

Ethnic Communities of Bangladesh

Kibriaul Khaleque, Ph.D

Introduction

The importance of local people's participation in the development programmes is now being increasingly emphasized in the policy papers of both the government of the less developed countries as well as the foreign donor agencies that support the development programmes. Accordingly, the policy planners at both levels have realized the need for including the ethnic communities in the development projects designed for the areas where these people live. The growing concern over an equitable distribution of the benefits of development programmes among all the people of a country have also led the policy planners to think about the ethnic groups. Indeed, these people deserve their share in the fruits of development programmes.

Like other less developed countries, the need for involvement of the ethnic communities in the development programmes, particularly in the programmes designed for the areas where these people live, has been recognized by the policy planners in Bangladesh. For the proper planning and implementation of development programmes, it is important to know who belong to the ethnic communities, where do they live, and under what social and economic condition do they live? Unfortunately, there is dearth of information about these people of Bangladesh. Shortage of anthropologists specially trained in ethnic studies, lack of government initiatives, lack of resources for conducting research, and similar other reasons might have been responsible for an inadequate number of studies on the ethnic groups of Bangladesh.

In order to get even some basic information about the ethnic communities, one has to rely on the scattered sources which are often difficult to get hold of. This paper is a modest attempt to put together some basic information from the scattered and sporadic sources. The information I gathered through my own field research on the Garo community of Madhupur Garh forest and through my visits to some other ethnic areas of Bangladesh is also incorporated in this paper. This paper is the revised version of an earlier article of mine (Khaleque 1987). Based on the comments received from the critics of the earlier version, certain information has been revised, modified, and amplified in the present version. In addition, the present version contains updated demographic data on the tribal population (as they were referred to in the Census Report) of Bangladesh based on the most recent Government Census Reports and also ethno graphic information from the most recent sources.

A few small ethnic groups those belong to the category "ex-tribal" were not mentioned in the previous version. These groups have lost their distinct identity, language, culture, and traditions. They are integrated into the mainstream Bengali society and culture. Nevertheless, being small ethnic groups they deserve their share in the fruits of development projects.

So, the names of these groups have been mentioned in the present version. By "ethnic communities" or "ethnic groups" a reference has been made to those people whose linguistic and/or cultural background is different from the linguistic and cultural background of the mainstream population of Bangladesh. It may be noted that most anthropologists now use the term "ethnic group" or "ethnic community" instead of using the term "tribe" or "tribal group". The people belonging to ethnic groups often do not like the use of the term "tribe" or "tribal group" to refer to them, particularly in those situations where these terms are used in a derogatory sense. The term "Adivasi" or "indigenous people" is sometimes used to mean the people who are otherwise referred to as "tribals." But the use of this term is often confusing, particularly in those cases where it is hard to establish whether the group in question is the indigenous people of the area they inhabit or they migrated to that area from somewhere else. To avoid this kind of confusion and also to avoid the term "tribe" or "tribal group," the different groups of people covered in this paper has been referred to as "ethnic communities" or "ethnic groups."

A Brief Review of Literature

The earliest sources on the ethnic communities of Bangladesh consist of a few books written by some British Government officials during the period between the middle of 19th century and the first quarter of 20th century. These classical sources include: Dalton (1872), Gait (1895), Gurdon (1907), Hodson (1908), Hunter (1876), Hutchinson (1906), Lewin (1869; 1870; 1873), Playfair (1909), Riebeck (1885), Risley (1891), and Smart (1866). It may be noted that after the establishment of political and military control over the ethnic areas the British Government made attempts to find the best possible ways to deal with the ethnic communities. Information on the ethnic communities and their socio-cultural life were, therefore, collected and the findings were documented in the above books as well as in other government publications. These books were intended more for administrative purposes than for academic research. Nevertheless, these are good ethno graphic accounts of that time and so far remained the main sources of the ethnic communities of Bangladesh.

Except for the ethnographic accounts on the ethnic communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) area, all the other books relate mainly to the ethnic communities of the Indian part of the northern and north-eastern borders of Bangladesh. People belonging to the same ethnic group also live in the Bangladesh part of the border and have more or less the same basic social organization and culture as their Indian counterpart. As such, the books written on those who live in the Indian territories relate only to a certain extent to those who live in the present-day Bangladesh territory. However, the ethnic communities living in the Bangladesh part have always had some differences in certain aspects of their life. But these differences had not been documented in the above-mentioned books. It is important to note that a good number of studies were done on the ethnic communities living in the Indian part of the northern borders of Bangladesh (for an example of only one ethnic group, see the Bibliography in Khaleque 1982), but nearly nothing was done on those living in the Bangladesh part.

Census Reports and District Gazetteers compiled during the British rule contain valuable information about the ethnic communities and hence these documents may be regarded as good sources. Such official documents had been updated in the subsequent period. But except for a continuation of the old tradition of preparing these documents, no significant research had been done in the post-British period. The Government documents prepared during the Pakistani rule (1947-1971) contain very few new information. These were basically a reproduction of the older sources. The same is the case with the only book, "Pakistaner Upajati" (1963), published by the Pakistan Government.

Besides the above sources, we find a few books and articles published during the middle of 20th century. These sources contain the findings of a few foreign anthropologists who did field research or at least had visited the ethnic areas during this period. Thus mention may be made of the works of Bernot(1957; 1958; 1964), Bessaignet (1958; 1960), Brauns (1973),Kauffman (1962), Levi-Strauss (1952a; 1952b), Sopher (1963;1964). Most of these studies were concerned with the ethnic communities of the CHT and a very few on the ethnic groups living in the northern borders of Bangladesh.

Among the recent sources, there are a few books written by a Bangladeshi amateur writer (see Sattar 1971; 1975; 1978). The facts presented in these books are based either on the classical sources, or on the hearsay, and/ or the superficial knowledge gained by the author through his occasional visits to the ethnic areas. The author has neither any background in anthropology or sociology (d. Maloney 1984:9), nor does he have any training in research methodology. As a result, the contents of these books suffer from many shortcomings.

To show the nature of shortcomings, let us consider a few examples from one of the books written by this author. He writes, "There are many other tribes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts which lack this culture dynamism. Consequently, they are lost in the wilderness of pre-civilized cult, belief and customs. They have not been able to evolve in any kind of cultures" (Sattar 1971:325).

To an anthropologist or to a sociologist, a society without culture is impossibility. Every society has a culture if the concept of culture is taken as it is defined in anthropology and sociology. Hence, the above expression made by this author is not acceptable in anthropology or sociology. Maloney (1984:9) has criticized similar expressions in the same book of the above author. He remarked that Sattar refers to ethnic languages as "dialects," and to their religions as "superstitious beliefs" and "irrational practices" (1971:13,17,135, 225). Ethnic languages are not "dialect" of the Bengali language as Sattar thought. These are distinct languages that belong to different branches of the various language family (see below). Similarly, Mey (1984:333) has criticized Sattar (1971) for describing the ethnic groups as "wild and crude" (Sattar1971:193). The use of such value-laden words to describe the ethnic communities or their religion is not acceptable in anthropology. Examples of similar views expressed by this author in the book mentioned above as well as in other books can be multiplied. Nevertheless, the books written by this author may be regarded as the pioneering efforts of a Bangladeshi writer to record certain information about the ethnic communities.

A recent book, "Tribal Cultures of Bangladesh" (Qureshi 1984) may be regarded as a good source. Some of the articles in this book had been contributed by professional anthropologists, some by students of anthropology or sociology who were engaged in research on ethnic communities at the time of writing their article, while some articles by persons well informed in ethnic affairs. However, this book also contains a few articles written by amateur writers. The quality of information presented by those writers is the same as that of the information in the writings of the amateur writer mentioned earlier. Recent data, and in some cases, an analysis of the nature and trends of social change among the ethnic communities of Bangladesh may be found in various articles published in different local and foreign journals. Among the most recent journal articles written by professional anthropologists and social scientists, we may include: Bertocci (1984), Islam (1981), Jahangir (1979), Khaleque(1983a,1983b,1984,1985,1988), Mey (1978), Montu (1980), and Zaman (1982). There are also some mimeographs (see for example, Chowdhury 1979), and theses and dissertations (Khaleque 1982, 1992; Rahman 1985) which contain valuable recent data on some ethnic communities.

The most recently published ethnographic accounts on specific ethnic communities of Bangladesh that I came across are: The Paharias by Gomes (1988) and Bangladesher Garo Sampradai (in Bengali) by Jengcham (1994). The former is based on the author's research among the Paharia people, while the latter is based on the author's observation of his own society and culture.

Number of Ethnic Communities

The beginning sentence of the earlier version of this paper was: "People belonging to more than two dozens ethnic communities live in Bangladesh." An American anthropologist (Burling 1988), a critic of that version, remarked: "why not you tell us exactly how many ethnic groups are there in Bangladesh." Let me begin this section with my response to the above remark.

The number of ethnic communities has been variously mentioned in the written sources. In the different articles published in Tribal Cultures a/Bangladesh (Qureshi 1984), for example, the number of ethnic communities has been mentioned as 12 (Bertocci 1984:346 and 358 Footnote 4; based on 1951 Census data as summarized by Bessaignet 1958:1), 15 (Samad 1984:54; basedon 1974 Census Report), 28 and 31 (Urao 1984:129 and Qureshi 1984:XV, respectively; no source has been mentioned - both are perhaps based on personal estimates), and 46 (Maloney 1984:8-22, based on his own distribution of the ethnic communities by language category).

Being puzzled by such a wide variation in the number of ethnic groups, i.e. from 12 to 46 groups, I decided to keep the number vague in the earlier version of this paper by saying "more than two dozens." I left the responsibility of finding the exact number with the readers who would pursue their interest further.

According to the most recent government official statistics (Census Report 1991) the number of ethnic communities is 29. But if the two cases where the same tribe has been listed as two separate ethnic communities are taken into consideration, the number of ethnic communities would be 27. The information found in the available literature and the spatial distribution given in the 1991 Census Report suggests that such mistakes were committed in the following cases:

The Tipra and Tripura have been listed as two separate groups, but they are, in fact, the same people. These groups are most commonly mentioned in the literature under the name Tipra but they are variously regarded as Tipra and Tripura by their Bengali neighbours in different areas. Similarly, the Bongshi and Rajbongshi, who are really the same people, have been listed in the Census Report as two separate ethnic communities. In this case, the people prefer to identify themselves as Rajbongshi but their Bengali neighbors call them Bongshi. In the literature, the name of this ethnic group is most commonly spelt as Rajbansi.

Listing the different names of the same tribe in different areas as separate ethnic communities, as found in the Census Report has contributed to the already-existing confusion about the number of ethnic communities. Clearly, the census enumerators were not aware of the facts that the same ethnic group is known by different names. The reasons for such variations in name are different in different situations. Two examples are already given above. Let us consider other cases to show the nature of distortion in the names of ethnic groups in different situations.

The people who call themselves Marma are called Mog or Mogh by the Bengali. The name Mogh is often used by the Bengali people in a derogatory sense, so the people who are called Mogh prefer to identify themselves as Marma. Again, the same people are known as Rakhaine in Patuakhali area. In this case, the people who live in that area also prefer not to identify themselves by the name Mogh for the same reason described above. But they use a different name perhaps to distinguish themselves from those in Chittagong area (cf. Khan 1984).

The variation in the English spelling of the name of certain ethnic groups is another source of confusion. It is sometimes hard to decide whether the different spellings of the name of any ethnic community constitute the same people or they are different ethnic communities. For example, the name of the ethnic community most commonly spelt "Oraon" has been spelt "Urang" in the 1991 Census Report. Looking at the geographical areas given in the Census Report against the name "Urang," I figured out that "Urang" must be "Oraon," but one may easily think that these two are different groups. The same is perhaps true in the case of the "Khyang" and "khyen." These two groups were mentioned by Maloney (1984:12) as two separate ethnic communities, but as one ethnic group in other sources, including the Government Census Reports. It is interesting to note that the name of the ethnic community most commonly spelt as "Koch" has been spelt as such on one page of Table 11.17 in the 1991 Census Report, and "Coach" on the following page, which is a continuation of the same Table. Although two different forms of spelling have been used, they were not treated as two separate ethnic communities. They were mentioned on the same column, although on two different pages, and one population figure has been given for this ethnic group. It might have been a typing error, but the spelling of the name of this ethnic community with two different letters "C" and "K" and an extra letter "a" in the case of spelling "Coach" indicates something else. During my field research among the Garo of Tangail and Mymensingh Districts, I learnt that "Koch" (who lives in the same area) is variously pronounced by the local people as Koch, Koach, and Kuch. In other areas, the pronunciation may be a little different. I think the variation in the spelling is a reflection of variations in the pronunciation of the name of this ethnic community. The divisions or branches of certain ethnic communities have been listed as separate ethnic groups by Maloney (1984) in his list of ethnic communities by their language category. He also mentioned the ex-tribal groups as tribes. Which groups constitute the branches of other larger ethnic communities and which groups are the ex-tribal people have been mentioned by Maloney (1984). But there are no such notes in the Census Report.

Treating the branches of a major ethnic group as separate ethnic groups is perhaps the result of an exact report of what people said. When the people belonging to any ethnic communities are

asked about their group affiliation, they perhaps gave the main ethnic group's branch name which they belong to. Such divisions or sub-divisions of large ethnic communities often result from population increase and other social, economic, and political changes.

There is no point to give a separate name of a group based on the name of the division of a main ethnic group when the people in both the branch and main ethnic group speak the same language and share the same culture and traditions. Even if the branch group live in a different geographical area, they might be still identified with the main group and could be listed under the same name. Nevertheless, if the people in branch groups wish to identify themselves by the name they chose for their branch, then they should perhaps be recorded accordingly. None of the available sources says anything about how these branches came to be known as separate ethnic communities: was it the people's wishes to have them recorded under the branch names or was it the decision of the census enumerators or ethnographers to use the branch names as separate ethnic groups?

The inclusion of the ex-tribal groups in the list of tribes also creates confusion. If these groups are included in the discussion of a paper, then there should be a clear note stating that they are "ex-tribal," as it has been done here.. Otherwise, the confusion about the number of ethnic communities will remain as it is. To keep consistency with the most recent population data, I have listed the different ethnic communities in Table 1 according to the list given in the 1991 Census Report. However, I have altered the English spelling of the names of certain ethnic communities given in the 1991 Census Report to maintain uniformity with the English spelling most commonly found in the existing literature. The different forms of the English spelling found in the Census Report and in some of the other sources have been mentioned in parentheses against the name of the ethnic communities.

In a few cases, the names of certain ethnic groups were found only in the 1991 Census Report. No such name, nor even a similar sounding name with a different spelling, was found in any other literature. These cases have been indicated by a note-"found only in the 1991 Census Report" -in parenthesis at the end of names of those ethnic communities.

Table : Distribution of the Ethnic Communities of Bangladesh by Population Size and Geographical Areas

<u>Ethnic Community</u>	<u>Population</u>
Bawrn (also spelt as Bum, Baur, Barn)	13471
Buna (found only in the 1991 Census Report)	7421
Chakma	252858
Garo (people prefer the name Mandi)	64280
Hajong	11540
Harizon (found only in the 1991 Census Report)	1132
Kharni (also spelt as Khurni, Kami)	1241
Khasi (generally known as Khasia)	12280
Khyang (also spelt as Khyen)	2343
Koch (also spelt as Kots, Kuch, Coach)	16567
Lushai (also known as Kuki, Mizo)	662
Mahat (also known as Mahatu)	3534
Manipuri (also known as Meithei)	24882
Marma (also known as Mag, Mogh, Mug)	157301
Mro (also spelt as Mroo)	126
Mrong (also spelt as Murang, Mrung)	22178
Munda (also known as Mundari)	2132
Oraon (also spelt as Urang, Urao)	8216
Paharia (also known as Pahary)	1853
Pankho (also spelt as Pangkhu, Pangkhua)	3227

Rajbansi (also spelt as Rajbongshi)	7556
Rakhaine (a branch of Marma)	16932
Sak (also spelt as Chak, Tsak, Thak)	2127
Santal (also spelt as Saontal)	202162
Tanchangya (abranchofChakrna)	21639
Tipra (also known as Tripuri, Tripura)	81014
Urea (found only in the 1991 Census Report)	5561
Other (see text, for comments)	261743
Total -	1205978

The ethnic groups that constitute the branch or division of other major ethnic communities have been indicated in Table by providing the name of the major ethnic group in parentheses at the end of the names of those ethnic communities. Information about the possible splitting of major ethnic communities into branches and divisions was found in some of the available literature (see for example, Maloney 1984; Khan 1984).

For reasons given earlier, the population data given in the 1991 Census Report for the ethnic groups Tipra and Tripura were added together and the sum was given as the population size of the Tipra in Table. Likewise, the data for the Bongshi and Rajbongshi were added together and their sum was given as the population size of Rajbansi. The population data given in the 1991 Census Report under "other" perhaps include the smaller sections or sub-divisions of some of the ethnic communities listed in Table, as well as the ex-tribal groups mentioned in other sources. The names of ethnic groups found in other sources in addition to those listed in Table are perhaps lumped together under "other" in the Census Report. These additional groups (cf. Maloney 1984) are: Banjogi (similar to Pankho and Kuki,), Dalu or Dulai or Dalui (a section of Garo), Hadi (a Hinduized group), Ho (a section of Munda), Kachari or Kacari (a Hinduized group), Mahili (a sub-division of Santal), Mikir (a Hinduized group), Paliya (a branch of Rajbansi), Pathor (a Hinduized group), Pnar (a sub-division of Khasi), Riang{ a section ofTipra), and Shendu (a branch of Khami).

The list of ethnic communities given by Maloney (1984) includes another 10 groups: Bede, Bhumali, Bhuiya, Ganghu, Jaliya (Kaibartta), Kukamar, Kurmi, Mahto, Malla (Mallo), Namasudra. These groups are, in fact, ex-tribal groups. Maloney is aware of this fact, but he has included them in the list of tribes to identify the Indo-Aryan speaking small ethnic groups.

Ethnic Population and Spatial Distribution

According to the Census of 1991, the ethnic population of Bangladesh is 1.2 million, which constitutes 1.13% of the country's total population. In fact, the ethnic population might be more than the figure given in the Census Report. There are reasons for supposing so. It has been observed that the ethnic people who were converted to Christianity are often listed in the Government official documents under the category "Christian," while those who use Bengali names similar to the typical Hindu names are often grouped under the category "Hindu." In both cases, ethnic people are excluded from the groups where they belong to. One can easily make such mistakes if one does not have adequate knowledge about the ethnic people and their ethnic, religious, and linguistic background. Even if some of the census enumerators possess such knowledge, all of them cannot be expected to have it.

Examples of a wide gap between Government official statistics and unofficial private censuses are not hard to find in literature. Maloney (1984:8) has mentioned that according to the Monthly Statistical Bulletin of Bangladesh (March 1981), the ethnic population of the five Districts in Rajshahi Division was 62,000. But the number of ethnic people found by the various Christian missions in private censuses was double as much as the population given in official statistics. A similar example has been given by Anwar.(1984:370), who has stated that the ethnic population

in Dinajpur was 11,000 in the official documents, while it was 55,000 according to the unofficial statistics (no period was mentioned).

To compare the data given in the 1991 Census Report with a research-based estimate, an example may be cited from a recent study on the Garo community of Madhupur Garh forest. According to Khaleque (1992), who did his Ph.D. Dissertation research on the Garo of Madhupur Garh of Tangail District, the Garo population of this area is 25,000, whereas the Garo population of the whole Tangail District is 2112 according to the 1991 Census Report. Khaleque's (1992) estimate is based on a sample survey of 10 villages out of 30 Garo villages within and around Madhupur National Park area.

When I wrote the previous version of this paper, it was impossible for me to present any distribution of the ethnic communities according to their population size. In the past Census Reports, no population size for individual ethnic group was given separately. All the small ethnic groups of a district used to be lumped together under the heading "tribal." However, the 1991 Census Report contains a spatial distribution of the "tribal" groups by the districts where they live and also a distribution by their population size (see Table given above).

The spatial distribution of the ethnic groups given in Table 11.17 of the 1991 Census Report shows that, there are some ethnic people in all the 64 Districts of Bangladesh. The tribal people living in different Districts belong to different groups. A closer look at the District-wise distribution would reveal that people of certain ethnic groups are concentrated in certain areas. Traditionally, the ethnic groups have been concentrated in the north and north-eastern borders, the forest areas of the north-central region, and the entire area of the CHT (bordering Assam and upper Burma to the East, Arakan to the South and Chittagong District to the West).

The ethnic communities like the Koch, Munda, Oraon, Paharia, Rajbansi, and Santal have been traditionally inhabiting certain parts of Bogra, Dinajpur, Kusthia, Pabna, Rajshahi, and Rangpur Districts in the northern border. The greater Sylhet District in the north-eastern border is the traditional area of Khasi, Manipuri, Pathor, and Tipra community. The Garo, Koch, Hajong people have been living in Mymensingh and Jamalpur District in the northern borders and in Tangail District in the north-central region. The Chittagong Hill Tracts are the traditional homeland of the ethnic communities other than those mentioned above. The large ethnic communities like the Chakma and Marma are concentrated in this area. Scattered settlements of ethnic communities found in Barisal, Comilla, Dhaka, Faridpur, Khulna, Patuakhali, and other Districts constitute the sections of different ethnic communities mentioned in Table.

Ethnic Background

Except for the Santal, Munda and Oraon, who resemble the Dravidians, people of almost all other ethnic communities have certain Mongoloid features in their physical appearance. All the ethnic groups of the CHT, the Garo in Mymensingh, Tangail, and Jamalpur districts, the Khasi in Sylhet district display Mongoloid characteristics. The admixture with other races is less evident in these cases. But a mixture of Dravidian and Mongoloid races is clearly evident in the physical characteristics of such groups as the Koch, Hajong, Rajbansi, Manipuri (Meithei), and Pathor. Some of these groups (e.g. the Koch) look more Mongoloid than Dravidian, while some others (e.g. the Hajong) look more Dravidian than Mongoloid.

It is assumed that the original home of most of these ethnic groups was somewhere else other than the area now constituting the territory of Bangladesh. Almost all the ethnic communities of the CHT are believed to have had their original homeland in Arakan and they migrated to their present habitat at different times in the past centuries. The Tipras had migrated from the Tipperah hills (India). The Garo, Khasi, Manipuri, Rajboansi, and Koch were basically Tibetan ethnic communities which drifted down to Assam (India) and then to their present settlements in the different areas of India and Bangladesh. The Munda, Oraon, and Santals are the ethnic people of

Chhota Nagpur and Santal Parganas of India and they came to the area now known as Bangladesh during the British period.

Language

Except for a few people living in the interior part of the CHT, almost all the ethnic communities of Bangladesh are bi-lingual. They have learnt the Bengali language for communicating with the Bengali neighbours and retained their own language to use it among themselves. In addition to the Bengali language, some of the converted Christians among the ethnic people have learnt the English language. The Chakma and Tanchangya people speak a language, which is a dialect variant of Bengali and do not use their original language anymore. The Rajbansi, Paharia, Koch, and Pathors have long lost their original language. They now use the Bengali language even for communicating with their own people.

Distribution of Ethnic Communities by Linguistic Affiliation

Language Family	Branch	Ethnic Communities
Tibeto-Burmese	Kuki-Chin	Bawm, Chakma, Khami, Khyang, Lushai, Manipuri, Marma, Mro, Pankho, Sak, Tanchangya (other groups: Banjogi, Shendu)
	Bara (Bodo)	Garos, Hajongs, Kochs, Mrongs, Rajbansis, Tipras (other groups: Dalus, Hadis, Kacharis (kacaris), Mikirs, Paliyas, Pathors, Riangs)
Austro-Asiatic	Khasi Munda	Khasis (other group: Pnar) ;, Mundas, Santals (other groups: Mahilis, Hos)
Dravidian Indo-Aryan		Oraons, Paharias, Bedes, Bhuiyals, Bhuiyas, Ganghus, Jaliya-Kaibarllas, Kukamars, Kurmis, Mahatos, Malias, Namasudras

Note: "Other groups" mentioned in parentheses, as well as the groups listed under the Indo-Aryan language family were found in some sources, but not in the 1991 Census Report (see text, for more information).

The original languages of the different ethnic groups belong to the various branches of different language families. A distribution of the ethnic communities by language categories (d. Maloney 1984; Grierson 1903) is given in Table. It may be noted that original written script was absent in all the cases of ethnic languages. However, many of these peoples have adopted other's script to write their own language. Thus Burmese script was adopted by the Chakma and Marma, Bengali script by the Tipra and Manipuri, and Roman script by the Garo, Lushai, Santal, and some others.

Religion

The Marma, Chakma, and Tanchangya are Buddhists and there are a few Buddhists among the other small ethnic groups of the CHT. Most people in the smaller ethnic communities of the interior parts of the CHT were animists. Some of these animists have been converted to Christianity by the Christian missionaries working in this area. Thus many of the Bawms, Lushais, and Pankhos are now converted Christians. A process of Christianization is presently going on among these as well as other ethnic communities like the Mrongs and Mrs. The Garos have had their traditional religion, which is a form of animism. But the majority of them have been converted to Christianity. The Kochs, Hajongs, Pathors, and Manipuris are Hinduized ethnic communities. The

Santals retained their traditional religion, which is based on belief in spirit (animism). However, they have been influenced by Hinduism and some of them are converted to Christianity.

A process of Christianization has been going in the ethnic areas since the British period. Before Christianization, however, most of the ethnic groups of the northern and north-eastern borders had been influenced by Hinduism, while those in the CHT by Buddhism. The rate of Islamization is very insignificant compared to that of Christianization. There are a few converted Muslims among the Rajbansis and also among the Garo, but their number is very insignificant in both cases.

Descent System and Kinship Organization

Except for the Garo and Khasi, all the ethnic communities of Bangladesh are patrilineal, i.e. they reckon descent from father's side. Property is transmitted in most cases from father to son (patrilineal inheritance), although in some cases the daughters also inherit their parents' property. The pattern of marital residence is patrilocal (wife comes at marriage to live in her husband's group) in all these patrilineal ethnic communities.

The Garo and Khasi are matrilineal, i.e. they reckon descent from mother's side. The system of property inheritance in these two ethnic communities is also matrilineal (daughters inherit their mother's property). Unlike the patrilineal ethnic communities, the pattern of marital residence among the Garo and Khasi is matrilocal (husband comes at marriage to live in his wife's group). There are certain indications which suggest matrilineal and matrilocal trends among the Marma. Remnants of matrilocal residence pattern may be discovered among the Marmas living in Arakan, but not in the case of those living in the CHT (see Levi -Strauss 1952a:51). A moiety structure is found among the Garo, and to some extent, among the Bawm, while all the other ethnic communities have a clan system. Clan exogamy is practiced by nearly all the ethnic communities.

Occupation and Economy

Almost all the ethnic communities are mainly agriculturists. The ethnic people in the north-western districts have long been engaged in settled wet rice cultivation, although most of them have other secondary occupations like trading, crafts, weaving, and so on. Among the ethnic groups of Sylhet district, the Khasis have traditionally been involved in trading across the border. Such trading is their main occupation, and agriculture is their secondary occupation. The Manipuri are basically craftsmen (carpenter and jeweller). Gathering and selling fuels is the primary occupation of the Pathors: In the CHT, all the ridge-top living ethnic communities have traditionally been engaged in shifting cultivation, known as jum. The valley-inhabiting groups of this area (mainly the Marma and Chakma) were also shifting cultivators in the past. But due to the Government prohibition on shifting cultivation, most of these people had to give it up and adopt settled plough cultivation for growing wet rice. Although the Marma and Chakma had adopted settled plough cultivation, some of them are now compelled to practice shifting cultivation mainly due to the shortage of land in the valley. Such a shortage of suitable land for plough cultivation had resulted largely from the construction of Kaptai dam for the Kamaphuli Hydroelectric Project. The creation of a lake (reservoir) by constructing a dam caused the submergence of 50,000 acres of settled, cultivated land. This area constitutes about 40 per cent of the district's total arable land. The people who were affected by the creation of this reservoir have not been adequately rehabilitated. So they have to find land in the hill-top for shifting cultivation.

But as the Government Jhum Control Board keeps checks on migration from one hill to another, it is now becoming increasingly difficult for these people to support themselves. Some of the valley-inhabiting groups and a few ridge-top living ethnic communities have recently established fruit gardens (pineapple and orange), which now serve as an alternative means for their subsistence (for details of economic changes in the CHT, see the articles written by Bertocci, Jahangir, Mey, and Zaman in Qureshi 1984).

Like the ethnic communities of the CHT, the Garo of Tangail, Mymensingh and Jamalpur Districts were also shifting cultivators, but Government prohibition made it imperative for them to adopt wet rice cultivation. The Garo people also found other new means of subsistence. Some of them have converted their previous jum fields to pineapple gardens, and pineapple eventually became the main source of their livelihood. Most of the ethnic groups lived in the past in a subsistence economy, but a market economy emerged in the process of their integration into the mainstream society. Both external and internal factors had been responsible for such a shift in economy. The external factors are: the imposition of external political control (see below), settlement of non-tribal outsiders in the ethnic areas, external market forces, and so on. And the internal factors are: the adoption of wet rice cultivation, knowledge of the outside world, changes in property relations, introduction of modern education, changes in the attitude towards life, ideas of value, exploitation for money, importance of financial investment, return, and profit, and so on (see Khaleque 1982; 1983 for an analysis of the economic changes in the case of Garo society).

Political Life

Centralized political authority and territorial form of organization were absent in most ethnic communities. The ethnic group as a whole, in nearly every case, was a kind of loose political unit having no significant organizational function, although ethnic affiliation had always played certain role in their life. Every tribal village with a traditional headman was a kind of independent political unit. In most cases, the village founder or his descendants used to be the village headman, who usually had no formal authority over other villagers. The role of such a headman was to maintain peace and order in his society, organize economic activities of the villagers, and in some cases, to perform certain rituals. However, a centralized political authority and a hierarchical administrative organization was superimposed among the ethnic people in order to integrate them into the wider administration of the country. After establishing political and military control over the ethnic areas the British rulers appointed revenue collectors for collecting revenue from the ethnic communities. These revenue collectors used to retain a part of the collected revenue for themselves and passed the remainder to the Government. Sub-collectors were employed in turn by the collectors and the function of collecting revenues from the village communities was usually delegated to the village headmen.

The village headmen were appointed from the village leaders who seemed to be efficient for revenue collection, not necessarily from the traditional headmen. In some cases, however, the traditional headmen were also included. The village headmen who were given the responsibility of revenue collection had acquired a dominant position in their society. In most cases, they became the real administrators of their respective ethnic group. This is particularly true in the CHT areas. Generally, the revenue collectors in the ethnic areas were the Bengali (mainly Hindu) zamindars, but in the CHT, they were appointed from among the ethnic people themselves. The whole area of the CHT was divided into three revenue "circles" and a "Raja" or "Chief" was appointed in each of them. The "circle" was, in its turn, sub-divided into "mouza," each of which consisted of several villages. One headman at both "mouza" and village level was appointed for revenue collection. Thus the ethnic communities of the CHT who were previously organized along kinship lines were subjected to a territorial system of administration.

The system of administration introduced in the British period had been continued during the Pakistani rule. The ethnic communities were incorporated into the broader framework of the national political system in 1960 when the institution of Basic Democracies was introduced in the then Pakistan. After the liberation of Bangladesh, the institution of Basic Democracies was replaced with a system of Union Parishad, which represents the local level civil administration in the ethnic areas. The revenue administration is no longer performed by village headmen, except in the case of the CHT, where the chiefs of ethnic group and their subordinate headmen still perform this function.

Acculturation and Conflict

A process of acculturation has long been going on among the ethnic communities of Bangladesh due to their symbiotic economic relationship with the mainstream Bengali society and also due to their integration into the wider political system. Except for the ethnic groups living in the interior part of the CHT, all the others have adopted many of the Bengali culture traits. The Hinduized ethnic communities have long lost their traditional way of life. Many of the small ethnic groups have been so much amalgamated that they even lost their ethnic identity. This is particularly true in the case of the ex-tribal groups. However, the larger groups like the Chakma, Marma, Garo, and some others have still maintained their distinct identity, although they have also adopted many traits of Bengali culture.

Although the ethnic communities have been maintaining political and economic relations with the mainstream Bengali people, some of them do not appreciate the Government policy towards the ethnic communities. They consider such policy to be the means for economic and political suppression by the Government authorities. According to them, the Government policy has an inherent element of discriminations against the ethnic communities and is aimed at the disintegration of their socio-cultural life. It is not hard to find cases of conflict and tension in the ethnic areas and ethnic people's reaction against certain Government policy (see Khaleque 1982; and the various articles on the CHT area in Qureshi 1984).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The information presented in this paper is too general and hence not enough for a real understanding of the ethnic situation in Bangladesh. More research is needed for a comprehensive ethnology of all the ethnic communities of Bangladesh. Instead of depending on the information collected long time ago or on the existing unreliable information gathered by amateur writers, systematic research programmes should be undertaken. Since very little research, or in some cases none at all, has been done on some of the ethnic groups of Bangladesh they could offer a good prospect for the professional anthropologists. The ethnic communities dealt with, to a considerable extent, in the earlier books are also worth studying now in order to discern the changes that have taken place since the time they were last studied. Most of the ethnic groups are changing very rapidly and many of their culture traits are likely to disappear in the near future. In order to understand the nature of changes in the ethnic communities of Bangladesh, systematic research should be conducted without further delay.

Studies relating to the origin of the various ethnic groups, their linguistic affinities, kinship and social organization, intercultural symbiosis, religious syncretism, nature and trends of political, economic and other changes, and so on, could be of much value from both an academic as well as from a pragmatic point of view. All these information along with an exact location and population size in each of the ethnic communities would be of great help for administrative purposes and policy formulations. Systematic empirical research should be the basis for formulating sound policy towards the ethnic communities. Policies formulated on the basis of anthropological research and their proper implementation might help reduce the tension that is going on in some ethnic areas of Bangladesh.

Kibriaul Khaleque, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, Dhaka University. He has conducted intensive research among the Garo in the Madhpur forest and wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on the land tenure of the Garo in the Madhpur forest.

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