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## LIVELIHOOD OF RURAL FOLK AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT: A CASE STUDY OF KOHIMA DISTRICT

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**Abstract:-**In this paper an attempt has been made to study the relation between rural folk and their environment. Nagaland has a population of 19.18 lakh, which is approximately 0.16% of total Indian population. The proportion of rural population has declined from 82.77% to 71.03% in 2011 census. The main reason behind such a high declined rate is because after 2001 census, eleven new towns were notified by the state Government and in addition seven new census towns were identified. Kohima district is inhabited by two major Naga tribes viz., Angami and Rengma. Traditionally Nagas used to settle in the mountains for security reason. Even today almost all the villages are found scatter in mountain area. Forest, land and water bodies are the main sources of economy for rural people. The rural folk heavily depend upon their immediate surroundings which offered a variety of choices – food in the form of foliage, seeds, fruits, tuber, roots, and wild vegetable. Housing materials, firewood, timber, rock etc are also obtained from the private forest, clan forest and community forest. Agriculture is the main occupation of rural people. The Rengma's widely practices *jhum* cultivation whereas most of the Angami's practice terrace cultivation. Underdeveloped economy and increasing unemployment has forces rural people to look forest and land product for easy money. Forests are cut for firewood, rock and timbers for commercial purposes. Every year thousand tonnes of firewood are transport from rural area to urban centre. With the increased in demand for fire wood in urban it has become an easy way to earn livelihood. Hunting of wildlife is a culture of Nagas. Even before the introduction of fire arms, Nagas were expert in Hunting of wild animals with spear and dou. With the introduction of fire weapon after the Second World War, the wild animal hunting has become easier which is causing much distraction to biodiversity. It is very unfortunately, that the state does not have specific policy for conservation of Biodiversity till date. Keeping in mind the importance of sound biodiversity some villages from both tribes has taken initiative to conserve the rich biodiversity in their village jurisdiction.

**Keywords:**Environment, forest, hunting, tribe, rural, folk.

### INTRODUCTION :-

The term 'environment' referred to all that surrounds us and with which we interact. According to economists it has three essential roles, a supplier of material resources and energy; a sink and assimilator of waste products; and a supplier of amenities that contribute to the quality of life. Livelihood according to World Book Dictionary is defined as “a means of living; what is needed to support life” Robert K. Barnhart (1995). Husain (1997) remarked that, man has been interacting with the environment from the primeval state of development and with greater vigour, as history rolls on the present age of space technology.

Rural people's activities on their environment are a concern for the environmentalist and policy maker. Though their contribution to environmental crisis is negotiable comparing to industrial sector contributions but it cannot be ignore as their activities has make much destruction to the natural environment. Underdeveloped economy, unemployment, rural poverty allied with population growth is understand to be a major cause of natural environment degradation in rural areas. It can be mention that there is a limit on natural environment to support human population and beyond the limits exhaustion and degradation take place. In many cases, rural people have no other option but to over exploit and degrade their environment. Poverty is a major cause and effect of global environmental problems. It is, therefore, futile to attempt to deal with environmental problems without a broader perspective that encompasses the factors underlying world poverty and

international inequality. Many parts of the world are caught in a vicious downward spiral: poor people are forced to use environmental resources to survive from day to day, and their impoverishment of their environment further impoverishes them, making their survival ever more difficult and uncertain (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Many millions of poor rural people are closely dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, and the abundance and condition of these resources undoubtedly have a major bearing on their livelihoods. Although in the last two decades there has been a decline in the proportion of people directly dependent on natural resources, in many countries absolute numbers are still increasing (UNDP, 2000, 2001). Safi (1997) remarked that, the only way to preserve the rich biodiversity of the North Eastern hill areas is by giving adequate employment to the tribal's, living in and around the forest area. Participatory approaches towards Conservation if implemented properly are effective in improving biodiversity status and people's livelihoods, ESMF (2009). Sustainable development in Nagaland depends primarily on a balanced approach that includes conservation, sustainable management of existing lands and forest, the exploitation of new forest resources, and adapting agricultural systems over time, Nakro and Kiki (2006). Agriculture has been the major human intervention for natural resources management aimed at achieving food and livelihood security of human-kind, Rajbhandari (2006). The ecological conditions where the tribal live are normally characterized by the hilly and forested environment. Their mode of livelihood has led them to develop a symbiotic relationship with their environment and also evolve culture, customs, practices and social control of mechanism need to ensure their sustainable use, Walter, (2003),

## MATERIALAND METHODS

The methods employed in this paper include both secondary and primary sources of information. The secondary sources were mostly drawn from the government records, published sources, newspaper and gazetteers. The primary sources were drawn from interview and visiting the spot. Methods like, focus group interview, observation of their activities, questionnaires were use.

## DISCUSSION AND RESULT

Kohima district has 270,063 populations in 2011 census with 54.40 percent of the population living in rural area. The district is divided into four Rural Development Block and 88 villages. The district is inhabited by Angami and Rengma tribes. At present, the Angamis are divided into three territories, the western Angami, the northern Angami and southern Angami. The Angami inhabits land comprise of irregular plateaus with elevate ridges and peaks. Kohima town, the districts headquarter and the state capital is situated on a saddle, north of Japfu Barrial intersection. Japfu and Ezupu are eminent peaks of the Angami area. The three different sections of the Angamis speak their own dialect at home, but the common Angami language in which a vast printed literature has been produced is based on the Tenyimia dialect. The Angamis are by and large non-vegetarian and take all types of meat. Hunting, fishing, animal husbandry, weaving and trade of local produce have been important subsidiary occupations of the Angamis.

The Rengmas of Nagaland are divided into two major social and territorial groups, the Ntenye and the Nzong or the Northern and Southern groups respectively. The Rengma tribes are concentrated in the Tseminyu sub-division of Kohima district. They occupy the spur of the ridge running from Nidzukhru hill. Culturally, Rengmas can be distinctly identified through the designs and colour combinations in their garments and shawls. The Rengmas are non-vegetarian and their staple foods consist of rice and meat. They consume meat of all types of animals and birds. The land, forest and water bodies are the main economic resources of the Rengma.

Like any other Naga tribes, Land and forests is the main economic of the Angamis and Rengmas. Since time immemorial land and forests have been a great source of livelihood to rural people. Land for agriculture, rock quarry and forests for fire-wood, building materials, vegetables, fruits, hunting and fodder. The rural population still depend on fire woods for heating and cooking as very few household used cooking gas. It has been observed that forest are cut down mostly for fire wood for domestic and commercial purposes as the demand for fire wood has been increasing in urban areas. Many of the unemployed youth are involved in fire wood business to make quick monetary profit. Every year thousands tones of fire woods are supply to urban area. Since the forests land belongs to people, the Government had limited power to control unscientific felling of tree for timber business. Despite of banned by Government for felling trees for timber business the log still reached mills. During the British administration, management of these forests was done according to the Assam Forest Regulation of 1891 by which the extraction of timber was regulated under terms and conditions of agreements drawn up with the coupe-holders who were measured and marked with Government passing hammers and with serials and allowed to be extracted under cover of transit pass and challen issued by the forest officials. It has been observed that most of the old trees were cut down in the early 80's by both local people and outsiders for timber business. At present, realising the important of conserving trees, villagers had started tree plantation in their *jhum* filed. Wild vegetable and fruits are the important sources of the nutrition and income for the rural people of Kohima district. Wild vegetables and fruits are collected from forests for sell in the market. Many of the wild species are endangered by the forest fire, deforestation and random exploitation. It can be mention that when fig varieties get burned by wild fire, the plant may survive, but the fruits become non-edible.

The slash and burn methods of cultivation is the most common agriculture system in Rengma area where approximately 80% of the farmers are involved in it. This system of cultivation is viewed by many scientists and

environmentalist as unproductive and destructive as it involved cutting down of forests and burning. With increasing population and limited option for livelihood, pressure on agriculture land and the jhum cycle has narrowed down from 15 to 10 years. Much environmental destruction is witness as more forest land is put into cultivation and forest fire during the burning of jhum field. However, in the absence of land use statistics it is not possible to precisely quantify the misuse of land resources and forest destruction through shifting cultivation. Very few farmers from Angami tribe practices shifting cultivation. Approximately 90% of the Angami farmers are involved in terrace cultivation. According to the local traditions, the Angami terrace system is as old as the tribe itself, the system believed to have been brought from its ancient home. The dense forests of Kohima district once exhibit multifarious species of fauna, which are valued not only for their meat, but also for their hide and skins, tusk, horns, feathers and plumes for decorative purposes. At present it is observed that both community forests and Government forests are depleting at a faster rate because of the human activities.

Hunting and trapping of wild animal and bird is another important activity of the rural people of Kohima district. Since time immemorial Rengmas and Angamis were hunting wildlife for domestic and medicinal values. Before the introduction of modern fire arms, they used spear and duo for hunting and certain traps and snares were used to catch the small animals and birds. People in the past hunt in the vicinity of their villages because there was abundant of wildlife but at present they have to walk more than 7 to 8 km to hunt wildlife and most of the time come home unsuccessful. With the introduction of modern weapons hunting has become easier and subsequently endangering wildlife species. Approximately 80% of the rural people hunt and trapped wildlife for domestic consumption and commercial purpose. Old age, ban by Government and NGOs, do not eat wild meat and lack of interest in hunting are the primary reasons for not hunting. Despite of restriction on hunting and trapping by Government and Village councils, hunting activity still continued both in Government Forests and Private Forests. January, February, March, October, November and December are the peak season for hunting. Hunters hunting in Government Forests is a clear indication that only little effort has been made by the state Government to protect forests and wildlife. It has been observed that most of the rural people start hunting at the age of 12 to 14 years and continue hunting and trapping till their health permit.

Realising the importance of having sound environment, rural people/villagers in Kohima district with the help of educated people and government has started conservation of natural resource in their village jurisdiction. Some important activities are as follows, Rupfunuo is a unique traditional institution in Khonoma village founded by educated non-resident of the village. The main aim of Rupfunuo is to educate the villagers about the importance of the biodiversity. The Khonoma village is declared as a Green Village and had prohibited hunting, bio-prospecting, logging and even the collection of wild vegetables for commercial purpose. They demarcated their primary forest area as 'Tragopen Wildlife Sanctuary' which is attracting many domestic and international eco-tourists. In Mezoma village a group of dedicated youths called 'Culture guard' has taken the task to educate the villagers the importance of maintaining ecological balance. This group has setup sanctuary for the Bythe tragopan within the village community forest. Presently, the initiative of the culture guard, the village council is collaborating with the Department of Forests, Environment, Ecology and Wildlife in preserving the forest, to make it the abode of wildlife under a Joint Forest Management Programmmme. In Sendenyu village with the initiative of the senior citizens residing outside the village, certain portion of the village forest has been converted into biodiversity conservation. This sanctuary is mainly concentrated on conservation of stag. There is a dramatic increase in the number of wildlife in the area after this initiative.

## CONCLUSION

As it appears, the rising rural population, limited employment opportunity and the land ownership guaranteed under Article 371(A) of the Indian Constitution to the Nagas has posed the greatest hazard to the natural environment. Safe guarding of natural resource needs a join afford of the land owners/villagers and the government. It is very unfortunately that most of the policy was make without consulting the second party or the villagers. Forest conservation policy, wild life policy, Jhum land policy etc should be a rural people's oriented policy as it is the rural people who are most closely related to their environment. Beneficiaries for any type of government subsidies should not be in the line of political back ground. As it is observed that, for tree plantation the subsidies are giving to people who are influential. In most of the cases government subsidies are not utilised in a proper way. Concerned department should supervise the work without any bias. Encouraging farmer to cultivated cash crop can reduced pressure on forest land. As remarked by Gilmour and Fisher (1991); Fisher (1989); Fox (1983), Rural people, because of their dependence on a variety of forest products to maintain their subsistence agriculture have for a long time played an important role in the use and management of the forests

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