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The Anthropocene and Garo Hills

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Abstract: the Anthropocene, marked by unprecedented human impact on Earth's ecosystems, hsd deeply influenced the biodiversity and landscapes of Garo Hills. This region, renowned for its rich ecological biodiversity and cultural heritage faces challenges from biodiversity loss and deforestation. The interplay between indigenous communities nd their traditional ecological wisdom highlights both resilience and vulnerability of Garo Hills in the face of anthropogenic pressures. This paper explores the transformative effects of the Anthropocene on the region.

Key Words: Anthropocene, Garos, Modernization, Commercialaization

Humans are now living in a new geological era called the Anthropocene which many are not yet aware of. What is Anthropocene? Is it necessary to understand this new concept? If so, why? What should be the response of the people in Garo Hills towards this new concept of Anthropocene?

The term *Anthropocene* is said to have been coined by Eugene Stoermer, an American freshwater ecologist in the mid-1980s. However, a Nobel Prize-winning atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen was also to be credited for popularizing the concept of Anthropocene.

From the ancient Greek words *anthropos* meaning 'human being' and *kainos* meaning 'recent, new', the Anthropocene is then the new epoch of humans, the age of man (*The Shock of The Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, 16)

John Green in *The Anthropocene Reviewed* states, "The Anthropocene is a proposed term for the current geological age, in which humans have profoundly reshaped the planet and its biodiversity" (4)

The Anthropocene originated from the natural sciences in general and from the earth sciences in particular. The core thesis is that humanity has affected nature over the last two hundred years or so in such a way that a new, human-made stratum has emerged in the geological record (*Anthropocene: Envisioning the Future of the Age of Humans*, 5)

Anthropocene is thus a period where human activities have brought upon ecological threat. Anthropocene is happening right now. Our planet is facing grave ecological crisis.

The growing environmental problems have become an unspeakable menace today. Our biodiversity is in trouble and our climate changing. The extinction of species, deforestation, pollution and contamination, have all led to a life-threatening imbalance in nature. Today, our planet is facing serious environmental problems. These problems are a threat to the very existence of humanity. The once most suitable planet amongst all the other planets for existence of life is on the way to become otherwise. As per the verdict of *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis*, the Sixth Assessment Report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released on August 9, 2021, it took just 120 years for humans to change the planet's climate.

Canada, which is otherwise considered to be one of the coldest countries in the world where temperature drops as low as -20˚C or -30˚C, experienced an extreme heat wave touching 50˚C in late June through mid-July 2021, which killed an estimated 500 people. This dreadful news sent a message once again that climate change is real and it is about to get worst.

The environmental problem is real and it is happening right now. Our planet is undergoing extreme changes caused by anthropogenic activities that have no boundaries. The modern anthropogenic activities have brought upon environmental problems severely affecting not only nature but also man himself. Anthropocentricism is a belief that human beings hold pivotal position in the universe. According to Timothy Clark, anthropocentricism is "the view that human beings and their interest are solely of value and always take priority over those of the non-human" (3).

John Green in *The Anthropocene Reviewed* states:

Humans are already an ecological catastrophe. In just 250,000 years, our behaviour has led to the extinction of many species, and driven many more into steep decline. This is lamentable, and it is also increasingly needless. We probably didn't know what we were doing thousands of years ago as we hunted some large mammals to extinction. But we know what we're doing now. We know how to tread more lightly upon the earth. We could choose to use less energy, eat less meat, clear fewer forests. And we choose not to. As a result, for many forms of life, humanity is the apocalypse (17).

Rikre R. Marak, Assistant Environmental Engineer, Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board, states that the Air Quality Index (AQI) of Tura, Garo Hills as on the fourth week of September was 28. According to her, as per the report, Tura, Garo Hills has a first-class AQI.

In an interview with Rupankar K. Marak, MES, Office of the Divisional Forest Officer, he states that as per India State of Forest Report 2019, the forest cover in Garo Hills is still intact as compared to other states in India. The total forest cover in West Garo Hills is 2,860.22 which is 77.7 % of the total geographical area, 1,702.20 in South Garo Hills which is 90.21 %, and 1,139.34 in East Garo Hills which comes up to 87.90 % of the total geographical area.

The Air Quality Index (AQI) and district-wise forest cover report of Garo Hills may not be as alarming as many regions in this Anthropocene era. However, Garo Hills, as stated by Gilbert K, Marak in *Garo Hills Damgipin A·gisi*, is gradually moving towards an unspeakable environmental crisis. The resources of the land are depleting and the flora and fauna are under threat. These changes in the environment may not be prominently evident but changes are happening, and unless people realise that Anthropocene is real and that it may hit Garo Hills soon, nature and men will both be in dire threat.

Arpyiush Ch. Sangma, MFS, Divisional Forest Officer, East & West Garo Hills Wildlife Division Tura, mentions that hulock gibbon has been listed as an endangered species. Hulock gibbon or *huro* is noteworthy in the indigenous Garo belief. In *The Garos,* A. Playfair mentions that after the earth was fashioned, Tatara-Rabuga created other creations assigning duties to each one of them. Of the animals which *Tatara-Rabuga* created, the first was the hoolock ape and his mission was to utter loud cries and prevent the earth from sleeping and neglecting her work from productiveness (91). However, the very first created animal by *Tatara-Rabuga* is now unfortunately in fear of extinction.

In an interview, 63 year old Wikkinson R. Sangma states that few years back, Tura Peak had a different ecological niche. Hulock gibbons were found in numbers in Tura Peak and their cries could be heard in entire Tura town. Today, the numbers have depleted either due to hunting or due to deforestation which causes them to lose their habitat.

The ecological environment of Garo Hills is no longer the same as it was during the foregoing generation. A study of Garo literature will enable us to understand that Garo writers are mostly nature writers. They have documented the rich flora and fauna of the land through which the present generation can have a glimpse of what Garo Hills was like many years ago. Today, we see changes in our environment. The Air Quality Index (AQI) may still be good, the climate still tolerable, and the forest cover spread out, but as Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring* observes:

The balance of nature is not the same as in the Pleistocene times, but it still is… The balance of nature is not a *status quo:* it is fluid, ever shifting, in a constant state of adjustment. Man, too, is part of this balance. Sometimes

the balance is in the favour; sometimes- and all too often through his own activities- it is shifted to his disadvantage (215).

Today, with the infiltration of modernization and commercialization, the outlook of the people of Garo Hills have changed towards the physical environment. Man now sees nature as a monetary asset and feels the right to abuse it in anyway. The indigenous Garos have however, held nature as sacred. They believed that everything in nature was created by Tatara-Rabuga, the Supreme-Being. Harendra W. Marak in *A˙chik Aganbewalrang* mentions that Tatara Rabuga is the creator of the heaven and the earth and the god of all things.

Julius L.R. Marak in *Atchu Ambini Kubisring* writes:

A˙ningo- chiningo donggipa plak miterangnaba Tatara- Rabuga mitean dal˙batgipa ong˙achim. Tatara- Rabuga mitedasa plak gipin miterangko a˙ani aro chini nokgipa ong˙china patiaha.

Translation:

Of all the gods on land and in water, Tatara- Rabuga was the highest. Tatara- Rabuga is the one who has blessed all the other gods to be lord of land and water.

Mihir N. Sangma in *Maniani Bidik* states that the creator Tatara-Rabuga has created all creations accordingly to depend and lean on each other:

Dakgipa Rugipara mingsa minggipino pangchakgrike dandan-su˙chalgrike pangkamgrikna gita sulsul dakaha ruaha (91).

There was a balance between man and nature. It was a sacred balance. The modern Garo Hills faintly recognizes this balance. Environmental changes are taking place though not at a large scale, yet if the people of the land are not aware of these changes and of the values of nature, like Canada, Garo Hills will experience a sudden deplorable situation.

The Divisional Forest Officer, Social Forestry Division West Garo Hills, Tura, has listed out the indigenous edible fruits of Garo Hills that are under threat due to climate change. Climate change often results in shifts in temperature and precipitation patterns. Many plant species have specific temperature and moisture requirements for growth. When these conditions change, it can lead to mismatch between plants and their ideal environment. The following table mentions the local name, common name and botanical name of the indigenous edible fruits of Garo Hills that have become rare and may become in danger of extinction:

Sl. No	Local Name	Common Name	Botanical Name
	Tesru	Malabar Tamarind	Garcinia paniculate
	Sampal	Longan	Nephelium Longana
	Bakwe	Sadalkou	Melodinus monogynus
	Tekring	Murtenga	Protium serratum
	Soksimareng	Fresh water mangrove	Carallia brachiata
	Dengga Doti	Sap trees	Garcinia Kydia
	Tepatang	Ripe fruit kach	Haematocarpus validus
	Chirore	Bahera	Terminalia bellerica
	Ambletong	Hog plum	Spondias mangifera
	Aritak	Black	Terminalia chebula
	Arimu	Monkey jack	Artocarpus lakoocha

This list of edible trees that are under threat is a message to one and all that Garo Hills is no longer in a pristine condition. Garo Hill may not be experiencing grave environmental changes but Anthropocene is a global phenomenon and Garo Hills is a part of this new geological era.

Conclusion: It is crucial to acknowledge that Anthropocene- the current geological era defined by human impact on the planet- is a global phenomenon. Garo Hills, like all other parts of the word, is not immune to the consequences of human activity. By recognizing this, we are reminded of our collective responsibility to protect and preserve the region's unique biodiversity and ecological balance for future generations.

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