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Generational Shift in Local Perceptions of Sustainability: A Review

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Abstract: ***The contributions made by indigenous people and their culture are not taken into account in the current state of natural resource management. The applicability of traditional resource management techniques among the Rajbongshi people in northeastern India is reviewed in this research. In order to better understand the local conception of forests, wildlife, natural resources, biodiversity conservation, and traditional beliefs and their importance in natural resource management, a study on human behavior has been conducted. One of the primary findings of the research is that, although traditional natural resource management has great promise for conserving biodiversity among the Rajbongshi people of northeastern India, these techniques are currently under grave danger. This is the result of rapid shifts in belief systems. These changes have been attributed to both biophysical and societal factors. The breakdown of traditional beliefs among the younger generation has been the most obstacle to the long-term sustainability of these ancient rituals.***

Keywords: conservation of biodiversity, traditional beliefs, and the management of natural resources

1. Introduction

There has been a long history of common community beliefs leading to traditional systems in managing natural common resources[1]. Rural communities use biodiversity and sustainable practices for managing natural resources to secure livelihood [2]. This includes harvesting wild species for food, fodder, medicines, and ecological services such as nutrient cycling, local climate regulation, and cultural benefits, which are not included in economies[3]. Their collective environmental wisdom and ethics are expressed through religious beliefs and a range of sacred and cultural practices. A large portion of the world's biodiversity can be found in resource bases that are either open to the community or controlled as common property resources. The usage of these common property resources is typically managed by established regulations that specify who is permitted to use which resource and when. Thus, the local community's beliefs, which in turn affect their level of participation and behaviour, are what determine whether community-based natural resource management projects are successful. It has been seen that the loss of biodiversity and poverty are intricately linked problems and therefore need to be solved concurrently (Adams et al, 2004). Thus it becomes imperious to recognize rural women's and men's knowledge of local fauna, fish and livestock biodiversity uses and practices, counting their values in tradition, culture, values system and beliefs as these practices have survived through the ages.

2. Objectives

1) To study the ideas and attitudes on the management of natural resources.
2) To research how natural resource management techniques are evolving and remaining sustainable

3. Methodology

For the study, two villages of the district of Bongaigoan Assam, India, were selected. The two villages namely Mulagoan and Dholagoan are primarily inhabited by people belonging to Rajbongshi community. Agriculture is the main mode of livelihood. The study was conducted from August 2022 to December 2022.

The management of traditional resources over time was examined using a trend analysis. Questionnaires on topics pertaining to the management of natural resources were distributed to the study population using a survey methodology. The identical set of study questions was posed to each of the various responder categories for this reason. This made it easier to examine how the conventional natural resource management system has changed over time. The purposive sampling method was used to gather the data.

The study was conducted in two stages, the exploration survey and the main or in-depth survey. In the exploration survey, initial visits to acquaint, create association and rapport, and build a relationship with the community was done. An unstructured interview approach was employed in which a framework or a focus group was developed to guide the interview process. In the focal in-depth study, the "three generational perspectives" was employed to study the change taking place. Accordingly, family units consisting of three generations: the grandparents, parents and children were interviewed. In case of families with members migrated, dead, or married out, the interview was modified and grandparents, parents, and children who did not belong to the same family but from the broad household compounds were considered. This method was used to implore comprehensive information on traditional natural resources management practices, values, opinions, customs, and generations involved in relation to natural resources management.

4. Findings & Discussions

1) Generational Line study

The Three (3) Generational Studies[6] were conducted in the first phase of the survey. Table 1 shows findings indicating the generational lines of Rajbongshi community of the two sample villages with three generations. Four hundred fifty (450) respondents comprising of grandparents, parents, and children with ages spanning 55+, 45-54 and 18-39 respectively were made up.

Table 1

	Estimated Age	Frequency	Percentage
Grandparent	55+	122	27.11
Parent	40-54	197	43.78
Children	18-39	131	29.11
Total		450	100

The incomplete generational units for grandparents and children were due to deaths reported in the case of the grandparents and migration for training, education, and marriage in the case of the children. In this instance, grandparents and children who did not come from the same family line under consideration but from the broad compound were considered for an interview.

2) Age and status in the community

The research revealed that the aged are the storehouse of knowledge, hence in traditional societies they are often respected and seen as authorities in their various fields of endeavours while the younger ones learn from them.

3) Gender status

The findings exposed that men lead the rural scene in leadership and decision-making.

4) Level of education

Education is perceived as the key to development as it enables the individual to realise the happenings of the outside world. In the study, it was found that 78% of children were educated up to the tenth standard while only 57% of grandparents and 62% of parents had school education.

Table 2

Generational line	Formal education (%)
Grandparent	57
Parent	62
Children	78

5) Occupation

The nature of the occupation of the respondents may affect negatively or positively the natural resource base in the district and thereby influence the way natural resources are managed. 77% of the respondents reported farming/ agriculture as their major occupation. The younger generation is mostly in the service sector both government and private.

Perception of Natural Resources

Analyses were made on how issues of possession, access, and control over natural properties are perceived by the respondents. The apparent divine, physical, socio-cultural, and financial significance of natural resources is also analysed. Resources access is of great significance for ensuring the sustainable management and use of natural resources. Most of the rural people rely deeply on their natural resources for livelihood and other performances.

1) Spiritual Significance

Spiritual relation is the major driving force that regulates the performance of traditional communities to manage natural resources. The traditional views of the Rajbongshi community on the spiritual properties and uses of natural resources have effects on the protection and improvement of the environment. 87% of the grandparents acknowledge the spiritual implication of woods, aquatic, and flora and fauna, while 78% of parents and only 58% of children acknowledge the spiritual significance. The divine worth of resources is further disaggregated as follows. 54.4% of the respondents believed that forests have high spiritual significance, while 21.7% opted for water resources and 21.4% for wildlife. Forest resources attracted the highest percentage of 54.4% as forests are regarded as homes for the ancestors.

2) Worth of the Natural Resources to Existing

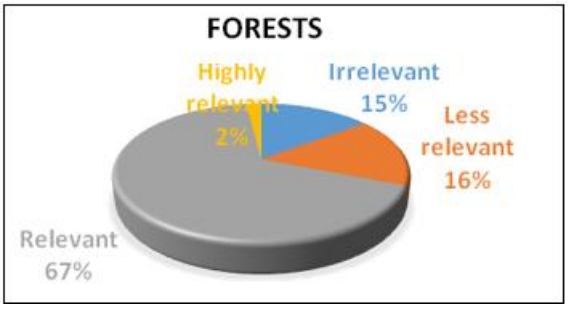
For the management and use of natural resources to be sustainable, access to resources is crucial. For their livelihoods and other activities, the majority of people largely rely on their natural resources.

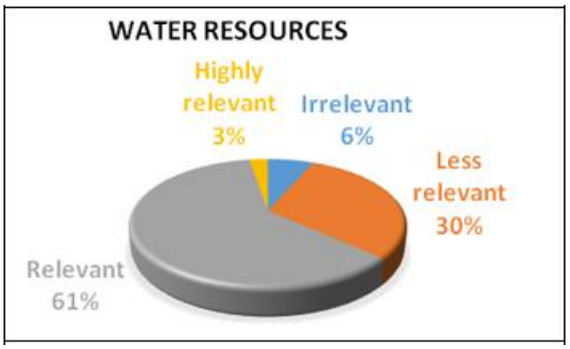
3) Physical Significance

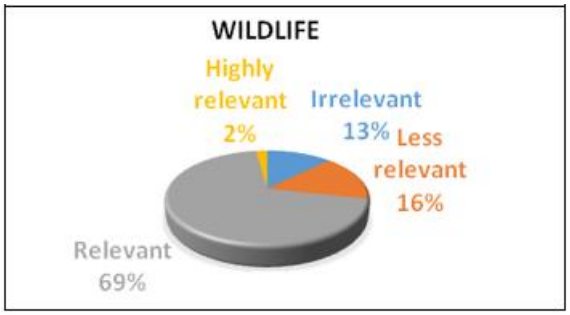
In-depth discussions on issues pertaining to the physical value of the resources were revealed during Focus Group Discussions with the various community members. It was discovered that woodland resources are of immense significance to the community's sustenance. In view of this, its physical relevance is massive. Forest delivers fuel, supplies for building and supplies for domestic items, wild fruits and vegetables, and herbal remedies are gained from the forest.

Table 3

Degree of Relevance (%)	Natural Recourses		
	Forest	Water resources	Wildlife
Irrelevant	9	3	7
Less relevant	10	14	9
Relevant	41	28	39
Highly relevant	40	55	44







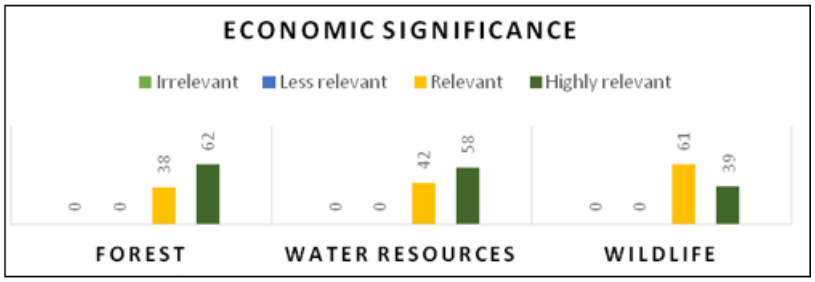
4) Economic Significance

It is not possible to quantify the relative contributions of each of the natural resources (forest, water, and wildlife), to each household but the ranking of the importance of each natural resource can be determined. The economic value of natural resources leads to the protection and sustainable management of the resource. Therefore, the resources were categorized in order of worth.

Table 4

Degree of Relevance (%)	Natural Recourses		
	Forest	Water resources	Wildlife
Irrelevant			
Less relevant			
Relevant	38	42	61
Highly relevant	62	58	39

From the table, it can be inferred that the resources contribute highly to the economic sustenance of the local people. None of the respondents indicated that the resources are less relevant or irrelevant to their livelihoods. It is evident from the table that forest resources attracted much higher economic value followed by water and wildlife. The study found that forest, water, and wildlife resources provide the basis for a wide range of uses for both subsistence and economic purposes. Many people take to fishing as their livelihood.



5) Socio-cultural Significance

Apart from economic benefits derived from natural resources, traditional cultures descend their socio-cultural identity from the resources around them. Hence, respect for the resource is built around the use of these resources. It has been found that traditional practices are based on a sense of harmony with the natural environment, which results in sustainable practice and sustainable use.

Management Systems 40 Years Ago

Countless native principles and practices have contributed to indigenous natural resource management systems.

Table 5

Management system	Category of Respondents		
	Grandparent	Parent	Children
1. Restriction to protected areas	62	30	8
2. Rules and regulations	35	22	4
3. Moral sanctions and fines	72	30	0

In Table-5, grandparents, parents, and youngsters' views were solicited on the management systems. Responses to management systems varied from generation to generation. Out of 450 respondents, 62% of grandparents, 30% of parents, and 8% of children were of the view that management systems were restricted to Traditional Protected Areas. The above table also shows that 35%, 22%, and 43% of grandparents, parents, and progenies correspondingly specified that rules and regulations were the modes of natural resources management. While ethical consent and penalties as a management system recorded 72% for grandparents, 29% for parents, and none for children.

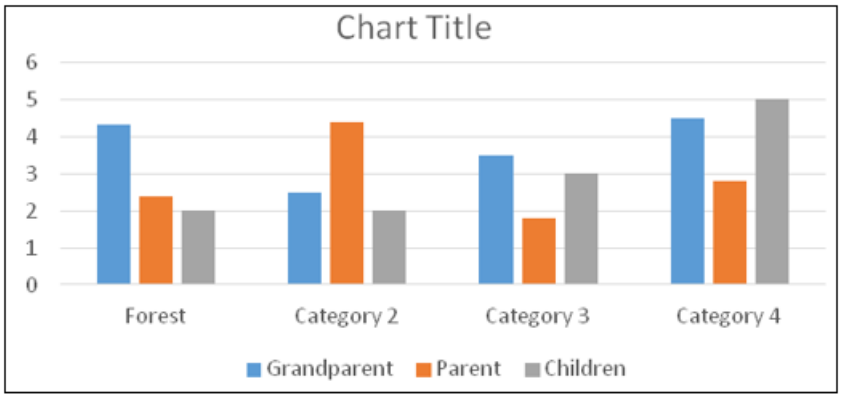
It is evident from Table 5 that traditional protected areas, rules and regulations, and moral sanctions were the main modes of managing natural resources 40 years ago as indicated by grandparents and parents. Experiences recounted during group discussions revealed that in the past, traditional cultures followed to restrictions in the managing of traditional protected areas and that the prohibitions delimited admission to actions that are destructive to the environment as a result, revered sites endured over several years and acted as reservoirs for biodiversity.

These systems of management are, however, unpopular with children and therefore they are not adhered to as indicated by low percentages in Table 5. Their knowledge on the use of prohibitions and talismans and traditional protected areas in the management of natural resources was low, they however stated administration guidelines and civic bye-laws as means of dealing natural resources. They have faith in administration institutions, service providers, and agencies in the management of natural resources. However, they accepted that the management and use of natural resources are very much reliant on rules and regulations as indicated in Table 5 hence, they believe in safeguarding that those who break the rules should be apprehended and punished. However, these regulatory mechanisms that were predominant accounted for the existence of protected areas over time.

5. Issues on Change and Sustainability

The common beliefs within a community are the basis of managing the common resources and open access land. But as these beliefs change, traditional management systems

have become less effective. During the study, it has been found that the community beliefs among the Rajbongshi community of the sample villages are changing. This is in response to a variety of pressures, such as changing land use practices, population growth, the introduction of market values, change in occupation, and the declining value of the traditional authorities[5]. Increased incidence of immigration and emigration has also eroded traditional social values. There have been various reasons for migration patterns such as conflict, environmental change, vanishing reserve base, and market prospects among others. As migrant populations have less knowledge of traditional practices, insignificant entrusted attention in long-term maintainable practices, and few resources, the influences of exodus on biodiversity are potentially significant. These migrant populations have engaged in the uncontrolled expansion of agriculture and grazing on marginal land has caused a major biodiversity loss, including the loss of officially protected areas. The extension of farming to open-access forests has led to grave land dilapidation. This has been depicted as the key reason for occurrences of ethnic vehemence and struggles in the recent past.



It has been found that the customary management systems and agreements are breaking down or have loosened. In such a scenario, many traditionally managed lands are on the verge of being sold out. In some instances, it has been found that open access and public land have amplified in worth or have expanded market value. Another revelation is that the long-standing traditional system is diluting without being replaced by the equally effective modern institution. Moreover, it was revealed during the in-depth discussion that the farmers have also expanded their activities onto marginal lands, or converted open access and common property resources into agricultural lands to increase farm size in response to demographic pressure.

6. Conclusion

During the study it was seen that there has been a shift in the traditional beliefs and values among the generations. With the migration of youth to the cities many traditional values have gone into oblivion. Now the primary duty of everyone is how to keep the younger generation tied to their culture still fraternization into the globalized world. The storehouse of knowledge should not fade with the loss of the older generation.

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