UNIQUENESS OF THE MATRILINEAL SYSTEM AMIDST THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURE AND CUSTOMS OF THREE MAJOR TRIBES IN MEGHALAYA: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

Jharendra Bishwakarma, PhD Candidate, *Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth*
Ranjith Kingston Gladstone, PhD, *Assistant Professor, Spicer Adventist University*

Abstract

This research explores the unique matrilineal practices of Meghalaya, India, home to the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintiya tribes, known for their matrilineal culture where inheritance and family titles are passed through the maternal line. This study aims to document and analyze these practices to understand their role in female empowerment and their implications for social, political, and economic domains. Key research questions include the uniqueness of matrilineal practices, their interplay with cultural diversity and comparisons with the major tribes of Meghalaya. Meghalayan matrilineal systems are distinguished by their flexibility and robustness, promoting social cohesion and economic stability by retaining property within the maternal lineage and enhancing family wealth. These systems afford women significant social standing and control over family and community affairs, challenging traditional gender roles and power dynamics. They shape social structures, influence marriage customs, and kinship networks, and foster community cohesion through matrilocality, which strengthens extended family bonds and maternal ties. However, contemporary socio-economic changes pose challenges to maintaining these cultural traditions. Despite these pressures, Meghalayan matrilineal societies continue to offer valuable insights into social structures, women's roles, and inheritance systems within indigenous communities. This study contributes to sociological theories on gender roles and family structures, highlighting the adaptability and diversity of kinship systems across different cultural contexts. Policy recommendations include funding for community-led projects, integrating indigenous knowledge systems in education, and safeguarding matrilineal inheritance rights. Empowering women within this framework is crucial for enhancing broader social structures and community cohesiveness. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies, comparative analyses, policy advocacy, and interdisciplinary approaches to further understand and support these matrilineal societies. By examining the matrilineal practices in Meghalaya, this research provides important insights that could inform policies aimed at advancing women's rights and gender equality in other regions of India and beyond.

***Keywords*:** Matrilineal System, Meghalaya, Culture, Customs, Sociology, Khasi, Garo, Jaintia

Introduction

Background and Overview of Meghalaya and its cultural diversity

Meghalaya, often called the "abode of the clouds" hosts nature's beauty. The easygoing nature of people, the beautifully crafted waterfalls and slops by Mother Nature, the sunset views, and the frequent rainfall make this state a go-to place for tourists around the world. The CEIC data (n.d.) noted that 9,37,100 individuals visited the state. The state remains among the hot spots that can be expected to be targeted by quite lightly funded pockets too. The state is well known for the Steel Bridge at Cherrapunji, the Tekken Falls at Cherrapunji, the Golf Course, the Spread-Eagle Fall, the Wards Lake, the Butterfly Museum, the Elephant Falls, and the Lady Hydari Park at Shillong.

The state of Meghalaya with a geographical area of 22,429 sq. km joined the Indian Union in 1972. Department of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya. (n.d.) reports that the State hosts a population of about 38 lakhs and a forest cover of about 76%. The state has over 6,500 villages and is bordered by Assam in the north and Bangladesh in the south. Meghalaya to its belt is home to two national parks and five wild life sanctuaries.

Meghalaya is home to The Khasi, Garo, and Jaintiya tribes and they are among the many aboriginal groups that call the state home. Additionally, Meghalayan culture is deeply associated with nature, and it is known to be one of the world's most matrilineal communities.

Introduction to the concept of matrilineal systems

Matrilineal systems are significantly less common than patrilineal one's while being the exact opposite of the former in that they place more emphasis on the mother than the father in determining a child's ancestry and inheritance rights. Matrilineal civilizations allow women to be powerful members of the family and clan, and women inherit property and titles through their families. Sanday (2002) expressed matrilineal systems as another type of social and family structure that gives women a significant role in the upbringing of their families and communities. These systems are found all over the world, from the Minangkabau people of Indonesia to the Akan people of Ghana and several First Nation peoples in North America. They serve as examples of diverse cultural environments where matrilineality is the norm (Schneider & Gough, 1961).

Thus, from a sociological perspective, the effects of matrilineal systems are extensive, influencing social connections in general, the inheritance system, and the responsibilities that women are assigned. Nongbri (2003) notes that although there is clear male dominance over females in many facets of Khasi social life, particularly in marriage and divorce, in Meghalaya, a state in northeastern India, the matrilineal structure supports females and gives them considerable freedom to manage their own and their families' affairs. This system affects not just family relationships but also social relationships and even the institutions that comprise entire towns.

According to Béteille (2002), a thorough examination of matrilineal civilizations clarifies many of the tenets of traditional sociological theories, which by default draw

comparisons and contrasts between patrilineal and patriarchal systems. Nonetheless, the placement of matriliny offers sociologists a further highly societal kind of adaptable and varied human organization.

Research Problem

Importance of studying the matrilineal system in Meghalaya

Studying the matrilineal system in Meghalaya is crucial for several reasons, mainly becauseofitsdistinctsocioculturalandeconomicramificationsamongthevariousethnicpeople in the area. The largely matrilineal lifestyles of the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes provide a striking contrast to the patriarchal standards that permeate most of India. Nongbri (2003) emphasizes that knowledge of these matrilineal systems offers important perspectives on gender roles, inheritance customs, and alternate types of social structure.

This understanding can challenge and expand sociological theories that often generalize based on patrilineal frameworks. Furthermore, analyzing these systems considering Meghalaya's great cultural diversity can help understand how regional traditions and customs adjust to and become part of larger socio-economic trends.

Furthermore, Studying Meghalaya's matrilineal system also has important ramifications for gender studies and policy making. Bereh (1997) writes in Meghalaya, matrilineal customs have been associated with greater degrees of female empowerment and autonomy in the social, political, and economic domains. By documenting and analyzing these practices, Researchers can offer important information, which could help shape policies intended to advance women's rights and gender equality in other regions of India and else where. Sangma (1981) asserts that the adaptability and endurance of matrilineal systems in the face of modernization stresses highlight the value of conserving and gaining knowledge from these cultural legacies. Such studies not only add to the knowledge in academia but also support indigenous communities' empowerment and cultural preservation.

Gaps in Existing Research

Despite the extensive documentation and analysis of matrilineal systems, there are still large study gaps in our understanding of the distinct dynamics of matrilineal systems in the context of the cultural and customary variety of Meghalaya both internationally and within individual Indian communities. While the fundamentals of matrilineal practices among the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes have been well-studied (Nongbri,2003; Bareh, 1997), there is a notable lack of comparative research among these distinct groups within the same region. The research that already exists tends to examine these tribes in isolation, ignoring how they interact and are influenced by one another, as well as how this adds to the distinctiveness of their matrilineal systems. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on the present issues and changes these systems encounter because of modernization and globalization. Further research is needed to fully understand how gender, the economy, and policy connect within these matrilineal frame works. A lack of comprehensive research exists

about the effects of economic shifts, educational progress, and legislative reforms on gender dynamics and matrilineal structures, even though certain studies discuss women's empowerment and social standing in matrilineal communities (Sangma, 1981). The extent to which non-indigenous influences and state actions shape or undermine traditional matrilineal traditions remains little studied. By addressing these gaps using a sociological perspective, it may be possible to gain a more thorough understanding of the adaptability and resilience of Meghalaya's matrilineal systems, which could have significant implications for gender studies and cultural preservation in a world that is changing quickly.

Objectives

1. To explore the uniqueness of the matrilineal system in Meghalaya.
2. To analyze the interplay between matrilineal practices and the diverse cultures and customs of the region.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Sociological Theory

This research makes a substantial contribution to sociological theory by scrutinizing and extending existing frame works that mostly concentrate on patriarchal and patrilineal systems. By examining the matrilineal systems in Meghalaya, this study highlights the diversity of family structures and inheritance practices, offering a different perspective on the frequently universalized conceptions of kinship and family. Demonstrating how matrilineal civilizations function and flourish in the face of cultural variety enhances the conversation about gender roles and power relations within families.

Additionally, this study offers fresh theoretical viewpoints on how social systems adapt and endure, especially when it comes to the ways that customs endure and change in the face of globalization and modernity. By incorporating the unique sociocultural context of Meghalaya, this study contributes to the wider sociological discussions on gender, kinship, and cultural diversity by providing an alternative perspective of social organization by considering the distinct sociocultural setting of Meghalaya.

Practical implications for understanding gender roles and family structures in Meghalaya

Practically, this research provides valuable insights into the gender roles and family structures in Meghalaya, while emphasizing how matrilineal customs affect social and economic dynamics. Understanding the distinct roles women play in Meghalaya can benefit Policies and initiatives aiming at advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. It can also serve as a roadmap for facilitating the development of culturally sensitive interventions that promote socioeconomic advancement and traditional practice preservation. Furthermore, this study can help government officials and social workers solve issues that matrilineal societies face, such as legal recognition of inheritance rights and the impact of external socio-economic changes.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Structural Functionalism

According to structural functionalism, society is a complex system whose elements cooperate to uphold stability and social order. From this angle, the Meghalaya matrilineal system can be viewed as a social framework that helps keep tribal groups stable and functional. Matrilineal societies rely on women to fulfill specific duties and obligations that guarantee the continuation of lineage and inheritance, which are essential for preserving social cohesiveness. According to Talcott Parsons' theory, family structures—including matrilineal ones—serve crucial purposes such as helping children develop social skills, fostering economic cooperation, and providing emotional support (Parsons,1951). Meghalaya's matrilineal system supports these roles by maintaining social balance despite the region's variety through unique cultural customs.

Symbolic Interactionism

The meanings and symbols that people construct and employ in their daily interactions are the main subjects of symbolic interactionism. Understanding the subtle cultural differences and unique experiences inside Meghalaya's matrilineal cultures becomes easier with the help of this theory. It highlights how social roles and identities are created and maintained via day-to-day interactions and the application of symbols like inherited practices and family names (Blumer, 1969). In the context of Meghalaya, Symbolic interactionism can investigate how women understand and perform their responsibilities within the matrilineal framework as well as how other community members comprehend and support these roles.

Feminist Theory

Feminist Theory examines how social structures challenge and support gender inequality. It provides an analytical framework for examining Meghalaya's matrilineal system, especially in terms of how it impacts gender relations and women's empowerment. In contrast to patriarchal structures, matrilineal civilizations often provide women considerable authority over assets and decision-making (Nongbri, 2003). In this context, Feminist theory sheds light on how matrilineal practices contribute to gender equity as well as the limitations and challenges faced by women.

Social Exchange Theory

Meghalaya's matrilineal system can also be understood through the lens of Social Exchange Theory, which sees social relationships as exchanges in which people try to maximize advantages and minimize costs. This theory plays a crucial role in analyzing how kinship networks and matrilineal inheritance affect social and economic exchanges in these communities. The allocation of property and resources along the female line, for instance,

may impact social obligations, alliances, and marriage patterns, illuminating how social and economic incentives shape familial and community interactions (Blau,1964).

Cultural Ecology

The study of cultural ecology looks at how social institutions and cultural practices adjust to their surroundings. Understanding how Meghalaya's matrilineal systems have changed in response to the physical and ecological environment of the area is made easier with the help of this theory. It investigates the relationship between cultural norms—like matrilineal inheritance—and the natural world, offering insights into how these norms support groups in managing resources and sustaining their way of life in a diverse and often challenging landscape (Steward, 1955). By integrating these sociological theories, the research can offer a thorough understanding of the distinctiveness of the matrilineal system in Meghalaya.

Matrilineal Systems Globally

A comparative examination of matrilineal systems in various cultures reveals notable differences as well as similarities that shed light on the various ways that different society's structure kinship, inheritance, and social roles. For example, the Minangkabau people of Indonesia, the Akan people of Ghana, and the Khasi people of India all display distinctive matrilineal customs specific to their cultural environments. Minangkabau practice- "adat" is a body of customary law that emphasizes marital inheritance and female leadership in the household, thus ensuring that property remains within the maternal line (Sabbath, 2002). Similar to this, the Akan people of Ghana place a high value on matrilineal descent when it comes to inheritance and succession planning. Mothers are the primary source of ancestry for these people, and women frequently hold important positions of social and economic influence in their communities (Schwimmer,1990).The Khasi tribe of Meghalaya, in contrast, combines matrilineal inheritance with a system where the family property is inherited by the youngest daughter (Nongbri, 2003). This highlights the role that women play in preserving social stability and familial continuity (see Table 1).

Table 1

Culture and Key Features

Culture	Key Features
Minangkabau (Indonesia)	-"Adat" customary law emphasizing marital inheritance and female leadership in the household - Property remains within the maternal line
Akan (Ghana)	- High value on matrilineal descent for inheritance and succession planning - Mothers as the primary source of ancestry - Women hold important social and economic positions in communities

Khasi (India)	- Matrilineal inheritance combined with the youngest daughter inheriting family property - Role of women in preserving social stability and familial continuity

Notwithstanding these variations, recurring patterns show how flexible and robust matrilineal systems are. Matrilineal practices can improve social cohesion and economic stability in all three cultures by ensuring that property and resources stay in the maternal lineage and consolidating family wealth. Furthermore, these systems frequently give women more social standing and significant control over family and community affairs, which is in direct contrast to the patriarchal norms prominent in many other societies. According to Schneider and Gough (1961), matrilineal systems put women at the center of social and economic life, which challenges traditional notions of gender roles and power dynamics. This comparative analysis emphasizes how matrilineal systems can take on diverse forms while emphasizing how they all share the ability to promote gender equity and social organization in a variety of cultural contexts.

Matrilineal System in Meghalaya

The historical background and development of matrilineal systems in Meghalaya are deeply linked with the region's indigenous tribes, especially the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia communities. Historically, these tribes have long been known for their Matriliny, or the practice of tracing ancestry and inheritance via the mother line. This system has been essential to their social structure for many years. One of the major matrilineal groups, the Khasi tribe, has long upheld a societal structure in which property and family names are passed down through the female line, guaranteeing that women play a central role in both familial and community affairs, according to Bareh (1997).

The origins of these practices can be traced back to ancient times, where they were likely influenced by the need for stable land tenure and social cohesion in a pre-dominantly agrarian society. According to Sangma (1981), the Garo and Jaintia tribes also created matrilineal customs that were tailored to their particular economic and environmental circumstances. These customs served to maintain social continuity and stability in the face of outside influences and historical shifts. These matrilineal systems have proven remarkably resilient over time, adjusting to the demands of globalization and modernization while retaining their core cultural values and practices (Nongbri, 2003).

The Khasi tribe is primarily matrilineal, meaning that inheritance and lineage flow through the mother's side of the family (Nongbri, 2003). In Khasi society, the youngest daughter, referred to as the "kakhadduh" or "kakhadduhshi," usually inherits family names and property. This practice gives women a great deal of economic and social power and emphasizes their pivotal role in family and community affairs (Bareh, 1997). Marriage customs among the Khasis often involve a matrilocal residence pattern, where the husband moves into the wife's household, contributing to the continuity of matrilineal ties (Sangma, 1981).

Matrilineality, in which descent and inheritance are traced via the mother's lineage, is another cultural practice of the Garo tribe (Roy, 1993). Women have a significant influence

on family and community decision-making processes in Garo society, where the youngest daughter inherits ancestral property (Karotemprel, 1982). Though there are variations depending on local customs and preferences, Garo marriage customs typically involve a patrilocal residence pattern in which the wife moves to live with the husband's family (Sangma, 1981).

Like the Khasis and Garos, the Jaintia tribe is matrilineal, with inheritance passing through the maternal line (Roy, 1993). Women are essential to maintaining cultural traditions and customs in Jaintia society, as well as playing important roles in managing family affairs (Karotemprel, 1982; see Figure 1). Rituals and ceremonies that highlight the continuation of matrilineal ties and community solidarity are common components of Jaintia marriage customs (Bareh, 1997).

Although all three tribes follow matrilineal customs, there are differences in inheritance laws, family structures, and marriage customs that are a reflection of their distinct cultural backgrounds and surrounding circumstances. Comprehending these disparities is imperative to grasp the complex dynamics of matrilineal systems in Meghalaya, as well as their wider consequences for social structure and cultural identity.

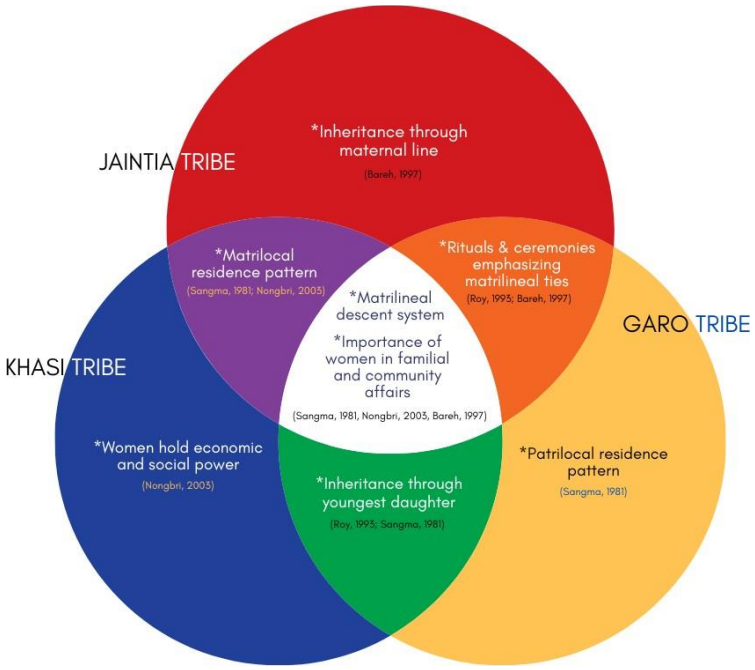

Figure 1: Significance of Matrilineal System across Three Major Tribes of Meghalaya

Diversity in Culture and Customs

The Khasi's yearly Nongkrem Dance festival, which honors the local deity U Lei Shyl-long and celebrates successful harvest, is one of their distinctive cultural customs. Invoking blessings and prosperity, the festival features traditional clothing adorned with silver ornaments and headdresses, as well as rhythmic dances performed to the sounds of

drums and the tangmuri, a type offlute (Sangma, 1981). The ShadSukMynsiem festival, which heralds the start of the planting season and involves rites to thank the gods for a bountiful harvest and to ask for blessings for upcoming crops, is another ritual practiced by the Khasis.

The Garo tribe, known for their agrarian lifestyle, festivals, and rituals, are integral parts of their society. The Wangala Dance, a post-harvest celebration honoring Misi Saljong, the sun god, for granting a bountiful harvest, is one of their distinctive cultural practices. Bamboo flutes, drums, and gongs are some of the traditional musical instruments that accompany the lively dance's rhythmic motions (Karotemprel, 1982). Another important ceremonial dance, the Songsarek, is performed at festivals and community events to represent the Garo people's unity and sense of cultural pride. The Garo people have complex marriage customs that involve gift-giving and traditional clothing exchanges as a means of fostering close family and socialties.

The Jaintia tribe is primarily found in Meghalaya's eastern region. One of their distinctive cultural customs is the Behdeinkhlam festival, which is held to ask gods for blessings for a bountiful harvest and the well-being of the community. The ceremonial race of wooden poles, which represents cooperation and communal harmony, is the festival's main attraction (Bareh, 1997). The Jaintia people are renowned for their exquisite weaving and bamboo crafts, which showcase their exceptional artistry and reflect both their cultural legacy and means of subsistence.

The Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes have different cultural practices and customs despite having matrilineal systems in common. These traditions demonstrate how their social structures, histories, and environments, which form the foundation of their cultural identities, have allowed them to endure over time. Knowing these distinctive customs enables us to better appreciate Meghalaya's rich cultural diversity as well as the close ties that exist between the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes' traditions, spirituality, and sense of community.

Research Questions

What is the uniqueness of Matrilineal practices?

What is the interplay of Matrilineal Practices with Cultural Diversity

HowdoyoucomparematrilinealpracticeswiththemajortribeofMeghalaya?

Analysis and Discussion

Uniqueness of Matrilineal Practices

Inheritance and Property Rights

Meghalayan matrilineal customs, which trace ancestry through the female line, subvert traditional ideas about inheritance and property rights. Property is usually passed down from mother to daughter in the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes, guaranteeing continuity within the maternal lineage (Nongbri, 2003). Women benefit economically and socially from

this special inheritance system because they frequently have control over family assets and decisions about the use and management of land (Sangma, 1981). Unlike patrilineal systems prevalent in many societies, where male heirs traditionally inherit property, matrilineal practices in Meghalaya provide women with a foundational role in familial wealth distribution and resource allocation. Though women have a great deal of autonomy when it comes to property, the matrilineal system also raises concerns about gender equity and the way that contemporary legal frameworks regarding inheritance and property rights interact with cultural traditions.

Role of Women in the Family and Community

Meghalayan matrilineal societies place a high value on women's roles in the family and the community at large. According to Karatmpall (1982), matrilineal descent guarantees that women have significant roles in preserving cultural continuity and family lineage. They frequently participate in economic endeavors like business ventures and agriculture, acting as decision-makers in household affairs (Bareh, 1997). Furthermore, women are leaders in the community, participating in village councils, social rituals, and ceremonies that influence daily life in addition to leading in the home (Roy, 1993). By giving women social standing and influence, the matrilineal system empowers them and promotes an egalitarian and co-operative view of family and community dynamics. Gender norms and cultural expectations can also limit women's autonomy, especially when it comes to assuming roles outside of conventional domains. This underscores the intricate nature of gender dynamics in patrilineal societies.

Impact on Social Structures and Relationships

The social structures and relationships in Meghalaya's tribal communities are greatly influenced by matrilineal practices, which also shape marriage customs, kinship networks, and community cohesion. Marriage customs are influenced by the emphasis on female ancestry; matrilocality—in which husbands move into their wives' homes—is a common practice (Roy, 1993). According to Sanday (2002), this practice fosters social solidarity and mutual support by fortifying the bonds between extended family members and strengthening maternal ties. Furthermore, the matrilineal system encourages cooperative decision-making and shared responsibilities within families by promoting a balanced power dynamic between the sexes (Nongbri, 2003). However, the matrilineal system in Meghalaya faces difficulties in adjusting to contemporary pressures while maintaining cultural identity and community traditions because of socioeconomic changes and cultural shifts, including urbanization and educational advancements (Sangma, 1981). Comprehending these dynamics is imperative in evaluating the adaptability and durability of matrilineal societies in Meghalaya, as wellastheirwiderconsequencesforsocialtheoryandpolicyformulation.

In conclusion, Meghalaya's distinctive matrilineal customs provide a unique perspective for examining social structures, women's roles, and inheritance systems in indigenous com- munities. Through the examination of these three fundamental areas—property rights and inheritance, women's roles in the home and community, and effects on

social structures and relationships—this research advances our knowledge of how matrilineal traditions influence cultural identity and societal dynamics within a heterogeneous socio-cultural setting.

Interplay with Cultural Diversity

Influence of Cultural Practices on Matrilineal Customs

Meghalaya's matrilineal system is intricately entwined with the customs and practices of the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes, both influencing and being influenced by their distinct cultural environments. Matrilineal customs are reinforced and perpetuated in large part by cultural practices like rituals, ceremonies, and social norms (Bareh, 1997). For instance, the Khasi Nongkrem Dance Festival honors the importance of female ancestry and the role that women play in maintaining cultural identity in addition to celebrating the harvest (Sangma, 1981). Similar to this, the Wangala Dance and Songsarek rituals among the Garos signify the power of maternal bonds and communal unity in addition to celebrating agricultural prosperity (Karotemprel, 1982). Cultural practices play a crucial role in shaping the functioning of matrilineal systems, impacting gender roles, inheritance customs, and kinship structures in these communities.

Variations in Matrilineal Practices among Different Tribes

Although matrilineality is practiced by all three of the Meghalayan tribes, there are some noticeable differences in the ways that these customs are applied and understood. For example, inheritance usually goes to the youngest daughter among the Khasis, but it can go to the daughter or the sister's daughter among the Garos (Roy, 1993). The Jaintia tribe also demonstrates variances in their matrilineal customs, which are specific to their cultural context and reflect historical and geographical influences (Nongbri, 2003). These differences demonstrate how matrilineal systems are adaptive, changing over time in response to historical developments, environmental changes, and regional customs. Comprehending these subtleties is essential to recognizing the diversity among the indigenous communities of Meghalaya and to placing the intricate matrilineal customs of various tribal groups in context.

Integration and Coexistence of Matrilineal System with Other Cultural Norms

In Meghalaya, the matrilineal system coexists with other cultural practices and norms, exhibiting a dynamic integration within larger socio-cultural frameworks. Other cultural practices, such as patrilocal marriage customs and religious rituals, also have an impact on social dynamics, even though matrilineality shapes kinship relations and inheritance patterns (Sanday, 2002). For instance, although the Garos' matrilineal system dictates inheritance through the female line, patrilocality—where the husband relocates to live with the wife's family—is a common aspect of Garo marriage customs (Karotemprel, 1982). The way matrilineal customs are incorporated with other cultural norms highlights how adaptive and resilient Meghalayan Indigenous traditions are at navigating challenging social environments

without sacrificing their sense of cultural identity or communal cohesion.

To conclude, the interaction of Meghalaya's matrilineal systems with its diverse culture underlines the complex interplay among customs, adaptation, and collective identity. This research adds to a nuanced understanding of how matrilineal traditions evolve within diverse socio-cultural contexts, providing insights into the dynamic interactions that shape identity and social structures in Indigenous communities. These explorations focus on three key areas: the influence of cultural practices on matrilineal customs, variations in matrilineal practices among different tribes, and integration with other cultural norms.

Comparative Analysis

Differences and Similarities between the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia Tribes in Terms of Matrilineal Practices

Meghalaya's Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes all follow matrilineal traditions, but they all differ slightly from one another in ways that are specific to their own cultural backgrounds and geographic settings. The youngest daughter, or "kakhadduh," is usually the one to inherit from the Khasis, guaranteeing property and lineage within the maternal line (Nongbri, 2003). On the other hand, the Garos practice matrilocality, in which the husband moves in with the wife's family, and they may also pass an inheritance to the daughter or the sister's daughter (Karotemprel, 1982). Matrilineality is also practiced by the Jaintia tribe, who are distinguished from the Khasis and Garos by subtle differences in inheritance customs and cultural rituals (Roy, 1993). All three tribes emphasize the significance of maternal lineage in forming kinship networks, family structures, and community identities despite these distinctions. Matrilineal practices exhibit both continuity and variation in response to historical, social, and environmental influences, offering insights into the varied ways in whichculturaltraditionsadaptandevolvewithinMeghalaya'stribalsocieties.

Influence of External Factors (e g, Modernization, Globalization on the Matrilineal System

Meghalaya's matrilineal system is subject to external influences that affect sustainability and adaptability, including modernization, globalization, and socioeconomic shifts. Traditional livelihoods and cultural practices are coming under more and more pressure in Meghalaya as a result of economic development and urbanization (Nongbri, 2003). Younger generations are exposed to alternative lifestyles and value systems through the infusion of modern education, technology, and media, which may change their perceptions of traditional matrilineal practices (Sanday, 2002). In matrilineal societies, globalization also brings with it new consumer culture and economic opportunities that have the potential to alter gender roles and social hierarchies (Bareh, 1997). Furthermore, inheritance laws and property rights may be impacted by legal frameworks and policies that are influenced by national and international norms, which may have an impact on the application of matrilineal customs (Sangma, 1981). Matrilineal systems in Meghalaya display resilience in the face of these outside pressures, as communities work to balance cultural continuity with the realities of a changing global environment. This highlights the ability of indigenous traditions to adapt to new circumstances.

The comparative examination of matrilineal customs among the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes, inconclusion, highlights the diversity of Meghalaya's cultural landscape and provides insights into how customs change and adapt in various sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, analyzing how outside forces impact the matrilineal system offer sacritical view point on the dynamics of cultural continuity and change within Indigenous communities, adding to larger conversations about identity formation, heritage preservation, and socioeconomic development in an increasingly globalized world.

Implications and Conclusion

Theoretical Implications

Contribution to Sociological Theories on Family Structures and Gender Roles

Studying the matrilineal system in Meghalaya makes a substantial contribution to sociological theories about gender roles and family structures. By emphasizing ancestry and inheritance through the maternal line, matrilineal societies challenge conventional patriarchal norms and provide a distinctive viewpoint on kinship and familial structure (Nongbri, 2003). This study emphasizes women's roles as decision-makers and keepers of cultural heritage, highlighting how matrilineal practices shape gender dynamics within households and communities (Karotemprel, 1982). The study highlights the variety of gender roles and responsibilities that exist beyond the Western paradigms by examining the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes. This helps to provide a comprehensive understanding of how cultural traditions influence social structures (Roy, 1993).

Furthermore, Meghalaya's matrilineal system challenges conventional theories that primarily concentrate on patrilineal societies by providing insights into alternative models of family cohesion and societal organization. By highlighting the diversity and adaptability of kinship systems in various cultural contexts, this contribution broadens theoretical frameworks within sociology and enhances our understanding of gender relations and family dynamics worldwide.

Insights into the Adaptability and Resilience of Matrilineal Systems

Research on Meghalaya's matrilineal systems also sheds light on how resilient and adaptive Indigenous cultural practices are in the face of globalization and socioeconomic shifts. Matrilineal societies in Meghalaya show a remarkable ability to maintain essential cultural values while adjusting to modern realities, despite external pressures like modernization and legal reforms (Bareh, 1997). The study reveals how matrilineal traditions change over time, balancing established norms with new possibilities and challenges (Sangma, 1981). By examining factors such as urbanization, education, and media influences, the research illustrates how matrilineal systems maintain cultural continuity while responding to shifts in societal expectations and economic opportunities (Sanday, 2002). This adaptability underscores the dynamic nature of indigenous cultures and their ability to sustain traditional practices in a rapidly changing world, offering lessons for cultural preservation and community resilience (Nongbri,2003).

In conclusion, researching the matrilineal system in Meghalaya has theoretical

implications that go beyond comprehension of gender roles and family structures to include a broader understanding of cultural diversity, adaptability, and resilience. This research emphasizes the relevance of Indigenous knowledge systems in forming modern conceptions of kinship, gender, and community dynamics by showcasing their contributions to sociological theories and offering insights into the adaptability of matrilineal systems. ThesefindingshighlightthesignificanceofIndigenousperspectivesintheglobaldiscourseonsoci etalchange and continuity, and they contribute to ongoing discussions on cultural heritage preservation, social equity, and sustainable development.

Practical Implications

Policy Recommendations for Preserving Cultural Heritage

The study of Meghalaya's matrilineal system provides an important context for policy suggestions meant to protect cultural heritage. Policies that support the documentation, protection, and promotion of indigenous cultural traditions must be put into place as matrilineal practices face challenges from modernization and outside influences (Nongbri, 2003). Funding for community-led projects to preserve oral histories, traditional arts, and rituals that are essential to matrilineal societies should be included in government initiatives for cultural preservation (Karotemprel, 1982). Furthermore, indigenous knowledge systems should be included in educational curricula to ensure that the next generation of learners recognizes and values their cultural heritage (Sangma, 1981). Matrilineal inheritance rights should be acknowledged and safeguarded by legal frameworks, guaranteeing women in their communities' fair access to resources and property (Roy, 1993). Through the implementation of these policies, Meghalayan policymakers can foster social cohesion and cultural diversity, allthewhilesupportingtheresilienceandcontinuityofmatrilinealsystems.

Recommendations for Empowering Women within the Matrilineal Framework

Targeted interventions that strengthen women's economic, social, and political agency are necessary to empower them within the matrilineal framework. According to Bareh (1997), policies ought to give precedence to initiatives that facilitate women's leadership roles in community governance and decision-making processes. Women can be empowered to actively participate in local development initiatives utilizing leadership training, mentoring opportunities, and capacity-building programs (Sanday, 2002). Women can effectively con- tribute to household income and community development through economic empowerment initiatives like training in entrepreneurship and credit facilities (Nongbri, 2003). Expanding educational opportunities is also necessary to guarantee equal access for women and girls, promoting higher education and skill development that meet their goals, and advance society (Sangma,1981).

To sum up, the research on the matrilineal system in Meghalaya has practical implications that emphasize the significance of policy interventions that protect cultural heritage while empowering women in their communities. Policymakers can enhance social cohesion, encourage inclusive growth, and support the sustainable development of matrilineal societies in a world that is changing quickly by putting specific policies and recommendations into practice. By celebrating the rich cultural diversity that characterizes

Meghalaya's Indigenous communities and defending their rights and dignity, these initiatives ensure the resilience and vitality of these communities for the coming generations.

Conclusion

Summary of Key Findings

This research investigates Meghalaya's matrilineal system's uniqueness in the context of the region's varied cultural and customary practices. Several important conclusions are drawn after examining a variety of academic sources, such as sociological theories, anthropological studies, and regional analyses:

First of all, the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes in Meghalaya are known for their matrilineal systems, which are distinguished by unique inheritance customs in which property and ancestry are passed down through the maternal line. This system offers insights into alter- native gender roles and family structures, while also challenging the traditional patriarchal norms that are common in other parts of India (Nongbri,2003;Bareh,1997).

Second, matrilineality has a cultural significance in Meghalaya that goes beyond family dynamics to affect larger social structures and cohesiveness within the community. Matrilineal traditions are essential to the construction of identities, to cultural practices like ceremonies and rituals, and to the governance of communities. They demonstrate a robust response to past and present transformations (Karotemprel,1982; Sangma,1981).

Thirdly, the study emphasizes how flexible matrilineal systems can be to external influences like globalization and modernization. Matrilineal societies in Meghalaya show that they can incorporate new elements while maintaining essential cultural values, despite the challenges these influences pose to traditional practices (Sanday,2002; Roy,1993).

Reflection on the Significance of the Matrilineal System in Meghalaya

Meghalaya'smatrilinealsystemisextremelyimportantonalocalandinternationallevel.Withinindigenous communities, it acts as a cultural anchor that shapes gender relations, family structures, and social norms. These societies preserve women's roles as tradition keepers and decision-makers in the home by tracing lineage through maternal descent (Thomas, 1986).

In addition, the matrilineal system provides a prism through which to view alternative social organization models and adaptability to changing socioeconomic conditions. As a counter weight to the homogenizing effects of globalization, it emphasizes the significance of cultural heritage in preserving community identity and cohesion (Goswami,2000).

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research on the matrilineal system in Meghalaya should explore several avenues to deepen our understanding and address emerging challenges:

Longitudinal Studies: Monitor changes in matrilineal practices over time by conducting longitudinal studies and investigating the effects of cultural and socioeconomic changes on gender dynamics and family structures (Singh, 1992).

Comparative Analyses: Extend comparative analyses to other matrilineal societies

worldwide, encompassing the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes, offering insights into similarities, variations, and adaptive strategies (Schneider&Gough,1961).

Policy and Advocacy: Within these frameworks, support policies that uphold women's empowerment and gender parity while preserving matrilineal traditions (hooks, 1984).

Interdisciplinary Approaches: To investigate holistic perspectives on matrilineal systems and their implications for societal well-being, and encourage interdisciplinary collaborations between anthropology, sociology, law, and cultural studies (Lipman-Blumen,1976).

Scholars may further their understanding of Meghalaya's matrilineal systems and their significance in the current conversation about gender equality, cultural diversity, and sustainable development by pursuing these research avenues. Maintaining cultural integrity, social justice, and indigenous rights in a variety of international contexts depends on the results of this ongoing investigation.

References

Bareh, H. (1997). *Khasi Society and Culture.* Classical Publishing Company.

Bareh, H. (1997). *The Khasi millennium.* Spectrum Publications.

Béteille, A. (1969). *Sociology of India.* Viking Press.

CEIC Data. (n.d.). *Visitor Arrivals: Local: Meghalaya | Economic Indicators | CEIC*. Www.ceicdata.com. Retrieved April 17, 2024, from https://www.ceicdata.com/en/india/resident-visits-by-states/visitor-arrivals-local-meghalaya

Department of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya. (n.d.). *Meghalaya Tourism Policy 2023*. https://www.meghalayatourism.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Meghalaya-Tourism-Policy-2023.pdf

Goswami, B. B. (2000). *Culture change in the tribal societies of North-East India.* Concept Publishing Company.

hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist theory: From margin to center.* South End Press.

Karotemprel, S. (1992). *The Garo tribal world: An ethnographic study.* Mittal Publications.

Lipman-Blumen, J. (1976). *Gender roles and power.* Sage Publications.

Nongbri, T. (2003). *Gender, caste, and matrilineal societies in India: A study of Meghalaya.*Omsons Publications.

Nongbri, T. (2003). *Khasi Culture.* Spectrum Publications.

Roy, H. L. (1993). *The Garos.* Mittal Publications.

Roy, S. (1980). *Anthropological dimensions of pilgrimage: A study of the Khasi people of Meghalaya.* Concept Publishing Company.

Sanday, P. R. (2002). *Women at the center: Life in a modern matriarchy.* Cornell University Press.

Sangma, M. S. (1981). *Meghalaya: A study in society and change.* National Publishing House.

Sangma, M. S. (1981). *Traditional customs and rituals among the Garos.* Spectrum Publications.

Schneider, D. M., & Gough, K. (Eds.). (1961). *Matrilineal kinship.* University of California Press.

Singh, B. P. (1986). *Social structure and change among the Khasi and Garo of Meghalaya.* Inter-India Publications.
Singh, K. S. (Ed.). (1997). *Family and kinship in Northeast India.* Concept Publishing Company.
Subba, T. B., & Som, S. (Eds.). (1998). *Northeast India: A reader.* Permanent Black.
Thomas, C. J. (1986). *Inheritance, property, and family law in matrilineal Khasi society.* Vikas Publishing House.

About the Authors:

JHARENDRA BISHWAKARMA is a research scholar at Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune, focusing on Technology in Education, Sociology of Education, and Teaching Methodology. With seven years of teaching experience at Siang Valley Academy and Spicer Adventist University and three years in corporate roles at Infosys, WNS, and Better Technology, he integrates a diverse professional background into his research. His interests include Nationalism, Challenges in Education, School-Level Sociology, Social Culture, and Globalization, reflecting a commitment to exploring how these factors influence educational practices and outcomes in a globalized world.

RANJITH KINGSTON GLADSTONE was born in Tamil Nadu, India, to Adventist parents, Mr. D Gladstone and Mrs. Patricia Gladstone. He is married to Mrs. Carol Linda Kingston, and they have a son,Carl Jason Harston Kingston. He has vast experience in teaching across many fields and places, such as Spicer Adventist University (India), Adventist University of Africa (Kenya), Andrews University (USA), Dewey International University (Cambodia), and AIIAS (Philippines). He has authored and co-authored books, blogs, peer-reviewed journals, magazines, and so on. Also, presented and awarded at International and National Research Conferences across the globe.