



Name: Kurbah, Sairabell
Designation: Lecturer
Organization: Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong
Contact Information: Hs. No. - 208, Opp. KJWA Office, Mawkhar, Shillong-793001, India.
email: ksairabell@yahoo.co.in
Language: English
Type of Presentation: Poster

About the Presenter:

Ms Sairabell Kurbah is a research scholar of Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong, Meghalaya, North East India. Her current research studies focuses on the improvement of livelihoods of those people who are still practicing the traditional occupation(s).

At present she is also a Lecturer in Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong teaching the under graduates as well as the post-graduates of Management Studies Department.

Title of Paper: **Traditional Occupations in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya**

Abstract:

This paper presents the status of traditional occupations using blacksmithy and bow and arrow as examples and discusses the relevance of traditional occupation as sustainable livelihoods.

The East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya has a population of 6, 60,923, belonging mostly to the 'Khasi' tribe. The small-scale cottage industries include cane and bamboo work, blacksmithy, tailoring, handloom weaving, cocoon-rearing, stonecutting, brick-making, fabrication, pottery, iron smelting, and beekeeping. Manufactured goods include: woven cloth, coarse cotton, *ryndia silk*, silver work, pottery, mats, baskets, rope and string, gunpowder, brass cooking utensils, bows, arrows, swords, spears, and shields.

The study was done at Myllem and Nongkynrih villages, 16kms and 33kms respectively away from Shillong. Myllem is known for blacksmithy and Nongkynrih village is known for making of bows and arrows.



Fifteen blacksmiths from in and around Myllem were interviewed. Most have inherited the business from their parents. The blacksmiths produce hoes, mattocks, spades, spuds, *daos*, cleavers, swords, choppers, knives and daggers. All these are made in small worksheds and employ five to six persons, some on daily wages. The majority of the farmers and gardeners in the region use these tools.

Five bow and arrow makers and five sub-contractors for bows and arrow-making from Nongkynrih were interviewed. The products are made at home in the porch or lobby. The materials required are bamboos, reeds, feathers (eagle's feathers preferred), lead foil, tinsel, wax, iron bits, kerosene and thread. Wholesale and retail businessmen give orders to the main producers, who may then subcontract to others. Bows and arrows are now rarely used for hunting but is still very popular for traditional sports, dances and decorations.

Traditional occupations provide a livelihood to a significant number of people in the region. They use skills that have evolved over long periods of time. But the skills and the knowledge systems remain largely informal, poorly protected, inadequately documented and socially and culturally disadvantaged. The return on skill remains low, and markets remain small and unstable. However, it provides supplementary income to farmers whose income is seasonal.