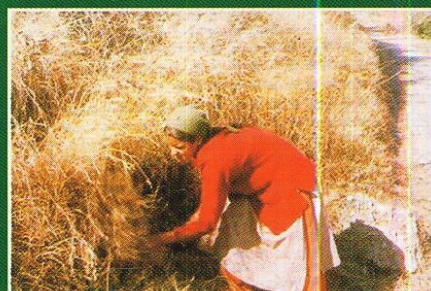
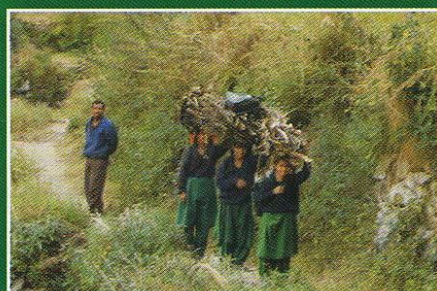
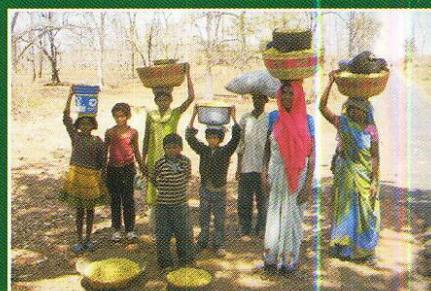
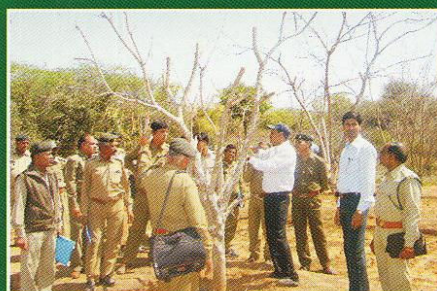




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## COMMUNITY CONSERVED AREAS IN NORTH EAST INDIA: SOME OBSERVATIONS IN ASSAM, MEGHALAYA AND ARUNACHAL PRADESH

SUDIPTO CHATTERJEE\*, SONALI GHOSH\*\*, JAYANTA SARMA\*\*\*,  
S.K. BARIK\*\*\*\*, B.K. TEWARI\*\*\*\* AND KULEN CHANDRA DAS\*\*\*

### Introduction

A very broad definition of Community Conserved Areas (CCAs), categorizes forests as those where local communities have ownership, a stake or are empowered enough to influence decisions that impact the very resources on which their livelihood depends. CCAs are spread across in North East India vary in ownership, size, management regime and the rationale for their protection. The nature of threats these forests are subjected to are similar to any other forests and are reported to be at different stages of degradation from pristine and relatively undisturbed to a point of degradation beyond which restoration is difficult. These could be age old under traditional forms of governance or recently established with a new set of institutions for its management. While waning of traditional faiths, belief and values have played a significant role in their decimation, has been parallel incidences of consolidation, re - sanctification and declaration of new community conserved areas in the region. Situations also exist where under compelling circumstances, community owned forests have been willingly handed over by local communities themselves to the government in wider interests of conservation.

Traditional and customary rights of local communities in North East India, are protected through the Sixth schedule of the Indian constitution under which, regional and Autonomous District Councils have been constituted where the tribal councils have legislative, administrative and financial powers over 40 subjects including forests. Presently North East India has 16 district councils-three in Assam, three in Meghalaya, three in Mizoram, one in Tripura and one in Manipur. Other forms of Governance of CCAs include the traditional village councils of Arunachal Pradesh, Durbar (Siemenship) in Meghalaya, Pippon system in North Sikkim amongst others. Table 1 provides a brief on the administrative provisions under the Indian constitution for North-East India.

Present case study is a preliminary compilation of baseline information on the CCAs of North East India

with support from IUCN. Netherlands and Kalpavriksha, Pune. While Community forest in Nagaland (Pathak,2009) and forest of reverence in Sikkim (Higgins and Chatterjee, 2005) are provided elsewhere in the report.

This paper focuses on the CCAs of Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. (Fig. 1). The case studies make an attempt to cover a diversity of case studies in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya which are being conserved by the local communities. Mapping locations of the case studies are shown in Fig. 1 and a discussion on the CCAs are placed in the paragraphs that follow. Pathak (2009), Chatterjee *et al.*, (2000), Malhotra *et al.*, (2001 and 2007) Tiwari *et al.*, (1999). Higgins and Chatterjee (2005) can be further referred for an account of CCAs in North-East India.

### The community conserved areas of Assam

With the present definition of the CCAs, it is difficult to find large CCAs in Assam due to the implementation of imperial forestry by the British since as early as 1875 in the state as a result of which, large tracts of forests were brought under the Department of Forests. With practically very little documentation of Community Conserved Forests (also refer to Malhotra *et al.*, 2007), under the present IUCN South Asia initiative an initial effort was made to report on the known clusters of CCAs in Assam (Fig. 1). These include:

1. Karbi Anglong
2. Goalpara
3. Marghareta Lekhapani areas of Marghereta subdivision of Tinsukia district
4. Chakrashila Wildlife Sanctuary, Kokrajhar Bodo Territorial Council, Assam

A documentation of these CCAs have been possible through secondary sources, experiences of the authors in the past, field visits undertaken and the contributions of the participants of the workshop "on Community Conserved Areas of North-East India-Challenges and Opportunities" held during 7-9 May, 2009, at Nagaon, Assam by Kalpavriksha and Winrock International India.

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\*\* Divisional forest Officer, Social forestry Division, Kokrajhar, Bodo Teritorial Council.

\*\*\*Girls College, Nagaon, Assam.

\*\*\*\* Department of Botany, North East Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya.

**Table 1**  
Constitutional provision for tribal areas of North East India.

| State             | Special provision  | Constitutions | Autonomous Councils  | (district)             |
|-------------------|--|---------------|--|------------------------|
| Arunachal Pradesh | Article 371H   |               | No autonomous  | councils               |
|                   |  |               | but the state has elective village councils and Anchal Samitis (Panchayats), |                        |
| Assam             | Sixth Schedule read with Article 371B (for scheduled areas only) |               | Korbi -Anglong, Cahar Hills, Rabha -Hajng, Mishing                           | North Boadoland, Tiwa, |
| Manipur           | Article 371C   |               | Ukhrul, Senapati, Sadar Hills  | Tamenglong             |
| Mizoram           | Sixth Schedule read with Article 371A                            |               | Mara, Lai, Chakma  |                        |
| Nagaland          | Article 371A   |               | No autonomous  | councils               |
|                   |  |               | but each village has a village council                                       |                        |
| Tripura           | Sixth Schedule   |               | Tripura Tribal district  | autonomous council,    |
|                   |  |               | Khumulwang   |                        |

(Tripathi and Barik 2004).

### 1 Karbi Anglong

The Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar are the two hill districts of Assam which enjoy the status of autonomous district under the provisions of the Sixth schedule of the Indian constitution. Before independence the Karbi Anglong district was known as Mikir Hills and was parts of Sibsagar district and Nowgaon district. The Governor General in council of Assam declared the Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills alongwith other hills areas as backward tracts under section 52 (A) (2) of Government of India Act of 1919. On the basis of the recommendations of the Government of India Act, 1935, these areas were described as 'Excluded Areas' or 'Partially Excluded Areas' and the Governor was empowered to make regulations.

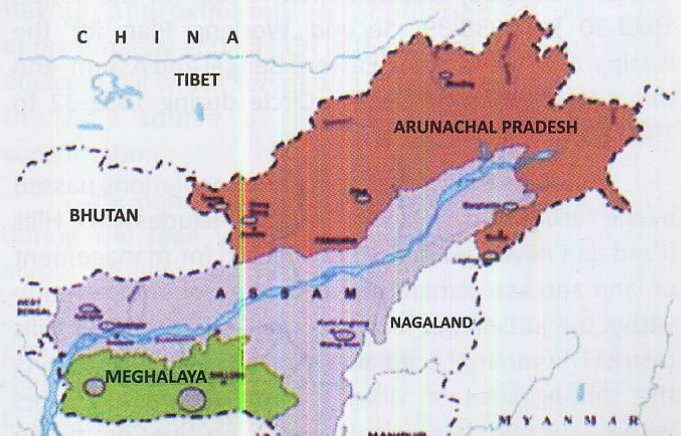
After independence the Constituent Assembly appointed the North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub Committee under the Chairmanship of Dr. Gopinath Bordoloi. This subcommittee formulated the Sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution to provide autonomy to the scheduled tribes for administration. In 1951, autonomy was awarded to the united Mikir and North Cachar Hills district (N.C. Hills). In 1970 N.C. Hills was created as a separate district.

The Mikir Hills was renamed as Karbi Anglong in 1976, However, alongwith the Karbis live the Bodos,

Dimasas, Assamese, Lalungs, Garos and other tribal communities. In 1970 when Meghalaya was formed both the regions were given the option of joining the state, however both the councils decided to remain with Assam (Bhuyan, 2006).

The Karbi Anglong district is bounded on the north by Nagaon and Golaghat districts, on the south by the North Cachar Hills, on the east by the Golaghat and the states of Nagaland and Meghalaya on the West. Karbi Anglong has a total geographical area of 10.332 km<sup>2</sup> and a total population of 3.79 lakhs according to 1971 census

**Fig 1**



Case Study Location in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya

**Table 2**  
*General Scenario of the CCA's in Hamren.*

| Sl No | Name of the cluster | Community forest(ha) | Sacred grove(ha) | Total Area (ha) of the village |
|-------|---------------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1     | Socheng             | 98                   | 24               | 516                            |
| 2     | Chinthong           | 75                   | 5                | 1249                           |
| 3     | Langsomepi          | 46                   | 65               | 407                            |
| 4     | Linchika            | 110                  | 21               | 1100                           |
| 5     | Rongcheck           | 782                  | 11               | 2654                           |
| 6     | Amri                | 26                   | 8                | 712                            |
| 7     | Long -e-luboi       | 28                   | 19               | 377                            |
| 8     | Rumphum             | 1200                 | -                | 1633                           |
| 9     | Tirkim              | 48                   | 32               | 462                            |
| 10    | Ronghidi            | 1050                 | 8                | 1685                           |
| 11    | Tikka               | 46                   | 8                | 536                            |
| 12    | Borgaon             | 156                  | 25               | 786                            |
| 13    | Jirkinding          | 208                  | -                | 790                            |
| 14    | Rongpongong         | 130                  | -                | 543                            |
| 15    | Umsowai             | 120                  | -                | 543                            |
| 16    | Rongjangphomg       | 20                   | -                | 197                            |
| 17    | Kungripi            | 10                   | -                | 155                            |
| Total |                     | 4153                 | 226              | 14345                          |

which increased to 8.13 lakhs in 2001. The reserved forests of Karbi Anglong are managed by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous District councils through the three territorial divisions namely Karbi Anglong West Division, Diphu and Hamren Division, Hamren. Unclassed state forests are managed by the district council administration.

Scanty published information exists on the community conserved areas in Karbi Anglong, however, some of the working plans may provide some insights. These include the working plan of the forest of the Goalpara Division, Western Circle Assam for the period 1929-30 to 1938-39, Second Working Plan for the Goalpara Forest Division, Eastern Bengal and Assam and the Working Plan of Eastern Circle during 1931-32 to 1940-41.

Some of the relevant acts and regulations passed by the Karbi Anglong District Councils includes Mikir Hills (Land and Revenue) Act, 1953 enacted for management of land and assessment and collection of land revenue within the jurisdiction of the council and the Mikir Hills District (Jhumming) Regulation Act, 1954 which prohibits the shifting sites of villages from the present sites without the prior permission of the Executive Committee of the District Council. This regulation is noted for fixation

of the village boundaries in the hills. The Mikir Hills District (Forest) Acts, 1957 is the most important for the management of the reserved forests proposed by the district councils.

A general scenario of the CCAs in Hamren is presented in (Table 2) as per the information provided by the Karbi Anglong Community Resource Management Society.

#### **The CCAs of village Kolbari Tokbi – Tharveso and Parmusor**

The village Kolbari Tokbi is situated at a distance of 45 km from the Hamren, the headquarter of Hamren Sub-division of Karbi Anglong district. The village is inhabited by 21 households with a population of about 150; all belong to the Karbi tribal group. The village has two Sacred Groves, namely Tharveso (meaning small mango) and Parmusor having a total area of around 100 ha. Originally the village was situated about two kilometers away from its present location sent possibly to avail the facility of the newly constructed road, the people moved from the interior location to the present location.

The people worship various Gods and mainly the Hemphu, the early Karbi man. They believe in evil spirits. At the heart of Tharveso, there is a mango tree, which they worship. The Lankaidang stream

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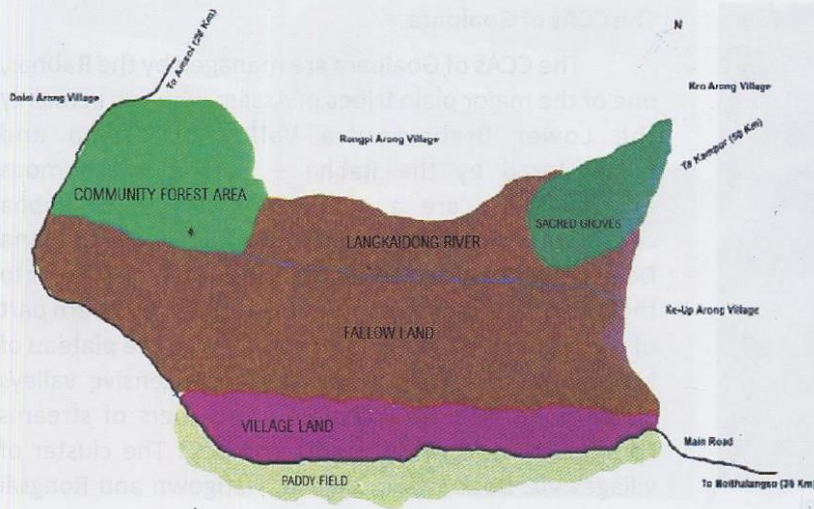
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flowing through the grove is reserved. Violation of rules necessitates a ritual in the form of a pooja. The people promise to offer puja in that case and make some kind of topla (some leaves of sacred trees with paddy are put in to a small bamboo pipe) and hang it either on the wall or on the roof, inside their house. Sacrifice of chickens and goats are a part of the ritual.

At the CCA of the Parmusor, the deity is bigger than the Tharveso. The area is also bigger and located from the village at a distance. Contiguous to the sacred forests, an additional village forest of almost 25 ha is preserved which until two years back it was under complete management of the community with a set of rules and regulations, however, the villagers consented to the Department of Forests in the Agari Rangeto undertake plantations for which financial support was provided. The village framed a committee to look after the plantation, weeding, etc. The villagers earn ₹ 40 per day as wages. A support of ₹15,000/- during the past two years by the department and the prospects of earning revenue from them and the mature plantations have made them to work closely with the forest department officials. This is a huge savings on their personal expenditure which would have otherwise been incurred on maintaining and managing the CCA. It is very interesting to observe that while the institutional arrangement resembles a 'Joint Forest Management Committee' there is no representation of Forest Department in the committee.

Determined to protect and conserve the CCA, even if the financial support of the forest department is withdrawn, the committee has drawn stringent rules for its management which includes ostracizing a violator of rules and denying him or her with the revenue earned

from the CCA. The floral diversity of the forests considered of high significance and specially connected to the rituals attached with the grove. They value the medicinal plants in the groves unavailable in plantations. Village members who have migrated to far off destinations like Delhi, Guwahati, Diphu also come at the time of the pujas and celebrations is a strong indication of peoples attachment to the CCA. Younger generations look forward to economic benefit from the forest like lac culture that can bring in added revenue.

The adjoining forest protected by Karbis in Kolbari Tokbi. The forests also viewed as a source of livelihood through cultivation of Lac.

**The CCA of Malong Kisir**

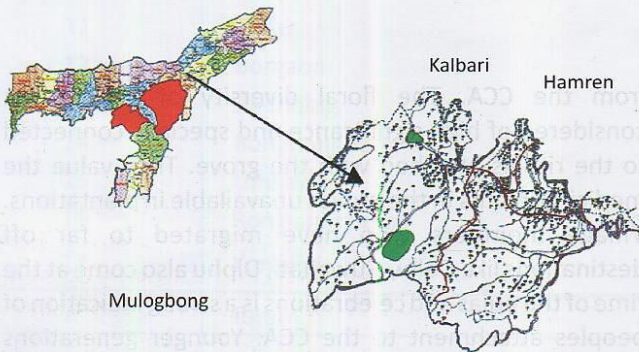
Malong Kisir village is a remote village in the Chingthong Development Block of the Karbi Anglong district. It is situated at a distance of 75 km from the headquarter of the Hamren Sub-division. The almost 70 years old settlement is inhabited by 35 households having approximately a population of 400. An approximately 100 ha CCA in the village is located in the adjacent hill which serves as a catchment to the stream, the only source of drinking water and fish for consumption.

The pond in the CCA serve as source of water during the lean winter season, however commuting across the hills remain a constraint.

While the Public Health department could not promptly respond to the villagers request to provide them with the infrastructure to access water from the CCA, the support provided by International Foundation for Agriculture and Development (IFAD) sponsored project implemented by Karbi-Anglong Community



The sacred Mango tree at CCA of Kolbari Tokbi



The CCA in Kolbari, Tokbi

Resource Management Society (KACRMS) resolved the crisis. Construction of storage tanks at the source and placing a pipeline using the gradient of the slope to bring the water to the storage tank, constructed at the village, now ensure availability of water round the year. This has been an incentive strong enough for the villagers to protect the forest and enrich the same with plantations with native species. The committee collects a fee of ` 5 from each household for managing and maintaining the water supply.

### The CCAs of Goalpara

The CCAs of Goalpara are managed by the Rabhas, one of the major plain tribes of Assam who live in mainly the Lower Brahmaputra Valley of Assam and administered by the Rabha – Hajong Autonomous Council. There are a number of villages of Rabha community in Bodohapur Panchayat of Balijana Development Block of Golapara, which is situated near to the Assam –Meghalaya border region. The Southern part of the region is a hilly terrain merged with the plateau of Meghalaya and the northern part is extensive valleys crisscrossed by river Bolbala and numbers of streams coming down from the southern hills. . The cluster of villages viz. Bodohapur, Baljana, Hatigown and Rongsai provide an unique example of watershed conservation based on indigenous knowledge system through well defined community conservation. Sacred spaces in the villages are repositories of floral diversity.

The villages have two common resources, namely, a pond and a forest. The villagers consider these as their most important assets. People of the village consider the pond as a resource because it provides fish, water for agriculture and water and fodder for animal they rear. Generally they fish only once in a year and the sale proceeds are deposited in the General Fund of the village.

The 'Ban Suraksa Samiti', a committee of the villagers manage the forest. The term of the committee is one year. The executive committee implements the written rules and regulations. This practice is almost 20 years old. People can collect fuel wood without the permission of the committee for their own use. But, if they need some timber for construction or other purposes, they need to give an application addressing the President and Secretary of the committee specifying



The adjoining forests protected by Karbis in Kolbari Tokbi. The forests also viewed as a source of livelihood through cultivation of lac.



The Pipeline from the CCA in Malong Kisir village

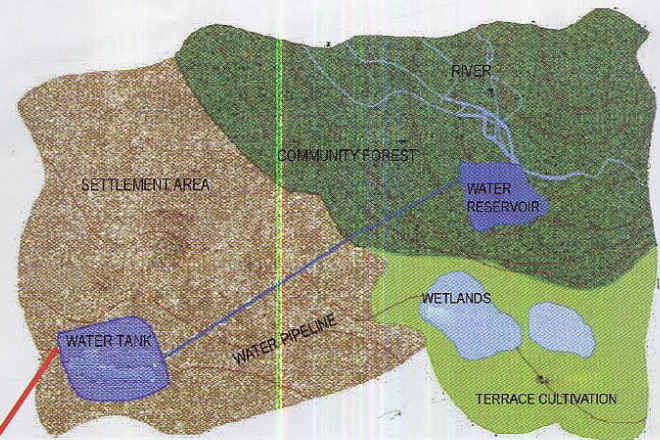
the quantity of the timber (verbal prayer in the meeting also permissible). The violators of the rules and regulations are punished by the committee by imposing a fine upto ₹ 500/-.

It is worth observing that no silviculture is practiced and weeding is done by all the villagers once in year. There is a sacred space in the village, called 'Baidam'. This area has a temple, with thick vegetation cover. People are not allowed to visit this place without taking bath and have to wear fresh clothing. Nobody is allowed to cut the trees in this area. In two occasions viz., sowing and harvesting of seeds they offer puja in the temple, i.e. at the time of new harvesting and before sowing of seeds.

#### The CCAs in Margherita

Margherita is a civil sub-division of Tinsukia district of Assam. The tropical and subtropical forest patches are under the administration of the Digboi and Domdama forest division. The region is a inhabitation of tribal groups like Singpho, Tai Phake, Tai Khamyang, Tangsa, etc.

The Singphos are a hilly tribe of Mongoloid origin believed to have migrated in several groups from Singra-Boom in Tibet. One went to China, one Burma (now Myanmar), and the rest came over to India and settled in the hilly region. Singphos in China are known as 'Jingphow' and 'Singphaw' or 'Kachin' in Burma (Myanmar). The Tai Phakes migrated to Assam from Houkong valley in the year 1775. Initially they wandered but around 1850 the Tai Phake people settled down in 'Nong tao' (Nong-Pong, Tao-algae). Tai Phake people are strict followers of Hinayana sect of Buddhism. In each village they establish a Buddha Bihar where Buddha



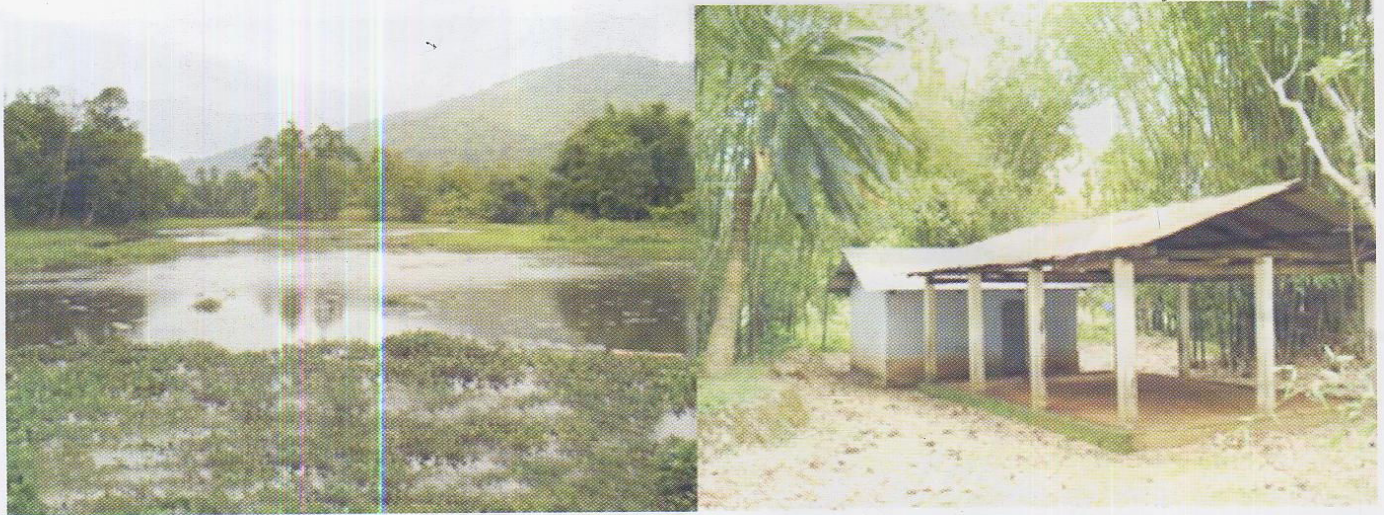
images made of brass are installed and regular prayers are offered by monks (known as Chow Moun) and the villagers.

The Khamyangs, who are popularly known as Noras are a section of the Great Thai or Tai-stock. They had their independent principality in Mungkong upto the end of the 18th Century. These people are also popularly known as the Shyams. Linguistically, the Khamyangs belong to a Tai-speaking group and they are Buddhist of Teravada School.

The term Tangsa is derived from 'Tang' (high land) and 'Cha' or 'Sa' (son) meaning sons of high land. All these tribal groups having their own traditional conservation ethics with prominent practices of sacred space, sacred trees, birds and animals and they have maintained floral cover in their home stead areas with different combination species. Moreover, they have maintained the vegetation in the village areas on the basis of their traditional knowledge of village landscape management. In all these practices community participation is



The CCA of village Bodohpur, Goalpara



mandatory and everything is organized under the leadership of village head. Map 2 shows the cluster of CCAs located at Marghareta. Table 3 provides baseline information on some of the Marghareta villages inhabited by the Singpho, Taiphake, and Tangsa Naga.

A brief description of the conservation practices and CCAs managed by the Singphos, Tai-Phakes and Tangsas are mentioned in the paragraphs that follow:

Singpho means man. As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the Singphos are a hilly tribe of Mongoloid origin believed to have migrated in several groups from Singra-Boom in Tibet. One went to China, one Burma (now Myanmar) and the rest came over to India and settled in the hilly region. Singphos in China are known as 'Jingphow' and 'Singphaw or 'Kachin' in Burma (Myanmar). The Singphos are strict followers of the Hinayana sect of Buddhism. It is believed that the Singphos embraced the Buddhism in the year 1892 after the Rajguru (prophet) of Burmese King visited the Singpho inhabited area in and around 1890-92. They are considered to identical in race with the Kakus or Kakhyens of Burma whose chief habitat was on the great eastern branch of the Irrawadi which extended far south touching on the north and eastern border of China. With the breakup of the Northern Shan Kingdom in Burma they marched upto an area laying between Upper Assam and Bhamoo (Mackenzie, 1884). The homeland of the Singphos according to their own tradition was in the Hukang Valley, a vast tract lying towards the North-East of the Patkai ranges (Baruah, 1977). According to Singpho History around 800-700 B.C. the people are migrated from Mongolia and settled for few hundred years in Tibet after that around 100 B.C. they comes through river Tsangpo settled in the present North East India (Ningkhee, 2009).

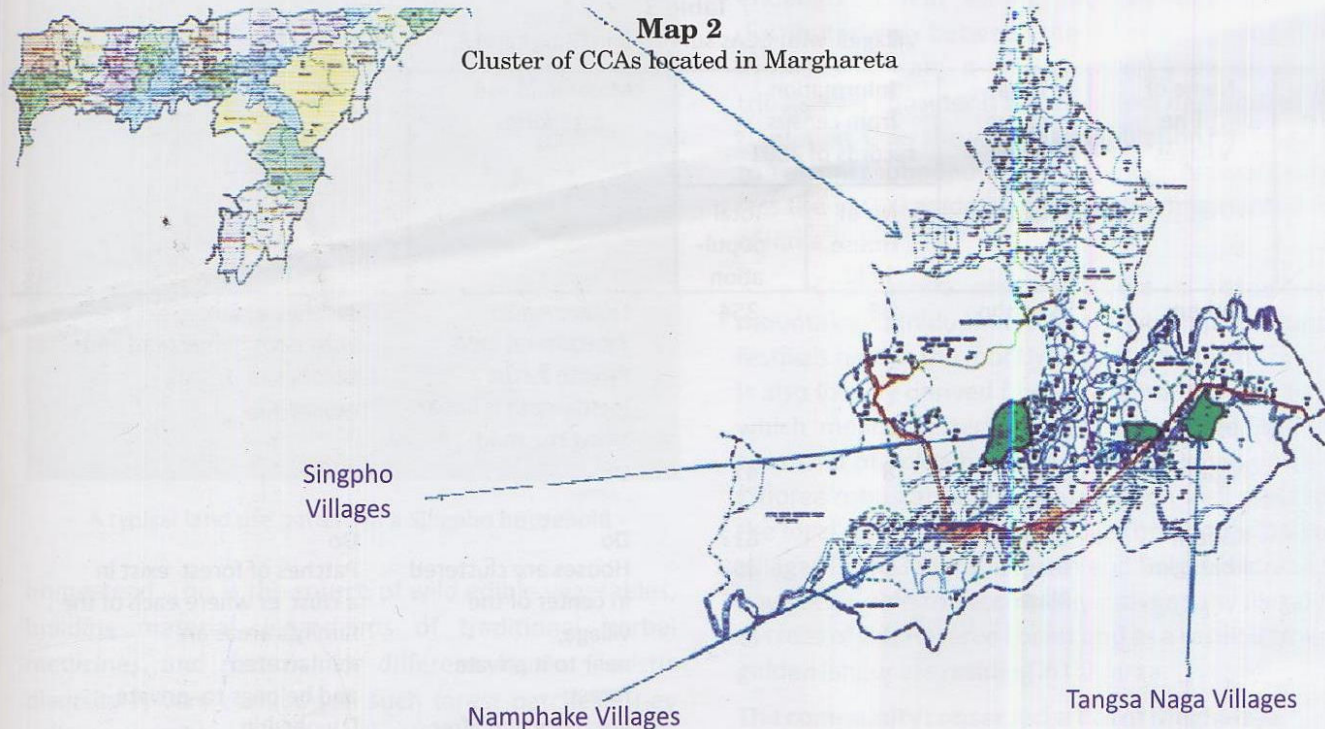
It is difficult define the CCAs of the Singphos as unit

from organizational aspects but in spatial context there is defined frame of a village. Generally the villages are near to perennial water sources ( like river, not on the bank but near to it), the highland are occupied by cluster of houses in north-south of south – north direction with homestead which sprawl over a large area and surrounding low lying areas are paddy field. A Mareng (village) is known by its place name as well as by the clan-name of the founder. The place name usually refers to natural setting or different natural feature associated with the area .

The population of the Singphos have come down drastically from 70,000 (Ningkhee, 2009) to a mere 20,000 concentrated in around 20,000 villages.

Consumption of tea as beverage is tradition among the Singphos. In the ancient period they collect it from the forest, later on started to plant it in their homestead. The called it 'Phalap'. They collect the tender leaf carefully and process it through their indigenous method (which is still practicing by them). Every Singpho family has their own forest land either along with the homestead areas or near to the agricultural field. They protect this patches out of their traditional believe that forest spirit sheltered there and welfare of the family and the village is concerned with it. However, it is a store house of material required to support their day to day activities. Therefore, even though forest are belongs to private ownership, there are large floral diversity exist in it. According to villagers. There are around 13 Singpho. villages in the area where such forest areas are there. Table 4 reveals the scenario:

These forest patches are repositories of local biodiversity, with variety of trees, shrubs, creepers, herbs and ferns. It also supports diverse wildlife of the regions. In the villages where it is located near to the reserve forest viz upper Dihing R.F., Dirak R.F. and Tarani R.F. Village forest are merged with the reserve forest, which



emerges a condition that some time wildlife found in RF are also take shelter in the village forest.

**Table 4**

Name of the Approximate Area.

| V illages  | under forest ( in Acre) |
|------------|-------------------------|
| Enthong    | 5                       |
| Mungong    | 9                       |
| Enthem     | 10                      |
| Ulup       | ½                       |
| Pangna     | 1                       |
| Bahbari    | 1                       |
| Ketetong   | 5                       |
| Duarmara   | 1                       |
| Kumsaikong | 6                       |
| Hasak      | 1                       |
| Pangsun    | 1                       |
| Namdang    | 1                       |
| Bias       | 4                       |

The Singphos believe in a great number of Spirits hovering all around whom they term as Nats. Many of these are associated with nature which not only reveals their beliefs and dependency on nature but also a greater extent indicates their respects to nature too. Some of the important traditions are:

- *Fun Nat*: It is believed that some spirit is there in trees.

- *Bum Nat*: He is believed to be owner of the hills, but he is commonly considered as the guardian of fields.
- *Matāi-tu*: Matāi-tu is considered as the lord of forest and as such it has to be prohibited for approval of clearing the forest.
- *Field ceremonies*: Singpho according to their tradition organize some rituals for protection of their crops, these are the common field ceremonies they have. The Sprit of *Ca' Nat* (Spirit of water), *Matāi Nat* (spirit of forest) and *Cithung Nat* (spirit of earth) they believed connected to good harvest.

Wide spread vegetation cover and traditional life style of the Singpho people nurture a range of variety of crops and plants in their village landscape. They cultivate five different variety of local rice varieties, which are very much endemic to this area like the Miyatong and Pikhisngkhon which are commonly cultivated by most of the Singpho farmers.

In their homestead forest areas a wide variety of plant species are found, some of the important vascular plant species found in the areas are Bansum, Hullock (*Terminalia myriocarpa*), Hulong (*Dipterocarpus macrocarpas*), Mekai (*Phobele cooperiana*), Nahar (*Mesua feria*), Simul (*Bombax malabaricum*), Barhamthuri (*Talauma hogdsnii*), Takau (*Livingstonia jenkinsii*), etc. All these are endemic to the area and endalgered. There are variety of Kawa (bamboo) found in

**Table 3**  
Villages with CCAs surveyed in Marghareta.

| Sl No | Name of The villages | Tribal group living in the village | Information from census records of 2001 |                  | Major land use categories   | Forest  |
|-------|----------------------|------------------------------------|---|------------------|---|---|
|       |                      |                                    | No of House hold                        | Total population |   |   |
| 1     | Enthem               | Singpho                            | 58                                      | 354              | Homestead, Agricultural field, Private forest (settlement is linear along the road)   | Patches of forest exist with each homestead and belongs to private ownership  |
| 2     | Nigam                | Tai Phake                          | 8                                       | 47               | Do  | Do  |
| 3     | Kumsai               | Singpho                            | 106                                     | 617              | Do  | Do  |
| 4     | Kharngko             | Tangsa Naga                        | 94                                      | 498              | Houses are clustered in center of the village, near to it private forest are there and after that paddy fields are located. | Patches of forest exist in a cluster where each of the family's areas are demarcated and belongs to private Ownership |

such area, mainly Jati, Bhaluka, Bijuli, Kako etc. Moreover, Thatch, Elephant grass and Reeds are also found in the marshy areas near to the agricultural field and in the grazing land. In this area mainly elephant, Tiger, Leopard, wild Pigs, Bear, Barking Deer and spotted Deer are commonly found wildlife of the area.

#### *Conservation practices of Tangsa Naga*

The term 'Tangsa' is derived from 'Tang' (high land) and 'Cha' or 'Sa' (son) meaning sons of high land. The Tangsas are socially organised and hospitable.

Tangsa Naga is mainly inhabited in the northern part of Dihing River in the Tirap Frontier of Patkai ranges. In Tangsa villages houses are found in clustered on the central highland areas of the village, where houses are there with large homestead areas, near to this generally large patch of forest are found, which is with individual family's ownership and there is clear demarcation of boundary of each of the family's possessions. In the surrounding of this forest areas paddy fields are located.

Tangsa Naga life is also associated with forest; they depend on forest for building material, food and medicinal plants in their daily walk of life. Usually large patches of forest are found in every Tangsa village, where small patches are with individual family's ownership.

In Kharangko village, we observed almost about 23 acre of land are being conserved. The people say that the

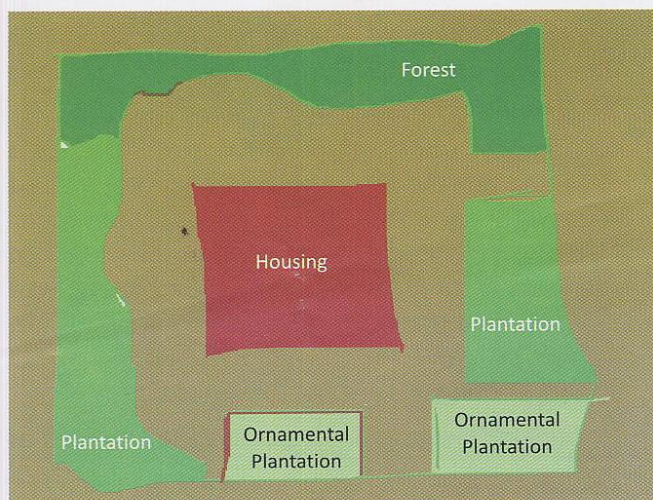
stake in the patch of forest is limited only to 14 numbers of households of the village. Individual's area in the patch is demarcated and one can collect timber, fuel wood and other necessities from his/her own plot only. But, interestingly, as far as the wild edible vegetables and sags (herbs) are concerned, the whole patch of forest is open for each and every one of the village. It is noteworthy that they have tradition of performing some rituals before harvesting in the honour of forest goddess; it is performed in the forest only.

#### *Conservation practices of Tai Phake.*

Tai Phake is one of the indigenous ethnic groups of Assam; they are concentrated only in few villages of Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts of Assam with a population of around 2000. They migrated to Assam in late 1700s. The word 'Phake' stands for 'Pha'- rock wall and 'Ke' - old. There was Phake kingdom across the Patkai in Hukong Valley. They left there own land due to political crisis, economic and natural instability in the area and migrated to this part of the country. Tai Phake villages were settled in the present location between 1830 to 1950 (Gohain, 2009).

Tai Phakes are Buddhist by religion. So, in the present social life there is significant influence of Buddhist Philosophy. Even it is reflected in their different festivals too.

Tai Phake also maintain a forest area in their



A typical land use pattern in a Singpho household

homestead. This is the source of wild edible vegetables, building material, ingredients of traditional herbal medicines, and material for different rituals. Floristic diversity is very common in such forest patches. They collect vegetables and herbs like Khngkha, Palap Maoun, Kan. Jang, Nam Hom, Panag, Panit etc. for day to day consumption from such area. The Nigam village visited during this field trip has around 3 acres of such forest area which are located in the homestead of different families.

In spite of the strong conservation practices the forest cover is declining in the Marghareta area and this is possibly due to the emergence of the nascent small tea gardens which is being viewed as threat to the forests of Marghareta.

#### **Community conserved areas in lower Assam Bodoland territorial council**

Kakoijana reserve forest is located in Bongaigaon district and is administered under Aie Valley Forest Division. The Reserve- exemplifies a case where communities have willingly handed over the management to the state forest department in the larger interest of the Golden Langur (*Trachypithecus geei*). The forest is surrounded by 22 odd villages with different ethnic communities such as Garos, Rabhas, Adivasis, Bodos and Muslims forming the majority in individual villages.

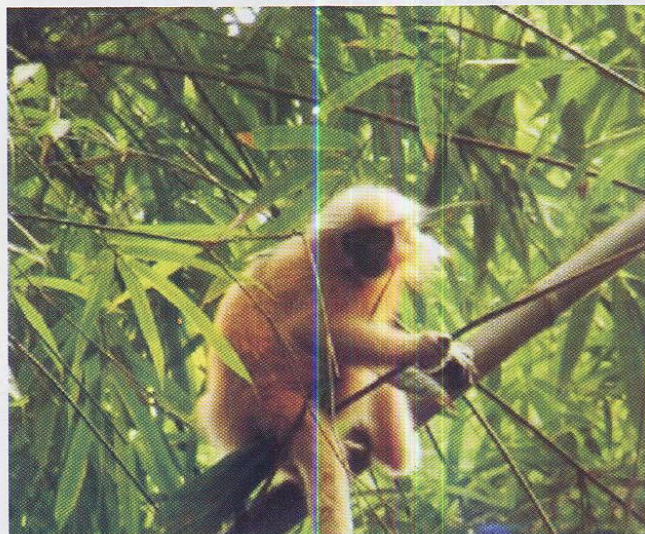
A small initiative from a local NGO and the support of training and motivation that prompted the communities to protect the forest patch for conservation of the golden langur whose population had reduced to a mere 100. Forced to live on ground due to loss of canopy cover, today, conservation of langur is a success story in Assam. Golden langur is a highly endemic and

endangered leaf eating monkey that is naturally distributed only between the rivers Sankosh and Manas in western Assam. It is much revered among the Hindu tribals who consider it to be a direct descendant of God Hanuman. Over the years the population has fragmented to 2 distinct subpopulations and rough estimates indicate less than 5000 golden langurs in the fragmented forests of India.

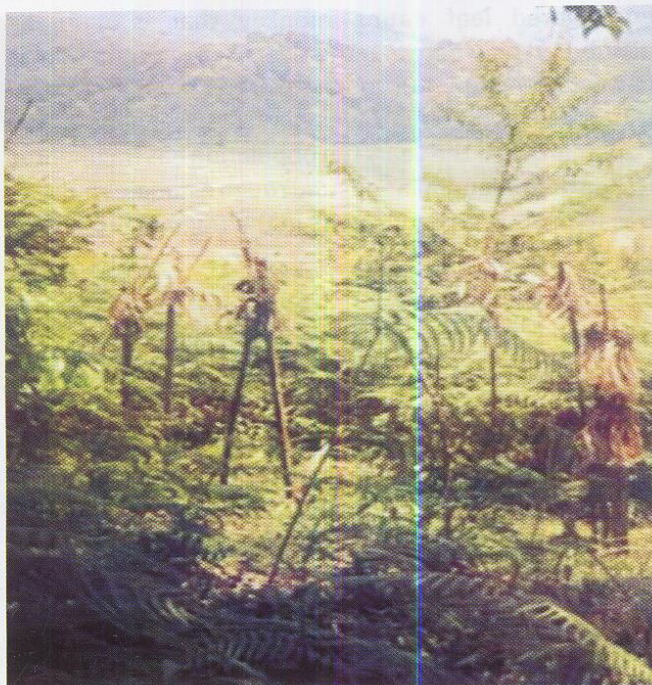
Chakrashila also harbours a set of sacred mountains 'Dan duphur' that are worshipped during the festivals held in the month of April. The term Chakrashila is also loosely derived from the word Page 15 'Sikrisikla' which means butterfly in bodo language. Within the township of Kokrajhar, Gendrabil is a small patch of Sal (*Shorea robusta*) forest that has been well preserved by the local community since 2001. The Bodo tribals of two villages Boro Gendrabil North and Boro Gendrabil South have been able to successfully prevent any illegal felling of trees of this Reserve Forest and as a result 3 troupes of golden langur are residing in this area.

#### **The community conserved areas of Meghalaya**

In Meghalaya 69.5% of the state geographic area is under the forest cover which is around 15,584 km<sup>2</sup> of which area of reserved and protected forests under the control of state forest department is only 12,124 km<sup>2</sup>. The rest are managed by the Autonomous District Councils, village durbars and other traditional institutions and private owners. Autonomous district councils control 96% of the community owned forests. As mentioned earlier, the ownership rights over land and resources are further protected by the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution, hence, the act and rules formed by the state and national governments are therefore not applicable to these forests. The district council acts are weakly enforced and the state of Environment report of



Local communities contribute to conservation of the Golden Langur in Chakrashila Wildlife sanctuary



Community managed forests, the paddy fields and the altars in the sacred groves of the Apatanis.



The Kako Nani Pine grove in Village Reru Apatani valley, Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh

Meghalaya highlights the over exploitations of the clan owned forests.

Based on the ownership pattern and management control and the tribe that preserve them, these forests are known by different names. The Law 'Kyntang' are the sacred forests, 'Law Adong' are forests from which resources are drawn but with concessions and Law Shanon that caters to all needs of the fuelwood. A

detailed description of the land tenure system is provided in (Gurden, 1975). The community lands are family, clan, lineage, village and Siemen ship owned.

Amongst the community forests the best documented are the sacred forests which are named differently. The sacred forests 'Law Kyntang', 'Law Niam' and 'Law Lyngdoh' in the Khasi Hills are known as Khloo Blai in Jaintia Hills and Asheng Khoshi in Garo Hills (Tiwari *et al*, 1999) The distribution of such forests are shown in Fig. 1. Sacred groves documented by North East Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, (Tewari *et al.*, 1999).

A. Traditional Classification of 'Law Adong' is placed as follows:

#### 1. *Ka Khlaw Nongkynrih*

This forest is protected and reserved only for community service needs. It is from this forest that trees are cut and felled for construction of schools, youth clubhouses, footbridges and similar projects. It can also be used in emergency cases.

#### 2. *Ka Khlaw Adong Kseh-Mawngap*

This forest is used only for cutting for timber for construction of houses and for other community-based constructions.

#### 3. *Ka Khlaw-Adong Wah-Lwai*

Only selected species of trees are permitted to be cut from this forest and then only in extreme situations (i.e. if there are no full grown trees available in any of the above named forests that can be felled for construction of a house). The Hima, only after careful examination and consideration, will decide whether trees may be used in these situations.

#### 4. *Ka Khlaw-Kor Um Kharai-Masi*

This forest is kept apart as the catchments area for spring water and serves as the source of water supply for the Hima. The entire zone is restricted to human and cattle entry.

#### 5. *Ka Khlaw Dymmiew-Blah*

The trees in this forest are completely protected and cannot be felled for any purposes. Only full grown grasses, small wild trees and weed on the outer ring of the forest are permitted for harvest and use.

#### 6. *Ka Khlaw Adong Wah-Sein long*

In this forest trees can be felled only for making coffins and the preparation of the cremating ground. Only five out of the sixteen villages are given access to fell trees and only for above purposes. Additionally the villages are



The Platform burial of the Wanchoos of Arunachal Pradesh. (Higgins and Chatterjee, 2005)

responsible for conservation and protection. Each village has to be normal permission from the Hima before felling any trees.

#### 7. *Ka Khlaw Adong-Kyiem*

Only grasses are permitted to be harvested from this forest.

#### 8. *Ka Khlaw Adong Shnong Jathang*

This forest is located in Jathnag village, which has been given the role to protect and conserve it. The residents of the village enjoy only the right to cut trees for cremation purposes and only with the permission from the village headman.

#### *Regulations on Access and Use of Khlaw Adong*

1. No trees can be uprooted or cut from the protected forests. Any person found in violation is liable for punishment and penalty.
2. Every resident of the Hima is responsible for protecting the forest, and can take necessary action against anyone breaking the law.
3. It is illegal to set the forest on fire and culprits will be severely punished.
4. It is illegal to use the lands located on the fringes of the protected forests for any type of cultivation or to cut any tree from such areas.

The full grown grasses inside the protected forests cannot be cut without the prior permission of the Chief and Ministers.

#### **Community conserved areas of Arunachal Pradesh.**

Community Conserved Areas are spread across the state of Arunachal Pradesh but remain practically undocumented. In Western Arunachal Pradesh, community conserved forests are under the ownership of the monastery forests called Gumpha forests. In Central Arunachal Pradesh are present the community

forests of the Apatanis, globally known for their paddy and fish cultivation. They conserve the forests which are sources of water that feed their paddy fields making them one of the most productive agro ecosystems of the world. (Ramakrishnan and Kumar, 1997). Like other tribal communities Apatanis, too are apprehensive of mapping their community managed forests. The forest surrounding village 'Hong' one of the largest village in the location exemplifies one of the best managed forests.

In the Apatani valley also are the age old Pine forests (See Pic of Kako Nani pine grove). The distribution of *Pinus wallichiana* in these groves are a botanical curiosity as the tree does not occur in the neighboring valleys of similar altitude. The Apatanis hold that they brought the tree species alongwith them when they immigrated from a country north of the Kamala and Subansiri rivers.

Very little is known about the forests managed by the Wanchoo tribals known for platform burials in the forests near Khonsa and Longling at the borders of Arunachal Pradesh at the Nagaland.

The Adi tribal community in upper Siang district rever the Mouling, Gangging and the Marrang peaks presently now within the boundaries of the Mouling National Park. The forests of Mouling are relatively intact and pristine with little evidences of disturbance possibly due to sacredness attached to these peaks.

The Thembang Bapu Community Conserved Area. The Monpa tribal community in Dirrang block of West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh have set up a Community Conserved Area in 29 ha of the forest area. The CCA was established in 2006 as registered society after procuring a no objection certificate from Department of forests and Environment, Government of Arunachal Pradesh. The World Wildlife Fund for Nature-India (WWF-India) played a key role in setting up the CCA. Thembang Bapu CCA was set up a time when the possibility of establishing Community Reserves was explored as per Article 36 C of amended Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 by WWF-India.

Apprehensive of the provisions of the act, the community opted to set up a CCA for a duration of ten years with its own set of rules and by laws.. Sir Dorabjee Tata Trust (SDTT), Mumbai, provided further financial support to strengthen the management and functioning of the CCA.

The Western Arunachal Pradesh is also extremely rich in *Rhododendrons*, a genera presently threatened because of its excessive usage as fuel wood. The Monpa community from village Sakpret in the Tawang district is all set to achieve another milestone. Under the



Thembang Bapu Community Conservation Area, village Thembang, West Kameng, Arunachal Pradesh.

conservation initiative of Winrock International India, the community has set up a 8 ha of a natural *Rhododendron arboretum* with support from Department of Science and Technology, Government of India. The *Rhododendron arboretum* in addition to the *in-situ* conservation would also serve as a permanent sample plot to initiate the much needed scientific studies on the ecology of the *Rhododendrons*. A network of such community managed arboretums would serve as new category of CCAs of the Monpas.

#### The CCAs on North East: concluding remarks

North East India is not homogenous entity but a mosaic of diverse ecological, social and physiological landscapes. Community Conserved Areas of North-East India needs deeper level of understanding, they need to be mapped, documented and traditional knowledge and wisdom attached to these need to be recognized and acknowledged. Rationale for the conservation of the CCAs and the management practices needs intensive

analysis and attention to conservation (Chatterjee, 2008).

A thorough situation analysis with respect to nature of ownership of the CCAs, level and intensity of threats, present institutional mechanism and the capacity to manage resources is an immediate requirement. Apprehensions of local communities that mapping and documentation of community forests might endanger their ownership rights is a concern. Little success have been achieved in declaring Community Reserves in the North East India as per the amended Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 is a pointer in this direction. In some locations like Karbi Anglong the willingness to work closely with the government to enrich their forests and ensure livelihood and initiate innovative approaches to protect their forests, as exemplified by a *Rhododendron arboretum* by the Monpas in Western Arunachal Pradesh, are welcome development.

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#### SUMMARY

Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) are a category of forests where communities have a stake or ownership and are increasingly getting recognized global recognition. CCAs across the globe are now being documented for their biological values, management regimes and conservation significance. Case studies were conducted in three states in North East India to document some of the CCAs in the region.

**Key words:** Community Conserved Areas, North-East India, Ownership, Management regimes.

उत्तर पूर्वी भारत के समुदाय संरक्षित क्षेत्र : असम, मेघालय, और अरुणाचल प्रदेश विषयक कुछ पर्यवेक्षण  
सुदीप्तो चटर्जी, सोनाली घोष, जयन्त शर्मा, एस.के बारिक, बी.के तिवारी व कुलेनचन्द्र दास

सारांश

समुदाय संरक्षित क्षेत्र वनों की ऐसी श्रेणी है जिनमें समुदायों का कुछ हित या स्वामित्व निहित रहता है जिन्हें निरंतर वैश्विक मान्यता प्राप्त होती जा रही है। विश्वभर में ऐसे समुदाय संरक्षित क्षेत्र अपने जैविकीय मूल्यों, प्रबन्धकीय क्षेत्रों और संरक्षण महत्व के लिए अब प्रलेखित किए जा रहे हैं। उत्तरपूर्वी भारत के तीन राज्यों में ही प्रदेश के कुछ समुदाय-संरक्षित क्षेत्रों को प्रलेखित करने को कुछ विशेष अध्ययन सम्पन्न किए गए हैं।

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