’ and therefore they are not ‘work’ at all. In many remote villages women still lack access to marketing and sale of the produce which is mostly monopolized by men thereby leading to an increase in the burden of economic hardships and losing control over the income.

Fourthly, with the current rate of 64 per cent literacy in Meghalaya and the meagre economic development that has so far been achieved, the world view of the women folk in rural areas of the state has remained as traditional as in the past.

All this leads one to agree that the environment today is facing a crisis amidst stringent legislations of the Government coupled with problems of development and conflict over resource base, there has been a gradual shift in women’s role as basic providers of subsistence needs and resource utilization thereby leading to invisibility of their livelihood strategies and marginalization of their rights over NTFP.

End Notes

¹The word ‘eco-feminism’ was first used by a French feminist Francoise d’Eaubonne in 1974. It is a feminist perspective that sees the connection between women and nature in culture, religion, literature and tries to draw similarities between the oppression of nature and that of women as being alike.

²The Khasi ‘kur’ is equivalent to a clan. Therefore a kur represents all the matrikins from the ancestral mother’s lineage.

³This data was procured as a result of the Ph.D field work conducted by the author on the topic “Forest in the life of the Khasi: A study in the role of forest in Khasi socio-economic structure”. (2007)

⁴The term ‘feminization of poverty’ was first coined by Diana Pearce in 1976 following her observation of women amongst women in America. A 1992 UN report found that “the number of rural women living in poverty in the developing countries has increased by almost 50% over the past 20 years.

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