

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES: A CASE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF LAND RIGHTS ON FOREST CONSERVATION IN MANIPUR

AUTHOR – LAISHRAM SANJEET* & DR. S. JAMES**, PHD RESEARCH SCHOLAR, DEPARTMENT OF LAW* & PROFESSOR AND DEAN, SCHOOL OF LAW AND DEFENCE & STRATEGIC STUDIES**, MANIPUR INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

BEST CITATION – LAISHRAM SANJEET & DR. S. JAMES, INDIGENOUS RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES: A CASE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF LAND RIGHTS ON FOREST CONSERVATION IN MANIPUR, *INDIAN JOURNAL OF LEGAL REVIEW (IJLR)*, 5 (1) OF 2025, PG. 444-453, APIS – 3920 – 0001 & ISSN – 2583-2344.

1. Introduction

Manipur, a state located in the northeastern region of India, is known for its rich biodiversity, unique cultural heritage, and diverse indigenous communities. The forests of Manipur are vital not only for maintaining ecological balance but also for supporting the livelihood, culture, and traditions of its indigenous peoples, such as the Meitei, Naga, and Kuki communities. These communities have historically lived in harmony with their surroundings, relying on the forest for agricultural practices, medicinal plants, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), and spiritual well-being.

However, over the past several decades, the conservation and management of forest resources have become increasingly influenced by state-led policies and legal frameworks that often fail to recognize the rights of these indigenous communities. The state's emphasis on conservation efforts, such as the creation of protected areas and national parks, has frequently resulted in land dispossession and exclusion of indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories. Moreover, national environmental laws such as The Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) of 1972, The Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980 and The Manipur Forest Act, 1988 have often been imposed without taking into consideration indigenous knowledge and land tenure systems.

In 2006, the Indian government enacted the Forest Rights Act (FRA), aimed at recognizing the rights of forest-dwelling communities and rectifying the historical injustices faced by indigenous peoples. The FRA has the potential to empower indigenous communities by legally recognizing their rights to land, resources, and forests, but its implementation has been uneven across the country, and Manipur presents a

unique case of both opportunities and challenges in this regard.

This paper seeks to investigate the Impact of Land Rights on Forest Conservation in Manipur. It aims to explore the intricate relationship between Indigenous Rights and Environmental Policies, focusing on the Indigenous Communities, Land Tenure and Rights, Forest Conservation Policies and Legal Frameworks, Challenges and Opportunities for Indigenous Rights and Forest Conservation in, Policy Recommendations for Balancing Land Rights and Forest Conservation and their connection to land in Manipur helping hand in sustaining the region's forests with the Indigenous People Rights.

2. Indigenous Communities and Their Connection to Manipur

2.1 Overview of Indigenous Groups in Manipur (Meitei, Naga, Kuki)

Manipur, a state in northeastern India, is home to several indigenous communities, each with distinct cultural, linguistic, and historical backgrounds. The major indigenous groups in Manipur include the Meitei, Naga, and Kuki peoples. These communities have deep-rooted connections to the land and natural resources

in the region, and their traditional land-use practices are integral to their identity.

i. **Meitei Community:** The Meitei people are the predominant group in the state, primarily inhabiting the valley of Manipur. They have a rich history dating back to ancient times and are known for their distinctive culture, including their language, arts, and religion. Traditionally, the Meitei are agriculturalists and practice wet rice cultivation, as well as horticulture. They also have strong connections to sacred groves and forest ecosystems, which hold spiritual significance. The Meitei's land-use practices are tightly connected to their cultural rituals and festivals. They have a deep respect for the balance of the natural world, with certain areas of land considered sacred and protected by social and religious taboos.

ii. **Naga Community:** The Naga people live mainly in the hills surrounding the Manipur valley and are known for their distinct languages, traditions, and customs. The Naga practice shifting cultivation (jhum), a form of agriculture where land is cleared in cycles for growing crops and then left fallow to regenerate. This cyclical practice has allowed the land to maintain fertility and biodiversity over generations. Naga communities organize themselves into clans or tribes, and land is managed communally, with specific territories controlled by clan leaders or village councils. The Naga people's deep spiritual connection to the land manifests in rituals tied to the forest, mountains, and rivers, which are considered sacred and protected.

iii. **Kuki Community:** The Kuki people, like the Naga, predominantly inhabit the hilly areas of Manipur. The Kuki have historically been hunters, gatherers, and farmers, with agriculture being their primary livelihood. They practice shifting cultivation, similar to the Naga, and depend heavily on the land for sustenance. The Kuki people have strong social and cultural ties to their land, with customary laws governing land use, resource management, and conflict resolution. Their land is not only vital for their

economic survival but also plays an essential role in their identity and community cohesion.

2.2 Traditional Knowledge Systems

Traditional knowledge systems among the indigenous communities of Manipur are intricately linked to their deep understanding of the environment, including its flora, fauna, and ecosystems. These systems have evolved over generations and are based on the practical application of observation, experience, and spiritual beliefs.

i. Agricultural Practices

a. **Shifting Cultivation (Jhum):** The Naga and Kuki peoples have practiced shifting cultivation for centuries. This practice involves clearing a section of forest for crop cultivation, followed by a period of fallow to allow the land to regenerate. The Kuki and Naga understand the importance of maintaining soil fertility through this system, ensuring that the forest is allowed to recover and regenerate. This knowledge of sustainable land use is passed down through oral traditions and customary practices.

b. **Wet Rice Cultivation:** The Meitei people rely heavily on wet rice cultivation in the fertile valleys of Manipur. They have developed irrigation systems to harness water from rivers and streams to support their rice paddies. Their farming techniques, which involve crop rotation, water management, and integrated pest management, reflect their deep ecological knowledge.

ii. Forest and Biodiversity Management:

a. Indigenous communities in Manipur possess extensive knowledge about local plant and animal species, including medicinal plants, edible roots, and animals. This knowledge is crucial for their survival and health, and it is embedded in daily practices such as hunting, gathering, and herbal medicine.

b. Sacred groves, a form of forest conservation, are a key aspect of the traditional knowledge systems of indigenous groups like

the Meitei. These groves are protected by religious taboos, and their conservation ensures the survival of biodiversity and the preservation of ecological balance. They serve as living museums of traditional ecological knowledge and are considered sacred spaces for the community.

iii. Ecological and Weather Patterns

a. Indigenous communities are adept at reading ecological indicators, such as the behaviour of plants, animals, and weather patterns, to guide their agricultural cycles and decision-making. For example, the blooming of certain flowers or the migration of birds can signal the arrival of specific seasons, guiding planting and harvesting times. This knowledge is deeply integrated into their lives and passed on to younger generations through storytelling and practice.

2.3 Cultural and Spiritual Connections to Land

For indigenous communities in Manipur, land is not merely a physical space for habitation or resource extraction; it is a central component of their identity, spirituality, and cultural practices. The sacred relationship with land is often expressed through rituals, stories, and traditions that reinforce the community's role as stewards of the environment.

i. Sacred Land and Sacred Groves:

Indigenous communities, especially the Meitei, view certain areas of land, such as forests and groves, as sacred. Sacred groves are spaces where no cutting, hunting, or gathering is allowed, as they are considered the homes of spirits or deities. These spaces are a key feature of religious practices, and they play a vital role in conserving biodiversity. The Meitei's devotion to sacred sites is a form of environmental stewardship that has preserved unique ecosystems for centuries.

ii. **Land as Ancestral Heritage:** For the Naga and Kuki peoples, land is not just a physical entity; it is a connection to their ancestors. The land is considered to have been passed down through generations, and there is

a strong belief that the spirits of ancestors inhabit the land. Respecting and maintaining the land is seen as a way of honouring ancestors and ensuring the continued well-being of the community. In the Naga tradition, land is often linked to specific clans or villages, with sacred rituals and ceremonies held to honour the spirits of the land. These rituals ensure that the land remains fertile and that the balance between human and nature is maintained.

iii. **Rituals and Festivals:** Cultural and spiritual connections to land are expressed through various festivals and rituals. For the Meitei, the Lai Haraoba festival, February and May or June, every year celebrates the connection between humans, nature, and the divine, with many rituals performed in forests and sacred groves. Similarly, the Chingkheirol festival (oral tradition of dance passed down verbally to women) emphasizes respect for the natural world, reinforcing the importance of living in harmony with the environment. For the Naga and Kuki, festivals like Naga New Year, 15th January of every year and Chavang Kut 1st November of every year celebrate the harvest, marking a time when the community gives thanks to the spirits of the land for a bountiful season. These festivals are a manifestation of the belief that the land is a living, sacred entity deserving of respect and care.

iv. **Land as a Source of Identity:** Land serves as a foundation of identity for indigenous groups in Manipur. Their relationship with the land defines not only their cultural practices but also their worldview. For example, the Naga's identity is intertwined with the forest, and their customs and values are tied to their understanding of land as a living, sacred resource. The loss of land, often due to government policies or outside encroachment, is seen as a loss of identity and cultural integrity. This has been a source of tension; especially as large-scale development projects encroach on indigenous lands.

3. Land Tenure and Rights in Manipur: A Historical Perspective

3.1 Customary Land Rights and Tenure Systems

Customary land rights and tenure systems among indigenous communities in Manipur have evolved over centuries. These systems are deeply rooted in the traditions, cultures, and spiritual beliefs of the people, and they vary across different groups such as the Meitei, Naga, and Kuki peoples. These traditional systems often involve communal ownership, with land being passed down through generations according to customary laws.

i. **Communal Land Ownership:** Among many indigenous groups in Manipur, particularly the Naga and Kuki, land is generally owned communally, rather than individually. The concept of land as a shared resource is foundational to their societies, where individual claims are subordinate to the collective needs of the community. This system is reflected in practices like shifting cultivation (jhum), where land is cleared and used for a season, after which it is allowed to regenerate. In Naga society, land tenure is often regulated by clan-based or village-based councils, where the land is divided into territories controlled by specific clans. Land management decisions are made collectively, and disputes are settled by community leaders or elders. For the Meitei, the traditional system has been more structured, with landholdings tied to local village governance systems. The Meitei practice wet rice cultivation in the fertile valleys of Manipur, where irrigation systems and water rights are regulated through customary laws. The Meitei's connection to their land is both agricultural and spiritual, with sacred groves and riverbanks being key areas of protection under customary rules.

ii. **Customary Rights in Forests:** Indigenous communities in Manipur, including the Meitei, Naga, and Kuki, have traditionally exercised customary rights over forests, utilizing them for a variety of purposes including

gathering Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), hunting, and foraging for medicinal plants. Sacred groves in forests are also protected through these customary rights, which are deeply intertwined with the community's spiritual and cultural practices.

iii. **Land Use and Stewardship:** The indigenous systems of land use, particularly the shifting cultivation of the Naga and Kuki and wet rice cultivation of the Meitei, are designed to maintain ecological balance and sustainability. Land stewardship is viewed as a communal responsibility, with resources being carefully managed according to local customs and ecological knowledge. These customary systems are also marked by a profound respect for the forest, where certain areas are off-limits for exploitation or cutting, ensuring the long-term health of the ecosystem.

3.2 Historical Context of Forest and Land Conflicts

The historical context of land and forest conflicts in Manipur is marked by a long history of disputes over land ownership, resource use, and environmental conservation. These conflicts have shaped the relationship between the indigenous communities and the state, often leading to tensions over land rights, environmental degradation, and displacement.

i. **Colonial Legacy and Land Dispossession:** The British colonial administration introduced policies that undermined indigenous control over their lands. The imposition of land revenue systems and forest regulations led to widespread land alienation, especially among indigenous groups practicing shifting cultivation or other non-intensive farming practices. The colonial state's focus on economic exploitation often disregarded indigenous knowledge systems and land-use practices, leading to the breakdown of traditional land tenure systems.

ii. **Post-Independence Land Conflicts:** After independence, the central government's focus on large-scale development projects, including the construction of dams and the

expansion of agriculture, often led to the displacement of indigenous communities. These communities were pushed off their ancestral lands without compensation or resettlement, leading to long-standing grievances and resistance movements. The government's failure to recognize indigenous land rights in these reforms exacerbated tensions, particularly as land conflicts became a focal point for broader demands for political autonomy and self-determination.

iii. Forest and Conservation Conflicts: The establishment of protected areas, such as wildlife sanctuaries and national parks, has been a source of significant conflict in Manipur. While the state prioritized conservation, many indigenous communities, such as the Meitei, Naga, and Kuki, have been excluded from these areas, despite having lived there for generations. Forest conservation policies, particularly the imposition of restrictions on forest resource use, have severely impacted indigenous livelihoods, as these communities rely on forests for sustenance and cultural practices. Moreover, the displacement of indigenous communities from their lands for conservation purposes has often led to social and economic marginalization.

iv. Land Ownership Disputes: Legal battles over land ownership and the recognition of indigenous rights have resulted in prolonged conflicts. The issue of who has rightful ownership over ancestral land remains contentious, with indigenous groups often pitted against commercial interests or state policies that prioritize development and resource extraction over indigenous land rights. The historical marginalization of indigenous land rights has led to a rise in local resistance movements, with communities demanding recognition and protection of their ancestral lands.

4. Forest Conservation Policies and Legal Frameworks in Manipur, India

India has implemented several Manipur state-led conservation initiatives over the years to

preserve its forests and biodiversity. These initiatives are designed to address the environmental crisis while also balancing economic growth and development. They are as follows:

i. The Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) of 1972: is a key piece of legislation in India aimed at the protection of wildlife and their habitats. It provides a framework for the establishment of protected areas such as national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and conservation reserves while also regulating hunting, trade, and the management of wildlife. This Act seeks to Conserve wildlife and prevent the hunting or poaching of endangered species, Regulate the trade in wildlife and wildlife products, Establish and manage protected areas such as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, promote wildlife conservation by designating protected areas and creating laws to regulate human activities that might harm wildlife.

ii. The Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980: The Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980 was a landmark piece of legislation designed to regulate the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes. It provides the legal framework for forest conservation in India and plays a key role in managing forest resources. The primary aim is to prevent indiscriminate deforestation and degradation of forest lands. It mandates that any diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes, such as industrial or infrastructural development, must be approved by the central government. The act makes it mandatory for state governments to obtain prior approval from the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change (MoEF & CC) before allowing the use of forest land for non-forestry purposes. The Act allows the government to establish forest reserves and manage these areas for conservation purposes. It also lays down penalties for illegal activities, such as encroachment, poaching, and deforestation.

iii. National Forest Policy (1988): The National Forest Policy (1988) aims to ensure that India's forest resources are utilized for ecological stability and sustainable

development. The policy emphasizes the need for maintaining ecological balance, conserving biodiversity, and providing social benefits to local communities. It highlights the importance of community involvement in forest management, recognizing the role of local communities, including indigenous groups, in conserving forests.

iv. Joint Forest Management (JFM), 1990:

Joint Forest Management (JFM), 1990 is a participatory approach that encourages collaboration between local communities and the government to manage forests. Through JFM, local communities are given responsibility for the conservation and sustainable use of forest resources. In exchange, they receive a share of the forest products and benefits from the forest. Although the JFM model has seen varying levels of success across India, it has been implemented in some areas of Manipur to engage indigenous communities in forest management.

v. The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:

The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, also known as the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, was a significant piece of legislation aimed at recognizing and securing the rights of indigenous communities and other traditional forest dwellers in India over forest land and resources. The FRA was introduced to address the historical injustices faced by these communities, particularly in relation to forest conservation laws that displaced them from their ancestral lands without compensating them or recognizing their rights. The Forest Rights Act, 2006, was enacted with the primary aim of ensuring social justice for forest-dwelling communities and integrating their roles in forest management.

vi. The Manipur Forest Rules, 2021:

The Manipur Forest Rules, 2021 serve as an important tool in enhancing forest governance, promoting sustainable use of forest resources, and involving local communities in forest conservation efforts. These rules are a significant step forward in addressing the

challenges of deforestation, biodiversity loss, and the socio-economic well-being of forest-dependent communities in Manipur.

vii. Afforestation and Reforestation Programs:

The Indian government has launched several afforestation and reforestation programs aimed at increasing forest cover, such as National Afforestation Programme (NAP), 2000, The Green India Mission, 2011 under the National Action Plan on Climate Change. These programs are focused on restoring degraded forests and expanding green cover across the country, including in the northeastern states like Manipur.

viii. Forest Biodiversity Conservation Programs:

Manipur State Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan or The State Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (SBSAP), 2008 for Manipur was developed to address the state's unique biodiversity challenges, including endemic species and habitat degradation. The plan was formulated as part of the nationwide effort to conserve biodiversity in India under the National Biodiversity Action Plan.

5. The Impact of Land Rights on Forest Conservation in Manipur

The relationship between land rights and forest conservation is crucial for achieving sustainable environmental practices, especially in regions where indigenous communities are closely tied to the land. The impact of land rights on forest conservation is multifaceted, involving both the recognition of indigenous land claims and the governance of natural resources. The impacts of Land Rights and Conservation in Manipur are as follows:

i. Legal Reforms:

Forest rights legislation such as, The Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) of 1972, The Forest Conservation Act (FCA), 1980, The Forest Rights Act, 2006, etc must be strengthened and effectively implemented to ensure that indigenous communities can secure legal ownership of their lands. This requires improved coordination between local authorities, forest departments, and indigenous

leaders to facilitate the recognition of land rights.

ii. Displacement and Compensation: Indigenous communities displaced by conservation policies or protected area creation should be provided with adequate compensation and resettlement options. Moreover, policies must consider the cultural significance of the land and ensure that communities can maintain their spiritual and cultural connections to the forest.

iii. Community Participation through Community-Based Resource Management (CBRM) in Manipur: Community-based resource management (CBRM) is an approach that recognizes the importance of local communities in managing natural resources in a sustainable manner. In Manipur, CBRM models could offer an ideal solution to balance conservation goals with the rights and needs of indigenous communities. By empowering indigenous communities to manage their forests and land, CBRM promotes sustainable development and biodiversity conservation.

iv. Co-Management of Forest Resources: Co-management models offer a promising solution to the conflict between conservation and land rights. In these models, local communities work alongside government agencies and NGOs to manage forest resources sustainably. Co-management allows for the integration of local knowledge into forest conservation strategies, while also ensuring that indigenous rights are respected. These models promote collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility for forest conservation, leading to better outcomes for both the environment and local communities.

v. Forest Conservation and Indigenous Communities: The Forest Conservation Act, 1980, and the Manipur Forest Act, 1988, have had significant impacts on indigenous communities, particularly regarding land rights and access to resources. Indigenous peoples often practice shifting cultivation (or Jhum farming), which involves rotating land use to maintain soil fertility. Despite its sustainability in many cases,

shifting cultivation is often seen by modern conservation policies as a threat to the environment due to deforestation and soil degradation concerns. Such policies frequently overlook the deep knowledge indigenous communities have developed over generations in managing their land and forests.

vi. Land Tenure on Forest Conservation Outcomes: Unclear land tenure often leads to unsustainable practices, as individuals and communities without secure land rights have little incentive to invest in long-term forest management. Conversely, clear land tenure gives communities a vested interest in protecting and regenerating their forests, as they are the primary beneficiaries of forest resources and ecosystem services. Research shows that communities with secure land rights are more likely to invest in sustainable land management practices, reduce deforestation, and improve biodiversity.

vii. Deforestation and Land Use Changes: Deforestation in Manipur is driven by a variety of factors, including illegal logging, land conversion for agriculture, and encroachment into protected areas. However, the impact of land rights on forest conservation is also significant. When indigenous communities' land rights are not recognized or are insecure, they are less likely to invest in sustainable land practices. This can lead to unsustainable land use and forest degradation.

viii. Strengthening Forest Conservation through Secure Land Rights: Secure land tenure enables local communities to effectively manage and conserve forest resources. When communities have legal ownership or recognized rights over their land, they are more likely to protect their forests as they have a direct stake in the long-term health of the ecosystem. Indigenous communities, who often have strong cultural and spiritual ties to the land, are more likely to practice sustainable land use and forest management methods, ensuring that their environmental practices align with conservation goals. Secure land rights create a foundation for community-

based conservation programs, where local knowledge is incorporated into forest management decisions.

ix. Integration of Indigenous Knowledge:

Conservation policies should recognize and incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) into forest management strategies. Indigenous practices such as shifting cultivation, sacred groves, and community-based forest management contribute to the health and biodiversity of forests. Collaborative approaches that combine scientific knowledge and local wisdom can help create more effective and culturally sensitive conservation programs.

x. Sustainable Conservation: Indigenous communities have long practiced sustainable resource management, including forest regeneration and soil conservation techniques. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) has also proven to be effective in conserving biodiversity while maintaining ecosystem health. However, modern conservation policies often focus on the protection of ecosystems through exclusionary practices, ignoring the vital role indigenous peoples play in sustainable management. The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, the Manipur Forest Act, 1980 and all the other acts or rules or policies relating to forest conservation and indigenous rights must therefore be reformed to better recognize the land tenure and resource rights of indigenous communities. Policies must integrate traditional knowledge with scientific conservation strategies, ensuring that indigenous rights are respected while still protecting biodiversity.

6. Challenges and Opportunities for Indigenous Rights and Forest Conservation in Manipur

Challenges

1. Conflicting Policies: Conservation policies often ignore indigenous land rights, which creates conflicts over resource use and land access.

2. Land Dispossession: The establishment of protected areas can lead to the

displacement of indigenous peoples, severing their spiritual and cultural connections to their ancestral land.

3. Legal and Bureaucratic Hurdles:

Indigenous communities in Manipur face challenges in securing legal recognition for their land rights under the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 1980, due to bureaucratic delays and lack of awareness.

4. Exclusion from Decision-Making:

Indigenous communities are often excluded from conservation policymaking, leading to conservation strategies that do not reflect local realities or needs.

Opportunities:

1. Recognition of Land Rights: The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, when fully implemented, has the potential to secure indigenous land rights and empower communities to manage their forests sustainably.

2. Co-Management Models: Collaborative management of forests and protected areas can create a more inclusive and effective conservation approach.

3. Integration of Indigenous Knowledge: Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) can be integrated into modern conservation science to improve outcomes for both biodiversity and local communities.

4. Community-Led Initiatives: Indigenous groups in Manipur have successfully managed forests and natural resources using traditional methods. By scaling up Community-Based Resource Management (CBRM), these efforts can be expanded to achieve larger conservation goals.

7. Policy Recommendations for Balancing Land Rights and Forest Conservation

1. Reforming land tenure systems to recognize indigenous land rights is essential for sustainable conservation. Policies should prioritize the legal recognition of indigenous land claims and ensure that local communities have control over their traditional lands.

2. Integration of indigenous knowledge into conservation strategies can improve forest management practices and enhance the resilience of forest ecosystems.

3. Strengthening community participation in forest governance and decision-making processes is crucial for ensuring that both conservation and land rights are respected.

8. Conclusion

The study of indigenous rights and environmental conservation in Manipur reveals a complex intersection between traditional land rights, environmental policies, and conservation goals. The impact of land rights on forest conservation is significant, with secure land tenure playing a key role in ensuring that forests are managed sustainably. Indigenous land rights and traditional knowledge are essential for achieving biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management. To create effective conservation policies, it is essential to recognize indigenous rights and integrate community-based resource management models that reflect the holistic relationship between people and the environment. The integration of community-based resource management (CBRM) and co-management models offers a viable path for balancing the need for forest conservation with the protection of land rights, leading to mutually beneficial outcomes for both people and nature. Indigenous rights, forest conservation, and land rights are deeply intertwined in the context of Manipur. To ensure sustainable conservation, inclusive governance, and the empowerment of indigenous communities, it is essential to recognize indigenous knowledge and incorporate it into conservation policies. Ultimately, respecting indigenous rights and sustainable land management will contribute to the long-term preservation of both the natural environment and the cultural heritage of Manipur's indigenous communities.

However, modern conservation efforts that fail to recognize indigenous land tenure and traditional knowledge can exacerbate conflicts

and lead to displacement and cultural erosion. Therefore, it is crucial for future conservation policies to respect indigenous sovereignty, integrate traditional ecological knowledge, and promote inclusive governance that allows indigenous communities to continue their role as guardians of the land.

In conclusion, Manipur's approach to forest conservation must move towards a more inclusive and participatory model, where the rights of indigenous peoples are respected, their knowledge is valued, and they are empowered to be active participants in conservation decision-making. By ensuring equity, recognizing traditional land rights, and fostering collaboration, forest conservation in Manipur can be both environmentally sustainable and socially just. This approach can serve as a model for other regions where indigenous rights and environmental conservation intersect and enable our environment greener and healthier.

Reference

1. Baviskar, A. (1995). *In the Belly of the River: Tribal Conflicts over Development in the Narmada Valley*. Oxford University Press.
2. Chakrabarti, M., & Chakrabarti, S. (2009). *Shifting Cultivation and Conservation of Biodiversity in Northeast India: An Overview*. *Indian Journal of Biodiversity*, 10(1), 12-22.
3. Ghosh, A., & Ghosh, P. (2013). *Impact of Forest Rights Act on Tribal Communities and Forest Conservation in India*. *Environmental Policy and Law*, 43(6), 394-400.
4. Kohli, A. (2010). *State and Local Environmental Politics in India: A Case Study of Forest Conservation and Indigenous Rights*. *Environmental Politics*, 19(3), 425-444.
5. Mishra, P. (2015). *The Forest Rights Act and Its Impact on Indigenous Peoples in India*. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 50(16), 14-17.
6. Mukul, S., & Roy, D. (2021). *Indigenous Rights and Environmental Policies in India: A Historical Perspective*. *Indian Journal of Environmental Politics*, 6(2), 42-60.

7. Negi, S., & Tiwari, A. (2017). *Forest Management and Indigenous Knowledge in Northeast India: A Study of Community Forest Resources*. Indian Journal of Forestry, 40(5), 42-48.
8. Roy, A. (2012). *Conservation and Conflict: Protected Areas and Indigenous Rights in India*. The Geographical Journal, 178(3), 247-260.
9. Sarma, P. (2016). *Land Use and Shifting Cultivation: The Role of Indigenous Communities in Sustainable Forest Management in Manipur*. Journal of Tribal Studies, 22(3), 111-120.
10. The Forest Rights Act, 2006. Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India.
11. The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change, Government of India.
12. UNDP (2017). *Indigenous Peoples and Conservation: Recognizing the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Global Conservation Efforts*. United Nations Development Programme.
13. World Bank (2007). *Indigenous Peoples and Forests: Forest Rights and Conservation in India*. The World Bank Report.
14. WWF India (2014). *Living with Wildlife: Managing Conservation and Indigenous Rights in Protected Areas in India*. World Wide Fund for Nature India.
15. Yumnam, B. (2018). *Forest Conservation and Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Manipur: A Local Perspective*. Journal of Northeast Indian Studies, 4(2), 67-79.