

Agriculture and Cottage Industries of Chittagong Hill Tracts: Role of Adivasi Women

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Abstract: *In the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, many Adivasi people have been living for hundred of years. Due to topographical differences from the plains, the indigenous people of this region of the country possess a distinct way of life and culture. Their habitations are concentrated mainly on riverbanks or on lofty hills. These Adivasis are skilled in jhum cultivation, producing food grains, oilseeds, fruits, and vegetables. At the same time, they collect a lot of natural produce from nearby forests and hunt animals for flesh. The Adivasis of the Chittagong Hill Tracts are also experts in handcraft work. In the hilly areas, people's everyday lives are toilsome. In this area, the Adivasi tribes are required to work hard for their lives and livelihoods. The women of the Adivasis play a leading role both in domestic work and in the cultivation of land, collecting firewood, fruits, and roots from the jungles, and in the performance of trading in markets. Compared to the male members of their family, women carry more responsibility for their families at home and away from home. In the development of their economic lives, the indigenous women of Chittagong Hill Tracts make the leading contribution.*

Keywords: *Adivasi, Community, Machang house, Jhum cultivation, Komor loom, Culture*

People from all classes contribute in some way or another to the economic progress of a country. For example, the peasants cultivate land to raise agricultural produce, and the weavers manufacture textile fabrics. They send their surplus production to the market for sale according to their demands after meeting their consumption. The artisans produce different types of domestic articles in their cottage industries. The peasants also supply timber in addition to cultivating. The professionals like the blacksmith, potters, washerman, barber, priest, and cobbler contribute to keeping the pace of economic progress in the society. The *Adivasis* are the indigenous communities of Bangladesh who maintain a self-sufficient society and lead their everyday lives without taking service from outside professionals. They are wholly self-sufficient, and they do all their necessary work by themselves. It is curious to note that the major portion of the outdoor work is done by women among the Adivasis. An *Adivasi* woman is simultaneously a peasant, weaver, artisan,

and daily labourer. At the same time, she is a trader, potter, washerwoman, barber, physician, and hunter. As a housewife, she is a mother, a nurse, and a cook. The Adivasi women produce their necessary agricultural commodities through *jhum* cultivation with their labour and implements. They weave their fabrics on their own *Komor* looms from the cotton produced by the plants they cultivate. They weave clothes for themselves as well as for other members of their families. Besides, they also produce their essential household articles from cane and bamboo with their own hands. The basic needs of human beings are food, clothing, and shelter. The *Adivasi* women apply their labour and skill to the production of all these things.

Many valuable books and articles on the *Adivasis* of Bangladesh have been published, for example, *Upajatiya Sanskritik Baishistya* (in Bangla) by Abdus Sattar (Dhaka: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, 1979). Herbert Hope Risley, in the two volumes of his most valuable work, titled *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, has described almost all the castes and tribes of Bengal (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891 and 1892). Risley also describes the origin and culture of these communities. In *Cultural Survey of Bangladesh Series-5, Indigenous Communities*, edited by Mesbah Kamal & others (Dhaka: Bangladesh Asiatic Society, 2007), accounts of forty-five indigenous communities living in Bangladesh have been discussed. This book highlights the origin, geographic location, and culture of different *Adivasis*. All these books have not given ample attention to *Adivasi* women. The indigenous women of Chittagong Hill Tracts are very experts in the performance of agricultural activities and the weaving of textile fabrics. They weave embroidered fabrics, shawls, and bedsheets with their excellent skills. All these articles produced by them are very attractive to the tourists who buy them on their tour of the Chittagong Hills. The tourists also buy from the *Adivasis* rice, ripened fruits, dry fruits, etc. produced in the hills. The present paper has been written to evaluate the role of *Adivasi* women in the development of agriculture and cottage industries in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The word '*Adivasi*' has been derived from Sanskrit. The meaning of *adi* is original, while the meaning of *vasi* is an inhabitant. Adivasi means and includes the indigenous people of Bangladesh. The Adivasis have been defined as a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of functions, ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognizing social distance with other tribes or castes, without any social obloquy attaching to them, as it does in the caste structure, following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration.¹ In many parts of the world, particularly in India, the synonym that is used to denote the Adivasis is forest dwellers. Most of the *Adivasis* live in and around the woodlands. When we use the word *Adivasi*, we mean a community that is geographically concentrated in a particular region, whose members bear a sense of cultural unity, and who believe that they are part of the same cultural unit.²

The administrative name of the extensive hill area that lies in the southeastern part of Bangladesh is Chittagong Hill Tracts. The geographical area of the Chittagong Hill Tracts is around 23,184 square kilometres, which is about one-tenth of the total area of the country. This geographical tract is comprised of eleven hills. They are: (1) Arakan Mountain Range (2) Ramgarh (3) Mount Sitakundu (4) Gall Hill, Fairy Hill, Tempest Hill, Batali Hill in Chittagong City (5) Chandpur or Pukuria Hill (6) Anwara or Dewang Hill (7) Ram Pahar (8) Sita Pahar (9) Ramtek (10) Mainak hill (11) Cox Bazar Hill, and (12) Unan Hill.³ Among these hills, some are only a hundred feet high, whereas others' altitudes are above four thousand feet. Keokradong is the highest peak in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the height of which is above four thousand feet. The central region of these hilly tracts is Bandarban, which carries dual meanings: 'border forest' and 'dam of monkeys.' This forest is extended to the south up to the border of Akyab, where it is blended with the 'Reserve Forest.' Varieties of wild animals and reptiles, i.e., elephants, tigers, monkeys, pythons, deer, and black bears, are found in the deep forests of mountainous Chittagong.⁴ Nearly all the mountain ranges are covered with trees and plants. Because these hills are steep, their scenic beauty is beautiful. These hills contain slopes where we find fountains. The slopes of these mountains are the abodes of the *Adivasis*. The Chakmas, Mags, and Tripuras reside on the banks of the rivers. On the other hand, the other tribes live on the summit of the hills.⁵ These mountainous forests produce not only valuable woody trees but also dense clusters of bamboo, creepers, canes, hemp, and leaves. Besides the existence of different types of animals, these forests are the habitats of around fifty species of birds. The *Adivasis* of the Chittagong Hill Tracts live their lives depending on what these forests produce.

Many *Adivasi* communities live on the foothills of the Chittagong Hill tracts. According to the 2022 census report of Bangladesh, different groups of small *Adivasi* tribes, with a numerical strength of 16,50,159, live in this country. Among them, 8,24,751 souls are men and 8,25,408 souls are women. Among these 8, 25,408 women, the majority of them live in Chittagong Hill Tracts. Different types of *Adivasi* tribes live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. They rely entirely on natural resources to survive. They do not carry any artificiality into their daily lives. The women undertake agricultural operations by themselves and produce a variety of articles at home. They bring articles produced in their cottage industries into local hats for sale and collect their daily needs from there. The tourists visiting these areas are the main buyers of their products. The contributions of the *Adivasi* women in the fields of agriculture and cottage industries are discussed below.

Khyang

The Khyangs are one of the hill tribes of the Chittagong Hill tract. They live on Muranja Hill, in the western part of the hilly region.⁶ This hill has three branches: Muranza Hill, Naspatang, and Basitang. The Wailatang Mountain Range is adjacent to it and extends to Myanmar. The meaning of Khyang is

desire. They have been living in this region through the ages. They introduce them as Hiou, meaning floating and near. The Khayangs are fundamentally a gipsy tribe. The scholars think that they arrived in this region from the southern Tame Chin or the northern part of the hinterland of the Arakan Yoma Valley known as Wild Chin. Many anecdotes are in circulation regarding their arrival in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. There has been a saying that the Khyangs of Arakan came to Chittagong with many warriors. During their return journey, their king could not accommodate all of them in the twelve ships he brought. Those Khyangs who stayed here as a breakaway group are known as 'floating.' All the Khyangs who arrived in this region could not return to the place from which they arrived. Historians are unanimous that the Khyangs arrived in Chittagong Hill Tracts between the years 1600 and 1700.⁷

The Khyang tribes undertake extensive jhum cultivation. They became a settled community with time during their journey from one hill to another while doing jhum cultivation. The 1991 Bangladesh census recorded the Khyang population of this region in 1950. At present, their members have been further reduced to 1343.⁸ The Khyangs live in *machang* houses made of poles made of trees and bamboo. They build their houses and live in safe and open areas on the slopes of the hills. Their villages are ordinarily located near the springs or streams of rivers. They call their villages 'Nam.' It may be mentioned here that jhum cultivation is the principal source of their livelihood. Hundred percent of the Khyang women engage in jhum cultivation. Their men produce baskets made of bamboo or cane, traps for hunting wild animals, and other domestic articles. The Khyang women are charming, and they cover their faces with tattoos to hide their beauty. The jhum-cultivating women arrange a festival known as 'bugele' to satisfy their god so that they get good crops. When they store paddy in their houses, they celebrate this festival by sacrificing swine. According to their beliefs, they would get a high yield from their crops and be able to save them from wild animals and insects if they celebrated this festival.⁹

Chak

The Chak tribes live in the regions of Byshari, Naikhsyangchhadi, Kamichhora, Krokhsyong, and Duchhdi under the Naikkhongchhari police station in Bandarban district, to the south of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. They are divided into 372 families. The complexion of their bodies is yellowish; their noses are flat and thick; and their eyelids are folded and thin. Their hair is comparatively thick, and their men grow a few moustaches and beards. Their bodies are stoutly built. One of their unique customs is that they wear threads on their shoulders as a symbol of their community. In modern times, they wear a thread on their waist instead of their shoulders. Even today, entwined threads are tied around the waists of their children by elderly persons selected by their parents before they are raised in the cradles. In his travel accounts, Francis Buchanan in South Asia left descriptions about

the Chaks. They live along one of the two courses of the river Naf, which flows over Chaktwang Hill. The Chak tribes came to this region between the years 1400 and 1600, when there was political tension between Burma and Arakan. Their habitat is found in the valleys of the rivers Lama, Yechho, and Bakkhari. The Chak tribes are very experts in the production of woven fabrics. The Chak women follow four steps in this process: (1) cultivation of cotton plants and collection of raw cotton; (2) separation of seeds from the raw cotton with the help of charki and spinning of thread from the cotton fibres with the charkha; (3) bleaching of the thread with their indigenous technique using ingredients from the barks, leaves, and roots of trees; (4) weaving of fabrics in the *komor* looms.¹⁰ Following are the dresses worn by the Chaks:

Variety of dresses worn by the Chaks

Garments used by Chak women	Garments used by Chak men
Nafi – A variety of skirt	Kotungpangrey – Dhooti
Rangkeng - Brassiere	Apong – Headgear
Rangkengpong – Head gear	Lakheypazu – A special variety of shirt

In addition to the designed garments, the Chak women also play an important role in jhum cultivation. They produce all types of crops necessary for their consumption in their fields. When they harvest their crops, they invite everyone and give a feast. On this occasion, they serve meat and wine and arrange performances of dance and singing. The Chak women are expert workers in cottage industries. They produce all their domestic articles using bamboo, cane, wood, and bitter gourd with the choppers. The articles they produce in their cottage include charka, charki, hamandista (pounder), boat, basket, cage for preparing dry fish, and container for storing grains.

Chakma

Among the tribals of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Chakma population is the highest. The Chakmas follow Buddhism as their religion. Their education, culture, customs, and way of life are superior to those of the other tribal communities in this region.¹¹ In addition to these, they have their own history, religion, and mythological tales. The name of their religion is Taras. The special talents of the Chakmas are that they are very intelligent and that their memory is very sharp. They are capable of tackling every challenge with their inborn efficiency. They earn their livelihood from jhum cultivation.¹² Jhum cultivation is an agricultural process adopted by the tribals living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.¹³ Ordinarily, the *Adivasis* living in the hills undertake jhum cultivation. This cultivation is mainly undertaken after the cutting and burning of the jungles. When the fertility of the soil decreases, the cultivating land is left and moved to a new area where new land for cultivation is prepared. The Chakma women call the jhum cultivation 'jhum-garana.' The

Chakma women make small holes in their agricultural land with their traditional chopper, 'chuchang tagle,' and sow two or three varieties of seeds in those holes. The plants grow after it rains. With time, plants grow flowers. In addition to paddy, the Chakma women grow valuable crops like sesame, pumpkin, sweet pumpkin, *marfa*, maize, brinjal, *chinar*, fruits, vegetables, ginger, and turmeric (pic.3).¹⁴ The Chakma women also produce sufficient cotton using the *jhum* method. The rice produced by them is in great demand among ordinary people.

The Chakma women are skilled artisans. They have a special skill in the weaving of clothes. There is a custom regarding weaving among the Chakmas. A Chakma girl is required to prepare at least six beautifully designed shawls before she gets married.¹⁵ The shawls produced by unmarried Chakma girls are called 'alam.' It may be mentioned here that they produce textile fabrics on the komor loom, which they call baine. The shuttle of the baine is known as the thurchuma. The women sit with their waists kept upright while weaving clothes (pic.2). They use the thorns of the porcupines to keep the threads in the right position. These thorns are known as 'kudukkadak.' Some of the fancy women use the small tusks of the elephants instead of these thorns. They use in the gaps of the threads long sticks with a small diameter made of split bamboo to make floral designs in them.¹⁶

Most of the Chakmas live on the banks of the rivers.¹⁷ They construct their houses by smearing mud on the poles, which are four to six feet long. These houses are called 'mojaghor' in the local language. They construct an earthen place on the bamboo-made floor of the mojaghor and make a special chulha with three legs. In the open space around their houses, they keep vessels to store water. They dry up their crops like paddy, sesame, etc. on the mats made by them with cane. In addition to *jhum* cultivation, they make baskets, cradles, containers, winnowing fans, a type of comb, hookahs, chess pieces, and other articles made of split bamboo and canes. They make bamboo baskets resembling flowers. They use these baskets on their backs to carry different types of goods. They carry their loads, keeping the ropes tied to the baskets on their foreheads.

Tripura

Anthropologically, the Tripura tribes are an offshoot of the Mongoloid people. Most of them live in the country to the north of the river Karnafuli.¹⁸ In Chittagong Hill Tracts, more than a lakh of the Tripura population lives here. If we go back in history, we will find that a portion of Bengal was under the control of the Tripura kingdom. The Tripura tribes are rich in literature and culture. Their society is patrilineal. A father is the head and controller of the family. In the absence of the father, the elder son of the family is considered the family head. The Tripura tribes are divided into thirty-six *gotras*. It may be mentioned here that the Tripuras follow Hinduism.

Since ancient times, the economic life of the Tripura tribes has been centred on *jhum* cultivation and cottage industries. *Jhum* cultivation is

familiar in the mountainous regions of many parts of the Indian subcontinent, even today. The method of *jhum* cultivation undertaken by the Tripuras is different from that of the other tribes. The world-famous Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore has portrayed a description of the *jhum* cultivation of the Tripuras in his novel, *Rajarshi*. They produce plenty of crops through *jhum* cultivation. They harvest paddy in the Bengali month of *Agrahayan*. The poet narrates,

*'Jakhan dhankatar samay hay takhan jhumchaser elakay ananda pariya jay.
.. Jhum chasira da hat-e laiya kshetre giya parila. Hai hai shobde parasparke
ahaban kare. Jhumya ramanider gan-e math-bat dhanita haiya parilo.'*¹⁹

Singing of the Tripura women is a part and parcel of the *jhum* cultivation. The echo of their songs is felt in the region of the *jhum* cultivation. The singing of the Tripura women is indispensable from the beginning till the end of the *jhum* cultivation.

One of the distinguished features of the Tripura tribes is their performance of *krishi puja*, which they call *haba*. They have been performing this worship for hundreds of years. They worship according to their own custom before they sow seeds in their fields. They conduct *haba* worship before sowing paddy and any other crops. They celebrate a festival by calling and worshipping the earth deity before they jump to prepare cultivable land. This worship is known as *haba puja*. It may be mentioned here that the Tripuras perform *haba puja* in two ways. At first, they decorate the compound of their houses with *wathops*. After that, they light an auspicious lamp and sacrifice an animal for the grace of god. They observe their second worship while sitting in a forest. All people are entertained by the meat of the animal that is sacrificed in the forest. They call this special type of feast connected with forest worship '*bonvojon*'. In Tripura, this forest feast is called '*Bolong Mi*'.²⁰

The name of their goddess of cultivation worship, whom they worship in their courtyard, is Dharitri (Earth). The name of the god whom they worship in the forest is Burasa, or debrided Sebrai. Their forest feasts are mainly special kinds of feasts related to their agriculture and their customs. It may be mentioned here that in the past, the cash crops of the Tripuras, which were raised through *jhum* cultivation, were harvested between the months of Talboong Bhadra and Talbawang Kartik. This is why they counted their financial year from Bhadra to Kartik. Even today, the head of the Bomang Circle, or Circle No. 3 of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, maintains the financial year and celebrates the *Punyah* festival, observing that tradition. The cash crops that are produced through *jhum* cultivation in this region are sesame, cotton, turmeric, ginger, arum, oilseeds, etc.

The Tripura women are experts at weaving clothes. They produce different types of garments like dresses, scarves, warm clothes, etc. They weave their clothes not only with the thread spun by them from the cotton they cultivate but also with the thread bought from open markets. They dye their clothes using their technology from the natural juice collected by them

from the bark of the trees and stems of the creepers. The garments used by Tripura women are called Rinai. But the name of the best clothes produced by them is Risa or Ria. They have been using the cloth named Risa for hundreds of years. Rinai and Risa are the traditional costumes of the Tripura women. The names of the garments worn by their men are Rintai and Kubai. All the garments worn by the Tripura males are woven by their female members. The women of Tripura decorate their garments with almost live designs. Depending upon the designs made on their clothes, their Rinai wears have nine varieties, e.g., Rinai Changroang, Rinai Okkaha, Rinai Nagri, Rinai Kalf, Rinai Rekhok, Rinai Peshom, Rinai Khaichentai, Rinai Nachhorai, Rinai Dagachhila, etc. The Risa also have eight names, such as Risa Sharbangi, Risa Kochlai, Risa Khumber, Risa Anchi, Risa Richu, Risa Athukiri, Risa Changkha, Risa Aatang, etc.²¹ The Tripura women use a variety of cloth named Gubai Barak to cover the upper portion of their bodies. Many of them wear turbans. The name of their turbans is Khroakrisa. We can find the excellence of their skill and expertise in their artistic mind and handicraft. In addition to that, their costumes reflect their own culture and tribal life.

Mag

The Mags are the second-largest *Adivasi* tribe in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Their habitations are scattered throughout all parts of this region. Lexically, the meaning of the term Mag is a dacoit or a pirate. That is why the Mags do not approve of this name for their community and introduce themselves as Marma. Marma is an Arakanese word, and the meaning of this word is Burmese. There has been a notion among the common people that the Mags entered this hilly region from the Arakan Hill, crossing the Matamuhari valley from Cox's Bazar. In their behaviour and rituals, one can notice the similarities with the Chakmas since both of these communities live side by side in the same region with similar lifestyles.²²

The Mag tribes live in places like Ramu, Chakria, and Teknaf. Another meaning of Mag is a community that lives in Arakan. They are divided into Maramgiri, Bhuinya Mag, Marua Mag (Rajbansi Mag), Marma, or Mam-ma-mag, Roang Mag, and Thongaiya, or Jamua Mag. These different sub-divisions of the Mags have been transformed into seven distinct tiers. Their physique is stoutly built and strong. They resemble the Chinese people. They are short in height. Their face is small, wide, and flat. Their eyes are also small, and their population appears to be a crossbreed of Chinese people. It is very difficult to determine their racial origin. The Mag women take a leading role in the production of grains, fruits, and vegetables through the cultivation of land. They produce in their fields not only different types of grains but also cotton, rice, melons, pumpkins, yams, and tobacco.²³

Their society is patrilineal, and their male children alone inherit their paternal property. The female children do not get any share in the property of their father. If there are three or more sons in a family, the elder son gets half of the property of his father, the next one gets one-fourth, and the

remaining is equally divided among the rest of the sons. The Mags follow Buddhism, and their girls are ordinarily very charming to look at. The Mag women like to dress up beautifully.²⁴

Mro or Mra Tribes

The Mros live in Bandarban district in the largest numbers. Most probably, these tribes are the aboriginal inhabitants of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Among themselves, this tribe is known as Mro. The other tribes of the hills and people of the plains know them as Murungs.²⁵ As per the report of the 1991 Census, their population is 22,167. They belong to the Mongoloid people. The complexion of their bodies is greenish-yellow. They have long faces and grow a few moustaches and beards. Their eyelids are epicanthic and folded. They grow on their heads fat and have straight hair (Leiothichi). Most of the Mros live in the dense forests located in the region of Bandarban. They still follow the lifestyles, dress, costumes, beliefs and practices of ancient times. They have their own cultural dances and love songs. The Mros maintain their family on *jhum* cultivation. Besides salt, oil, and a few other useful articles, they produce everything by themselves. They even weave clothes for them. They are all self-sufficient. One of the special features of the Mros is that they have no blacksmith, potter, carpenter, or barber among them.²⁶

Though the Mros live on top of the hills, they catch fish in the *Jiri*, and their women collect drinking water from the springs. Since they climb up and down the hills, their bodies are stoutly built. Like other *Adivasis*, they also live in *Machang* houses. The Mros call their houses *Kim*. They construct their house with bamboo, cane, and flax. Unlike the other tribes, the special feature of their dwelling places is that they keep their domestic animals, like swine, in a place under their houses. Their houses have three main and distinct areas. One of the places is used for meeting with guests, cooking, and sleeping with unmarried persons and children. On the other place, married couples and their children sleep at night. In third place, they keep their valuable articles.²⁷ They use *chamalgolaghar* to store their food articles. In addition to that, they use a raised, open platform to dry up the paddy and clean their clothes. Their houses also contain some small parts. At a place attached to their house beside the staircase for going up on the floor of the house, they build small compartments where they keep their domestic birds, like hens. The other hill tribes do not follow this type of arrangement in their houses. They hang in front of their houses the horns of cows, the skulls of monkeys, the shells of tortoises, the feathers of birds, dry fruits, and roots for the wellbeing of their families.

They undertake *jhum* cultivation in the regions of the Chittagong Hill Tracts like Chimbuk, Rooma, and Thanchi. The season of their *jhum* cultivation begins in March, and their crops get ripe in the month of September. The Mro women are more industrious than their men. The women undertake *jhum* cultivation and grow fruits and vegetables. At the same time, they sell their

agricultural produce and buy their daily necessities in the markets. They get up early in the morning, cook their food, and go out for cultivation, taking with them their cooked food wrapped in the leaves of the banana trees. They work all day in agricultural work in their fields and come back home in the evening. The Mro women produce on their agricultural land crops like paddy, maize, chilly, beans, spiny gourd, sesame, cotton, tobacco leaves, mustard seeds, turmeric, ginger, bananas, pineapples, *marfa*, lady's finger, cucumber, and pumpkin. Their women make cheroot with the tobacco they produce. They chew dry tobacco leaves as a narcotic substance. They cut wood like the men in the forest to collect their firewood.²⁸

The Mro women weave a pair of clothes for her and all members of her family on *komor* looms. Every Mro woman wears a garment called wanclai the breadth of which is between nine and eleven inches.²⁹ As a result, there remain four to six inches of space open towards their waist. When they go to market, they wrap the upper part of their body with a *chadar*. They do not wear any scarves when they are at home and sometimes keep the upper part of their body uncovered.

The Mros celebrate festivals, keeping *jhum* cultivation at the centre. After they bring their harvested crops home, they arrange a cow slaughter festival. They celebrate this festival between December and February. The young boys and girls dance in rhythm with the tune of flutes, keeping a cow tied to a post in the centre. The *karta* of the Mros orders a young man to pierce a javelin into the body of the cow. When the javelin is pierced into the body of the animal and it begins to struggle in pain, the Mros celebrate with joy. They arrange a feast with the flesh of this slaughtered animal. They take out the tongue of the slaughtered cow and hang it in the middle of their locality in the hope of peace. They believe that a cow swallowed their religious scripture, and for this reason, they celebrate the cow slaughtering festival for the restoration of peace. Besides this festival, they also celebrate another festival, which they call the champua festival or plantain leaf-cutting festival. The women accompany their men, go to the forest, cut plantain leaves, and bring them home. They also celebrate this festival with fanfare, dancing, and singing. It is believed that their religious words had been written on plantain leaves, which a cow swallowed.³⁰

Rakhaine

Rakhaine is a Pali word. The combination of the words '*Raksha*' and '*Rakshain*' is '*Rakshaine*,' which means orthodox. The Rakhaine tribes are very orthodox, and they have carried their religion, culture, and tradition for hundreds of years. For this reason, they are known as Rakhine. The scholars believe that they have been living at Ramu in Chittagong since the fifteenth century. At present, they live in the regions of Ramu, Cox's Bazar, Bandarban, Manikchhari, and Teknaf. Their special culture is that they have a common Buddhist temple, school, large pond, and Buddhist monastery in each of their localities. One interesting thing is that one has to take water from these ponds

without getting down there. The Rakhine Buddhists like to live a life full of joy and exuberance. They wear colourful and well-designed garments. Their women like to wear deep-coloured costumes (pic.5). The women wear *lungi*, or *thabbing*, a blouse, and an *orna*. Men wear a *lungi* and shirt. When they pray, they wear a turban on their head. It may be mentioned here that the Rakhaine women produce bright and colourful batik-printed *lungis*. These *lungis* are very beautiful to look at. They wear colourful blouses with these *lungis*.³¹ The women prefer to keep themselves beautifully dressed. Among the *Adivasis*, they are the people who wear gold ornaments to a greater extent compared to others. The Rakhaine women keep themselves engaged in agriculture. They raise all their agricultural produce (pic.6) themselves. In addition to cereals and oilseeds, they produce plenty of fruits. Besides cows and buffaloes, they domesticate hens and ducks. One of the special features of the Rakhaines is that they not only weave clothes but also produce salt and jaggery.

Kuki

The Kukis are one of the most notable *Adivasis* of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Tagore has narrated in detail about them. He mentioned the *jhum* cultivation of the Kuki women and the efficiency of their men in warfare. Their women produce plenty of crops through *jhum* cultivation. At the same time, they are very skilled in cottage industries. The poet says,

*Tripura raj juddher janya Chattagramer parbatya pradesh e nana upahar samet
dut pathia dilen. Sekhane Kuki Grampatider nicate Kuki sanya sahajya
prarthona karilen. Juddher nam shunia tara neche uthlo. Kukider jata Lal/
Grampati chhila tara juddher sangbadswarup lal bastrakhande badha da
duthasthe gram-e pathie dilo. Dekhite dekhite Kuki r srot Chattagramer
shailashringa haite Tripurar shailashringe asia parila. ... E-samay jum kata
shesh hayechhilo.*³²

It is evident from the description of the novelist that many Kuki *Adivasis* lived in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and they produced sufficient crops in *jhum* cultivation. After harvesting their crops, they went to the battlefield, taking sharp weapons with them. The first description of the Kukis is known from 1799, from an account of one Surgeon McCrea. He referred to the Kukis as a martial race and hunting as their occupation. They were first discovered in the hilly regions of Cachar, Assam, in the nineteenth century. At that time, they were divided into four groups, namely Changsan, Singsan, Thathan, and Lungam.³³ They were defeated in the battle with the Lushai tribes. They were permitted to live at Cachar in the Chittagong Hill Tracts during the rule of the British. They were ferocious types of people. They use sharp weapons for their protection. They believe in the power of rivers, hills, and forests. It is noticeable that their dresses resemble those of the Nagas to some extent. The Kuki women work both at home and on the agricultural land. The entire burden of the daily lives of a family falls on their women. They fetch water, hew wood, cultivate the land, and assist in reaping crops. At the same time, they undertake spinning and cooking.³⁴ They admit a spiritual power, which

they call 'puthen.' Their women smoke like their men.³⁵ The Kukis are very partial to dogs as an article of food. They give the dog a big meal just before killing it, and they cook and serve it with this meal still inside it.³⁶

Kumi or Khweymi Tribe

It is very difficult to correctly ascertain the exact time when the Khweymi tribes came and settled in this hilly region. According to the observation of the eminent historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, this tribe came from the Mongoloid race. They live in the hilly regions of Thanchi, Roangchhari, and Lama. The Kumi villages are generally situated on the top of a lofty hill which is regularly stockade and fortified.³⁷ The scholars think that they arrived together with the other minor tribes and started living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts at the end of the seventeenth century. As per the census of 1991, the population of the Khweymi tribes in this hilly region was only 1,241.³⁸

According to the beliefs of the Khweymis, *kha* denotes a human being and *mi* denotes excellent. The term *Khami* has been gradually changed and finally transformed into Khweymi. They have their language, and they do not want to teach it to others. They prefer to live in groups. One of their special features is that once they take an oath on any matter, they keep their word, even at the cost of their lives. The Khweymi tribes living in the Hill Tracts acknowledge the Bohmong Raja as their ruler. They pay him taxes annually.³⁹ The Khweymi women collect *golpata* and construct their houses on top of the hills. Keeping in mind the matter of security, sometimes they construct their houses at a high place on the branches of trees. Like other *Adivasis*, the Khweymi women undertake *jhum* cultivation. At present, they are producing bananas on the slopes of the hills, along with other crops (pic.1). Among the crops, they produce paddy, chilly, spiny gourd, tobacco leaves, turmeric, ginger, and vegetables. They sell their surplus agricultural produce to the local market after making it for their consumption. Their women prepare fermented wine using their technique. All of them drink this wine. Female members of this tribe do more work compared to their male counterparts. The Khweymis are expert hunters. They eat the flesh of different animals hunted by them. They even eat the flesh of a dog.⁴⁰ With their meals, they consume intoxicating drinks and smoke cheroots that they produce themselves.

They pursue *jhum* cultivation. At the same time, the handicrafts produced by them are very famous. Their women also produce miscellaneous articles with easily obtainable natural produce around their locality. Among these articles are baskets made of bamboo, cane, and wood, which they carry on their shoulders, and different types of *khol* made from wild gourds. The Khweymi women have been producing these articles from generation to generation.

Lushai Tribes

The word Lushai has been derived from the term Lusei. *Lu* means head, and *sei* means long. Lusei denotes those with long heads. In the past, the Lushai males grew long hair, made locks on their foreheads, and walked

around. For this reason, their heads seemed to be tall. Among the *Adivasi* tribes living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Lushai tribes are the most minor community.⁴¹ In this region, their population is very small. Most of them live in the Assam-Burma region adjacent to the Lushai hills, all of them follow Christianity. They have their church in the region of Ramgarh. At present, they live in the regions of Rangamati and Bandarban.

The Lushai women cultivate their land through the *jhum* method. They produce paddy and vegetables on the slopes of the hills. They catch snails, crabs, and fish from the streams of the hills and hunt birds and animals, which they eat together. The Lushais are fond of eating flesh. The supply of flesh for them depends on their success in chasing animals since domestic animals are not very plentiful among them.⁴² They boil their vegetables with a lesser quantity of salt and water and consume them. One of their special features is that their women preserve the fat of the swine for the whole year in the containers prepared from the ripe gourds using their technique. They use this swine fat for their cooking oil. They keep the swine fat in the shell of a gourd, which they hang tied with a rope over their oven in the kitchen.⁴³ After collecting fish and flesh, they hang them to dry up so that they can eat them for a long time.

In the past, they prepared their dress with the skin of animals and used them.⁴⁴ At present, they spin the thread from the cotton and their women weave their clothes in the *komor* looms. They weave attractive *shawls*. In recent times, they produce various kinds of designer clothes in their *komor* looms, for example, *puanfen* (*thami*), *karchung* (tops/blouse), which their women wear. Their men use *karchung* (shirt) and *puanbing* (lungi). Around the years 1600-1700, they would use white clothes and black striped wrappers which they called *darlem*. Their women produce dyes from natural products like the fruits, leaves, and bark of trees and use them for dyeing the clothes produced by them. *Ting Juangting*, a variety of grass which they use to blacken the white threads. They produce red dye from the seeds of *kekfek* tree. The Lushai tribes produce yellow dye by boiling turmeric paste. They produce clothes in four shades: white, black, red, and yellow with these dyes.⁴⁵ A Western influence has always been noticed in their dresses.

The women of the Lushais are generally held in consideration. They have much influence in the family, and after a husband's death, the wife becomes head of the family.⁴⁶ The Lushai women are very skilled in cottage industries. They produce wicker baskets made of strips of bamboo for carrying paddy and winnowing fans. They make *herawt* out of wood, bamboo, and cane for separating seeds from cotton. The Lushais also make spinning wheels for producing threads and instruments for drawing threads from wood and bamboo. They make *suvels* from the roots of trees and bamboo for opening the twists of threads to weave clothes on *komor* looms. In addition to those, they make *saumbur* from the dry shells of the ripened gourds, which they use to carry and contain liquid drinks. They also use this as their water vessel.

Pangkhoa Tribes

The Pangkhoa tribes have been living between the tracts from the Sajek valley of the Rangamati district to Ruma of the Bandarban district under the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh and along the borderland adjacent to the Mizoram state of India. They have been habituated to live in dense forests and inaccessible hilly regions. The 1991 Census of Bangladesh enumerated that the Pankho population in the Chittagong Hill Tracts was 3,227. Hunter noted, 'The Banjogi and Pankho Tribes claim to be of common origin, sprung from two brothers, and in language, customs, and habits they exhibit a great similarity.'⁴⁷ The Pankho Tribes can be found in greater or lesser numbers in the 6 upazillas out of the 10 districts of this region. The villages of the Pankhos are located in faraway places away from the upazila headquarters. The communications in their localities are maintained by boats driven by indigenous engines or by walking a long distance on foot. Their oldest locality is situated on the Bashanta hills on the eastern bank of the Karnaphuli under Rangamati Sadar upazila. The researchers believe that they have been living in this region for 200 years.

The Pankho Tribes are different from other *Adivasi* tribes, and they are complacent with their past. They are far from the influence of modern civilization. They do not have any desire for education or modern opportunities or advantages. In 1999, their 60 families were rehabilitated with modern facilities Tinkuniamouza (J.L. No. 120) at Bilaichhadi. But after six months, they moved from there and began to live beside dense forests.⁴⁸ They swear to keep witness with their blood, water, chopper, spear, gun, the moon, stars, etc., to do good works. They remain closer to nature. They do not have any desire for wealth. They fulfil their demand for food through traditional hunting in forests and *jhum* cultivation on the slopes of the hills.⁴⁹ The Pankho women cultivate their land using 100 percent traditional methods.

Like other *Adivasi* tribes, the Pankho women weave clothes on *komor* looms (pic.4). One of their special features is that they can weave perfect clothes without any difficulty. They produce clothes not only for the use of their own family but also for sale to others. Sometimes, they sell the clothes they produce in the local markets. The Pankho tribes still conduct their business dealings through the barter system. They exchange their clothes for their necessary articles in the markets. The Pankho men stay at home and spare their time doing their domestic work. They have their traditional expertise in handicrafts made of bamboo and cane. In this field, women are much more advanced. The tourists visiting these areas buy their products from the markets.

In addition to the *Adivasis* already mentioned above, the Marma and the Bawm tribes also live in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Risley has referred to the Marmas as '*Myamma* or Roang Magh, a sub-tribe of Maghs in the Hill Tracts of Chittagong.'⁵¹ The Bawm tribes are expert *jhum* cultivators. They produce paddy, maize, chilly, beans, spiny gourd, sesame, cotton, turmeric, ginger, *marfa*,

The working area of the Adivasi women⁵⁰

<i>Jhum</i> Cultivation	Cleaning of jungles, sowing crops, cleaning of weeds from the crops, harvesting and thrashing paddy, growing tea and oilseeds between two hills.	Drying fish, storing dried fish, producing rice from paddy.
Cultivation on plain land	Cultivation of land, Sowing of seeds, planting the seedlings, cleaning of weeds from the crops, harvesting of crops.	Preservation of fruits and vegetables collected from forests.
Gathering of Forest Produce	Collection of cotton from forests, cutting of grass and flax, collection of fruits and roots.	Collection of firewood, snail, and crab.
Handicrafts	Making baskets from bamboo and cane, mat making, and preparing rope from bamboo and cane.	Making clothes on looms, spinning thread, making <i>biri</i> and cigarettes.
Animal Husbandry	Rearing of duck, hen, cattle, goat, and swine.	Collection of milk and production of butter and ghee.
Trade and Commerce	Independent shopkeeping and work as a daily labourer in local commercial establishments.	Selling of own agricultural produce and handicrafts in local hats and bazaars.

lady's funder, cucumber, pumpkin, and vegetables through *jhum* cultivation. Besides, they produce pineapple, banana, papaya, mango, jackfruit, cashew nuts, arum, oranges, etc. One of their special features is that they make their articles for daily needs and musical instruments out of materials like wood, bamboo, flax, leaves, cotton, *jhumur* leaves, animal skin, birds' feathers, and tails collected from forests.⁵² They also make baskets, caps, cradles, and fishing traps with bamboo and cane and sell these products in the market.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts lie in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh, which is the only hill region of the country. A series of hills are there. More than twenty groups of Adivasis have been living in this part of the country for hundreds of years. The *Adivasi* women living here make an extensive contribution to the production of agricultural commodities and handicrafts. The feature of the soil in the hills is that it is loamy, and its colour is mainly yellow-brown and reddish-brown. The cliffs of the hills are covered with dense clusters of bamboo, tall trees, creepers, and weeds. Besides these, this tract is rich in valuable wood, cane, and flax. The *Adivasis* of this region raise many crops and vegetables like paddy, maize, chilly, beans, spiny gourd, sesame, cotton, turmeric, ginger, *marfa*, lady's funder, cucumber, pumpkin, etc. through *jhum* cultivation. Among the fruits, they produce pineapple, banana, papaya, mango,

jackfruit, oranges, etc. At the same time, they produce cotton clothes, bamboo nets, bamboo baskets, and different types of handicrafts in cottage industries. They sell their surplus production in the markets and earn money after fulfilling their demands. The colourful and well-designed clothes woven on *komor* looms by the *Adivasi* women were one of their best-selling products. Among the tourists, there is a great demand for their woven clothes and other handicrafts. They are self-dependent not only at home but also in the outside world. The *Adivasi* women of the Chittagong Hill Tracts make a remarkable contribution to the development of agriculture and industries in Chittagong.



1. Kumi women in agricultural work



2. Chakma women weaving cloth



3. Chakma women going for jhum cultivation



4. Pangkhua girl weaving



5. Rakhain women weaving cloth



6. Rakhain women at agricultural work

(1-6, Mesbah Kamal & others, *op.cit.*, pp. 69, 73, 104, 162, 174, 185)

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