

LIFE AND SOCIETY OF THE *MRO* ETHNIC GROUP OF BANGLADESH: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract: The study examines the conditions of the daily and social lives of the Mro (or Mru) ethnic community, small group of whom recently adopted Islam, used to reside in remote rural areas of Southeastern Bangladesh. This community is struggling to maintain and protect its traditions. Moro has centuries of unique and rich cultural heritage that they need to save. Many of their ethnic elders are trying to preserve their traditions, but they are slowly dying out after each generation. This study aims to find out what is happening to their culture and society, especially in rural areas. Exploratory, descriptive, and qualitative methods were used to pursue this ethnographic research. The work involves a few more researchers who had access to interviews with respondents to create a good picture of the ethnic communities' lifestyle, livelihoods, and economic conditions, as well as their cultural perspectives and identity. In Bangladesh, the Mro is an ethnic community that belongs to Muslim tribal society and follows the distinct cultures and traditions of their ethnic groups. The present endeavor documents the socioeconomic obstacles they had to overcome, their suffering through deprivation and oppression, and their exploitation by the dominant Bangali community. It discusses how they were settled in other parts of cities with poor infrastructure, police harassment, and discrimination. However, their economic condition has been worse compared to others who, due to a lack of education, cannot contribute to their local population. It is worth mentioning that there are almost 636 ethnic groups in Bangladesh. But because more people went to school after independence, most of them can't speak their language well anymore.

Keywords: Mro, Ethnic Group; Tribe; Culture; Tradition; Cultural Erosion; Hill Tracts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Various names are used simultaneously to refer to one of Bangladesh's extinct ethnic groups, the Mro. To be specific, they go by the names Murong, Mru, Mrung, Taung, etc. An insignificant portion of the Mru, a subset of the Chin people, dwell in western Myanmar. This tribe is found around the borders of Bangladesh, Myanmar, and India. Additionally, the northern part of Rakhine State may include them. Specifically in the Bandarban District and the Rangamati Hill District in Bangladesh's southeast Chittagong Hills, they reside (Brauns et al 2013). According to a census taken in 1991, there were 222,167 Mru living there. Mraw and Murong are additional names for them. They previously lacked the alphabet while having their own language.

There are now third-grade textbooks accessible in those pupils' native alphabets and languages. The Mrus go by the name Marucha. The Mru word "Maru" means "person." A clan is made up of numerous families in the Mru culture. Several Mru clans' names are now available. The *Mro* or Murongs are said to be one of the oldest and most illustrious tribes in Arakan. Two Murong kings governed Arakan even in the tenth century. In 957, Amythu reigned as king, and in 964, Pi-fiu. Moreover, *Wetheili* served as Arakan's capital during the time. However, the "Khaumu narrative" from the "History of the Ancient World" is said to exist in Mrod definitive oral history. In the tale, Khomarun, a man, and Khomanri, a woman, had a cave home together. There was no moon or sun on Earth at the time. Khaumu also means "guy of darkness" in Mro. Moreover, Khaomu Mro, which also means production or creation, was the name given to the kid of Khomarun and Khomanri. However, it is forbidden for boys and girls from the same clan to get married. The Mrus identify as patriarchal descendants. According to their way of life, the Mrus often arrange their marriages during the dry season (Benison 1933).

2. NOMENCLATURE OF THE ETHNIC *MRO*

After conquering the Mros tribe in Arakan, the Khumi tribe dispersed them. Sometime during the 17th and the 18th centuries, they relocated to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. However, many people think that this occurred around the 14th century. The Tripura Mros clan resides in the Khagrachari area. The languages of the two tribes are connected to one another. The Riangs are the Mrus' equivalents in the Indian state of Tripura. Mros, however, are commonly derided as inferior animal species, such as Mro-Dang or Myawktong. However, Mru call themselves Mro-cha. Mru signifies "man," whereas Cha denotes "being." Compared to the Chakma and Marma, the Murung or Mro, the two biggest tribal tribes in Bangladesh, are the CHTs region's oldest ethnic minority (Ahmed 2002). They represent several societal and cultural entities. The hamlet in which the Mro people live serves as the main socioeconomic unit of their way of life. The Mros are arranged into kin groupings and reside in hamlets, which are tiny settlements of five to twenty homes (Brauns and Loffler 1990). The term "Mro" has been around from ancient times, according to the 1458 manuscript "Ba Sa Phew Min Tham Echin" by Rakhine scholar Adyumanu. Additionally, King Narpati inscribed it on a stone at Saguin Hutopine in Line in 1442. For the purposes of Rakhine Maha Yazuntyagi and Dhanyavadi Yazuntit, as well as Marayu and Bedar's interpretations, the name Mro was later utilized in the Rakhine Puranas. On the banks of the Kolydan river, the Murangs and the Khumis engaged in a violent conflict. The Murangs were driven from Arakan by the Khumi tribes via conflict. So, somewhere in the 17th or 18th century, the Murongs moved toward the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Despite what the majority of Murongs think, this incident took place 14 centuries ago. The Mros relocated to the Chittagong Hill Tracts when the Khumis drove them out of Arakan, where they built new towns along the Sangu River, which borders the Matamuhuri River. Additionally, Burma Raja informed the district head of Chittagong in a letter.

The Mros are tall and powerful, with blackish-brown skin, and some have Mongolian characteristics. They have tranquil natures. On Mro males, beards and mustaches are uncommon. The Mrod is physically similar to the Semang people of Malaysia. A gotra in the Mro civilization is made up of multiple households. Even now, one still hears the names of several Mrod tribes. Ngarua, Naichah, Tam-tu-chah, Yemre, Ngarinchahn Tang, Kanbok, Prenju, Deng, and Khou are notable examples. However, it is illegal for men and women from the same clan or tribe to be married.

3. GEOGRAPHY

Geographically, Re Chaung and Sit Chaung are the two main rivers that pass through Saingdin. Both streams originate in the area's northern portion, serving as the Buthidaung Township's and Arakan Hill Tracts' border. For 48 km (30 mi), the two streams meander between rocks until coming together close to Tharaungchaung hamlet. The two streams often dry out after rain and flood during the monsoon season. Water flow is a difficulty in the streams because of the huge stones. The only ways to go into the interior of the area are via bamboo rafts and canoes. After removing any Kaing grasses that may have been there, the Mro produce tobacco on the sandy deposits on the sloping sides of the two streams. They too cultivate cotton, bamboo, and cane to distribute in the weekly market nearby.

4. LANGUAGE AND TEXT

The Mro language is primarily a hybrid of Tibetan and Burmese. But the Mro language spoken in Bangladesh is different from the Mro language spoken in Myanmar. The Lama, Ruma, Alikdam, and Thanchi forests in the Chimbuk Hills in the Bandarban district are home to the Mro speakers. Additionally, Rangamati reports seeing a few Mros. However, Mro is also the name of the Mro people's original language. The Mru people of Bangladesh believe that Torai, also known as "the great spirit," provided all peoples-aside from the Mru-with written languages and social codes to govern their daily lives. They believe that they were mistakenly excluded. a Mruic tongue that is a member of the Tibeto-Burman family of Sino-Tibetans (Simons et al. eds.).

5. *MRO* DEMOGRAPHY

Most Mro populations are located along the intersection of Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Indian borders. Some people live in one of the over 200 villages nestled away in the tropical forests of southeast Bangladesh's Chittagong Hills. 70,000 *Mro* people now live along Bangladesh and India's borders with Myanmar. Most 12,000 Mru people reside in western Myanmar's Yoma District in the Arakan Mountains. However, these figures can only be regarded as rough estimates since the most recent census was conducted in 1931 when colonial authorities still governed the country. As of 1931, there were 90 hamlets in the Saingdin area, each having two to twenty bamboo homes. In the 1931 Census, there were over 3500 residents, 1,779 of whom were males (Bennison 1933). 13,766 Mro people were estimated to be living in the world at the time. In the southern Bangladeshi Chittagong Hills, there are about 200 more villages, each with 20,000–25,000 people. There is an additional 2,000 Mros in West Bengal, India (Hattaway, Paul 2004).

Name	Description
People Name	Mro
Domestic Name	Mru
Population in BD	72,000
Global Population	98,000
Total Country	3

Figure-01: Mro Demography

Source: Joshua Project

6. JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

It is believed that Bangladesh represents a synthesis of multiple vanished ethnic groupings. For a few of them, the term "ethnic group" has now been adopted. Around 54 indigenous communities may be found in Bangladesh (Chowdhury & Chakma 2016). Around 1.10 percent of the overall population, as measured by the 2011 census, comes from several tiny ethnic communities (BBS 2011). Nearly One lac Mro live along the border of Bangladesh, India, and Myanmar. These three adjacent countries, each with its own culture, are home to the Mro people. A thorough study of the Mro people's habits, traditions, and way of life should be done to gather information for academic purposes.

7. OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

This research aims to examine Mro social and cultural norms from various perspectives, emphasizing how their society has evolved through time. The emphasis will also be on the issues and adjustments that their way of life had to make in the past due to the rise of modernity and the diffusion of other opportunist groups.

7.1 Specific objectives:

- To get acquainted with Mro ethnic ancestry and culture;
- To learn about Mro tradition and practices;
- To understand this extinct community scientifically in its natural setting

8. STUDY AREA

From August to September 2022, the research was conducted in Thanchi Upazilla in Bolipara union, Bandarban. The Upazilla consists of 12 Mauzas, 4 Unions, and nearly hundreds of villages. In the Upazilla, there are 3000 houses, 2700 of them are ethnic habitations. Around 4000 of the Upazilla's 18,000 residents are Mro, compared to 22,178 people in all of the CHTs (BBS 2002).

9. RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIALS

This study employed the historical technique and an ethnographic strategy to collect data for its qualitative research and further its investigation. As secondary data, the primary source of information for this study's content analysis predominated. Information was gathered from relevant books, journals, articles, newspaper articles, archival records, formal studies, reports, and other sources. Reputable national and international magazines, periodicals, and online data were all analyzed. The Mro ethnic group is located in the mountainous regions of the Upazilas of Thanchi, Alikadam, Lama, Ruma, and Naikhyangchari, which are seven in number in the Bandarban district (Drong 2001). Mro mostly populated in the Bolipara Union of Thanchi Upazilla. Therefore, Bolipara Union was chosen on purpose randomly.

10. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

10.1 Mro people's struggle for existence:

The ethnic Mro is influenced by their traditions, culture, and beliefs in both their way of life and in society. They are very skilled and experienced in farming and exploiting natural resources. They are a group of people distinguished by their ethnicity, culture, and traditions. They communicate in a distinctive language that is different from Bengali. The majority of their rituals are thought to be pagan. If a Mro wishes to get married, he must leave his village to find a mate. He must also get familiar with the language and customs of the prospective spouse before getting hitched.

Civil society members assembled and demonstrated in Dhaka in support of Mro rights in March 2021. Because this ethnic minority population was a target of corporate hostility. Protesters urged the revocation of a plan to build a five-star hotel and amusement park in Bandarban's Chandrapahar, also known as Chimbuk, the home of the Mro ethnic minority. They

argued that this ethnic group needed the ability to continue living in their customary way on their ancestral territory. The "Committee to Save Mro Land on Chimbuk Hill" staged the demonstration in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, to catch the prime minister's attention. An activist for human rights stressed that "wanting to establish a luxury and resort hotel on the ancestral lands of the Mro people is a sin and a crime." It is their traditional and ancestral territory. It's absolutely up to them to decide what they'll do with it. We must respect their democratic right to say "no." Therefore, socialites, intellectuals, professors, and politicians are committed to defending Mro land rights as legal land users (the Daily Star, Dhaka, Bangladesh 3 March, 2021). The discussion above demonstrates that this ethnic Mro group's existence and standard of life are difficult in the present climate.



Figure- 02: Mro people play traditional musical instruments in Shahbagh, Dhaka as a sign of protest against corporate aggression on their ancestral land.

Source: The Daily Star, Dhaka, Bangladesh

11. CHALLENGES OF ETHNIC MRO LIFE

The tribal Mro is a particularly isolated population because of a government policy prohibiting outsiders from purchasing land in critical border zones and limiting access there. However, since last year, there have been tales spreading around Bangladesh of armed Bengali farmers who has allegedly fled into the neighboring hills with the assistance of law enforcement. To fight them, the Mro armed themselves. The Mro are people who have great material and spiritual needs. Along with the belief that their deity, Torai, wants them to stay that way, they deal with poverty and illiteracy.

12. MRO SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Clans, phratries (connected clans), and kinship groupings make up the Mro culture. They could get married outside of their clans or even outside of their phratries. The village community practices democracy in politics. Although there is a headman for the community, his power is negligible. The Mro has no educational institutions.

13. WEDDING SYSTEM

There are hardly any priests in the Mro village. They perform these rites with the tribal elders, beginning with Puja-Parvan and continuing with auspicious puja or wedding preparations etc. Terms from contemporary society like "love marriage" and "arranged marriage" are common in Mro culture. When he is 16 years old, a young Mro male starts braiding his hair on top of his head to attract other Mro girls and choose the finest mate. He keeps flower heads in his khoppa or turban for decoration. Young Mro have the freedom to choose their mate in Mro society. Even if the relationship is selected or picked, both parties must have the parents' approval. Promiscuity is freely accepted before marriage, yet an unintended pregnancy triggers an urgent marriage. Mros' marriage lasts just a few days.

A wama, or rooster, is slain with a daa on the wedding day. An older family member uses a small amount of the finki blood that escapes from the rooster's neck on his middle finger to paint the girl and boy's heads with *Tilak*. Essentially, this is how the wedding ceremony is concluded. After marriage, newlywed couples often reside with the bride's or groom's family. When the couple has their children, they construct a separate house. In the Mro culture, there are two main types

of marriage: those that result via talks and those that result from elopement by both boys and girls. The husband receives all gifts provided to the wife back in the event of divorce, while the woman returns all of her decorations to her parent's home. Female second marriages are uncommon, although men may remarry in the event of their wife's death. It is not typical to practice polygamy or have numerous spouses (Banglapedia). Typically, a guy will talk to his father about the lady he wants to wed (Benison). The bride often travels to her house but she never resides there.



Figure- 03: Young Mro starts braiding hair in this fashion to attract other Mro girls and choose the finest mate

Source: internet

14. PATRIARCHY

The Mro have a patriarchal social system, unlike the majority of hill tribes. The family is led by the father. Women's social status or position, however, is a heated subject as a result. It is obvious how women are in command in numerous social spheres as a result. The bulk of the property is left to the sons. However, the youngest son rather than the oldest receives the most of the land. Mro's societal customs dictate that parents raise their youngest son till their passing. Single families do occur, despite the fact that paired couples are more common in Mro society. The Vengua (banana tree), Prenseng (cockroach tree), Kanglai (wild banana tree), Meijer (jackfruit tree), and Ganaru Gnar are other notable tribes (mango tree). Even if the father is the household's head, the daughters assume a leadership position in society. Boys are given the land, with the youngest receiving the bulk. The parents continue to live with the younger son as he gets older. In Mru culture, nuclear and blended families are both prevalent.



Figure- 04: Mro male busy at work

Source: Internet



Figure- 05: Mro children

Source: Internet

15. *THE MRO HOUSE PATTERN*

In essence, Mro builds a nest atop the hill. The homes are often rather vast in size. They construct a machang (foundation) and a nest on the slope. Nests made by Mrods are often bigger than those made by any other sentinel group. Their primary jobs are growing jhum and gathering wood from the woods. They generally reside in homes built of bamboo or wood. Either thatch or tiles are used for the roofing. Some houses are constructed on stilts to protect from flooding and wild animals. The farm animals spend the night underneath the dwellings. The Mro tribe's house layout was mainly composed of three components. The Kim-tam, a large chamber with an outside door, was first.

That space resembled a living room in that it is used for cooking, eating, hosting visitors, and receiving visitors. Despite standing in front of the Kim-tam, only the Kim-tam provided entrance to the chamber. The Kimma, which formerly had a fireplace in the front where babies were born, now serves as the married couple's and their younger kids' bedroom at night. One of the corners of the Saar was a toilet built entirely of bamboo and sun grass. On the back of the house, windows were often created by cutting walls; these windows were then covered in a bamboo mat. The bamboo bark thongs that kept the home's construction together at all crossing locations. There was no usage of wire, screws, or nails. On the top of the entrance door, one could see the heads of every wild animal that has attacked the Mro. The houses (Kim) were constructed between six and eight feet from the ground. The house was also built with a little tilt toward the hills in order to shield it from the wind and storm (Alam 2000).

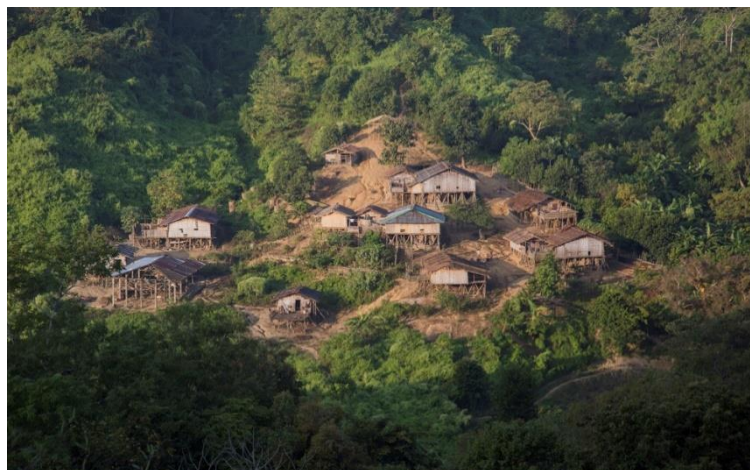


Figure- 06: Mro house pattern

Source: Internet

16. *MRO LIFE AND LIVELIHOOD*

Compared to Mro males, Mro women are more energetic and diligent. However, many people still have to look for work, and most still grow their food through subsistence farming, communal farming, and gardening. Household economic metrics show that women are more active. They do all the cleanings, and they weave their clothing. Jhum farming is their primary source of income. Farmers make up the bulk of the Mro. Although they have been taught about wet-rice farming's irrigation techniques, most still engage in "slash and burn" cultivation on the hillside.

This forced them to move to new fields every two years, making them a semi-nomadic tribe. Men and women both participate in the fieldwork. The primary crop grown by the Mru people is rice. An extremely impoverished people, the Mru. Despite living in a location with abundant resources for timber and hydropower, the villagers lack the skills and information necessary to better their economic situation. They continue to live in poverty as farmers as a result. The Mru rationalize their destitution by asserting that Torai meant for them to live in poverty. They take satisfaction in being self-sufficient at the same time. Every home makes its products. During the weekly marketplaces, they also go to the lowlands to trade cotton for goods like fabric, salt, knives, and ceramics.



Figure- 07: Mro women at wage earning job

Source: Internet



Figure- 08: Mro women putting manual labor at Jhum land

Source: Internet

17. MRO CUISINE

The Mros often eat rice twice a day and are known for consuming various types of meat. But it's also clear that the Moros prefer less spice in their curries. Salt and oils were used as seasonings to enhance the flavor and delicacy of the veggies and curries. Fish were affected by the circumstance as well. 90% of the time, wealthy farmers bought their fish in the marketplace; the other 10% came from water sources in the forests. One of their favorite meals is dried salmon. The Moros are big drinkers, and eating anything is not frowned upon in their culture. Their main foods and beverages are rice and homemade booze. The Moros' traditional and favorite cuisine is Nappi.

A dish prepared with flour mixed with fish oil and powdered sea fish, frog, deer, and wild boar meat. Nevertheless, the Tripura people also refer to this meal as Sidel. Simply put, this cuisine is well-liked by everyone and is known by several names throughout the hill towns. The majority of poor (70%) and middle (60%) farmers got fish by fishing in bodies of water close to and inside of the forests. With the exception of a tiny percentage of middle (30%) and poor (40%) farms, all categories of farmers consume eggs from their flocks. They wanted to have more chicks in their clutch in order to sell more of them and enhance their income. Although each farmer produced their own wine at home, they all purchased their salt, oils, and molasses from the nearby market.



Figure- 09: Mro cuisine

Source: Internet

18. MRO CULTURAL PRACTICES, ENTERTAINMENT, AND FESTIVALS

18.1 Chesotpoi:

One of the Mro people's most important social rituals is called *chesotpoi* or cow sacrificing. Tongue of the cow is cut off. Then, wearing turbans, the people sit on the cow's body. Beer or other alcoholic beverages are served at the feast. Once the meat and most of the cow have been cooked, the whole town congregates to share in the feast. The ceremony has no defined time since anybody with the resources to organize one is free to do so anytime they choose. Everyone at the time was quite busy with their jobs. They deliver the letters using a cow that they send. Cow obeyed their orders and left after being given them before starting to turn around. The cow stopped at a fig tree for a break since she was hungry halfway through. Unconsciously, she swallowed the letter plate, which went into her stomach. When the letters were eventually found, the Mro people were informed and opened fire on the cow. The cow's top teeth were shattered when the Mro chief struck it in the mouth. They complained about the cow being swallowed while the supreme spirit checked, and the spirit commanded them to punish the animal, whatever they saw fit. Furthermore, it was declared to be sinless. As a result, the incensed Mro people resolved to punish the cow by killing it and then chopping off its tongue. As a result, the ceremony got underway. It is now recognized as one of their most important rites (Brauns et al. 1986). Additionally, now you know why the cow does not yet have any upper teeth.



Figure- 10: Mro women performing the Chiasotpoi dance

Source: Wikipedia

19. NEW TAUNGYA CUTTING

The locals collect two hens from each house and buy two goats as a group before starting a new, sour crop. The goats are arranged such that one stands in front of the cabin that is closest to the stream and the other is adjacent to it. The area between the two dwellings is then prepared for the birds. The locals pray for wealth and health for the next taungya farming before butchering the goats and chickens one at a time, starting with the one that is closest to the stream. Soon, animal blood covers the little dwellings, the stream, and the flowing ground. The birds were then given back to their owners after the people had cooked the goats. Before starting the feast, they made a sacrifice to the nat with the meat and khaung. The locals cover the village path with bamboo arches while the community is closed for three days. If someone visits the community during this time, they must pay compensation to cover all costs. Once a year, they hold this ritual, following which they may begin the year's taungya farming.

20. START OF TAUNGYA REAP

When the fruits and vegetables in their taungyas are ready to be harvested, the Mro family member go there to gather a variety of them as well as a few paddy plants. Then, a big basket containing the fruits and vegetables is emptied into a khaung pot. Then a bird is killed, and the vegetable basket and khaung pot are covered in the blood. By mixing rice flour, salt, and ginger, another bird is made. They then blended the rice with the khaung and presented it to the nats on the house's stairwell along with the birds in different baskets. The leftover meat is then offered to the neighbors. This nature is present in several houses in a hamlet on the same day. Villagers are free to pick their crops after the ceremony.

21. MRO CUSTOMS AND RITUALS

21.1 After birth rituals:

The Mro community keeps four bamboos on the riverbank for each born kid. After that, a chicken is killed there, and the blood is stored in bamboo. Together, the people offer a unique prayer. According to their beliefs, God is happy with the kid and the villager is concerned for the child's wellbeing. The Moros also practice various customary rites, ceremonies, and beliefs. Then a prayer for the child's protection is uttered (Bennison 1933). The chicken is then disposed of in the garbage.

22. AFTER DEATH

The Mros see death as the final fulfillment of life. The Mros either burn the corpses or bury them underground (Banglapedia). When a Mro person passes away, their corpse is placed in a coffin of a split, colored bamboo and, sometimes, carpets and blankets. The bones that were not burned after the corpse was incinerated were gathered, and after being kept in the community for two to three months, they were placed in a tiny house built over the spot where the body had been cremated (Bennison 1933). The dead are buried right away, and no tent is built in the event of a communicable illness death (mainly smallpox and cholera).

23. COSTUMES AND OUTFIT

In Mro attire, there is also a distinction between males and women. Males don the Neng. The waist is covered with a piece of fabric that is pulled in between the two thighs. And the ladies dress in what is known as wanglai—a large, dark blue garment. The centre of a six-inch-wide fabric is embroidered or hand-woven. This wanglai's primary function is to conceal the private areas in some manner. On the left side of the back of the head, ladies bind their hair.

Boys and girls play the Pung flute and dress in the Mros' traditional garb. During these three days of celebrations, the fresh jum crop is used to make pitha. Mro does puja twice a year. The Mro language refers to worship as "Khang." Three days are dedicated to Kerai/Kangnat Puja in the months of Falgun, Asadha, and Basumati. Even though there is no set time for puja, it is also done when there are epidemics or other illnesses. The only clothing worn by men is a cloth that covers only the top of their heads and "Kha-ok" Burmese jackets. Mro women go without a top before being married, with the bottom half of their bodies covered by a short piece of fabric (Bennison 1933). The yarn used to make this skirt was bought from Indian vendors. Some wealthy women embellish their waists with a copper-colored ribbon and a necklace made of beads. They are also wearing three-inch hollow silver earrings. During the dance, the men dress in red and don turbans that are covered with beads and feathers. The women also wear flowers, jewels, handcrafted clothes, and money. The Mro themselves make musical instruments during the performance. The musical instrument known as Plong is designed like a bamboo pipe.



Figure- 11: Mro young lady with traditional attire

Source: Internet



Figure- 12: Mro women with traditional attire

Source: Internet



Figure-13: Mro boys and girls play the pung flute

Source: Internet

24. ORNAMENT AND JEWELRY

Ear piercing is a custom in the Mro culture. Both men and women in Maro culture adhere to this custom equally. In Mrod, it is known as "Raiksharam." It is planned through events and feasts. After the harvest in jumcha, the established Mro family hosts a feast called Chyachat-plii. This event is typically scheduled for December to February. Mro ladies particularly like wearing jewelry and other accessories created by regional artisans. However, at parties or dances, everyone likes having their cheeks, lips, and forehead red. Girls like wearing beaded neckpieces, flower crowns, and ear garlands—all of which are referred to as "kegger" in the Moro language. Girls adorn their arms with silver earrings and metal bangles (ramcheng).



Figure- 14: Mro women with traditional jewelry

Source: Internet

25. THE MRO BELIEF SYSTEM

The Mros follow a religion. Another name for it is social materialism. They revere the forces of nature. However, "Turai" is Mro's chief god. The cosmos was created by the Turai, according to their beliefs. The Mros also had "Sangtung," which are hill gods, and "Oreng," which are river or water gods. They satisfy themselves by making an oath in the name of Turai before doing anything. For a bountiful crop, they offer jumcha prayers to the mountain god Sangtung, who is revered as a symbol of purity. The Mro worship the god Oreng as a group to keep their villages safe and to protect them from all kinds of bad things, like diseases. People worship to the hill god Sangtung, who is respected as a symbol of purity, in order to get a plentiful harvest through Jhum farming (slash and burn). In the belief that Oreng would shield the locals from illness and bad spirits, they adore him. The sun and moon are not worshipped by Mro. At the same time Mro ethnic group affiliates Buddhism, Krama, Christianity, and Islam as well. It should be noted that Mros lack priests, written texts, and temples for worship (Adul Mabud Khan).

26. COSMOLOGY

The Mro have a number of old cosmological theories. Among the Mro, the moon is associated with masculinity and the sun with femininity. The globe is supposedly carried by a Naga, whose vibrations generate earthquakes as a mechanism for the Naga to determine whether or not there are still humans on the planet. Some traditional beliefs assert that rainbows serve as passageways for Nats and that eclipses are caused by God imprisoning the sun and moon. Therefore, it may be argued that the local culture is highly rich in them. Again, the cultural and linguistic variations among the Mros' tribal groups are discernible. Sungama, Anong, Domrang, Dumma, and Dopteng are a few examples.

27. MRO FOLK BELIEF AND PRACTICE OF ANIMISM

The Mro ethnic group has little hope for the future. Thus, what they cherish most is the now. They lack any sacred texts. However, the Mro Purana has a legend explaining why there are no scriptures describing the present-day events. The story continues as follows:

All living beings were once pushed by the Creator to pursue the religious practices described in the scriptures. The Mros remained away, despite the presence of all the castes or gotras. The Turai Mro were long awaited by the Creator, yet they never appeared. Because of this, the Creator also granted Mro a bull and the Scriptures. The bull must transport the scriptures written on the leaves and bring them to Mro's head. The bull became hungry on the journey and nibbled on the banana leaf that had the passages from the Bible inscribed on it. As a result, no Scriptures were provided to the Mros. The Mro visited the court of their creator Turai one day to inquire as to why they were different from other humans. The author then provided further details. He also ordered that the bull be beaten to death as a form of punishment. Since that time, the Mro "Nasyatpa" festival—a distinctive social gathering of the Mro—has included both dancing and the slaughter of a bull. However, the majority of Mro people in Bangladesh and India follow ethnic faiths that include aspects of Buddhism. They revere the deities of the forest, water, and fire. Their lives are governed by their adherence to the Torai tale. According to this mythology, the Mro's ancestors discovered other tribes had written languages and established social norms and sent a cow to Torai, the great spirit, to ask for assistance. The Mro were left penniless because a wicked beast devoured the regulations that Torai had written on banana leaves. A two-day ceremony when a cow is killed in remembrance of this event is the highlight of their year.



Figure- 15: Mro "nasyatpa" festival

Source: Internet

28. CRAFTS

Many of the Mro males are excellent at making bamboo products in addition to farming.



Figure- 16: Mro youngster good at producing bamboo craft-A

Source: Internet



Figure- 17: Mro youngster good at producing bamboo craft-B

Source: Internet



Figure- 18: Mro youngsters apt at weaving-C

Source: Internet

29. PROBLEMS OF THE MRO COMMUNITY

29.1 Land grabbing

Without a doubt, the Mro community's most important resource is its land. The most terrible issue facing the Mros in Bangladesh is land and resource grabs, much as with other indigenous populations. The majority and powerful corporate entities have been the two primary ways that land has been taken from the people.

29.2 Economic condition

The FGDs and field trips make it clear that the whole Mro community depends heavily on agriculture. However, only few of them cultivate their own land; the rest are engaged in non-farm activities including non-agricultural work, small-scale commerce, services, etc.

29.3 Education

The lack of education, according to all FGD participants, is the biggest barrier to the progress of Mros. The Mro community has a relatively low literacy rate. It has been noted that younger generations are eager to further their education in order to improve their socioeconomic standing.

29.4 Financial inability

They claim that Mro people's inability to pay for education is the biggest barrier. Due to their extreme poverty, they are unable to provide their children with the necessary resources (such as books, papers, fees, clothes, etc.) for their education, which has a negative impact on the education of the community as a whole.

29.5 Language

Children cannot comprehend Bengali in school because they speak Mro at home and in the neighborhood. As a result, Mro kids are unable to interact with both their professors and their classmates. Because of this lack of communication, they feel mental pain and anguish, lose interest in their studies, and decide to drop out of school.

29.6 Rights and status of women

Indigenous men predominate in the Mro village. However, practically all adult women work on farms in addition to their domestic responsibilities. The majority of them are day workers in agriculture. In addition, women in the Mro community are responsible for caring for their husbands, aging relatives, and children, as well as cooking and tending cattle.

29.7 Organizational association and access to services

The Mro have limited access to programs including microcredit, Medicare, family planning, maternity care, and nutrition because they lack knowledge and awareness. On the other hand, only a small number of NGOs, in particular, are now promoting sanitation, family planning, and health while also giving out bad microcredit.

29.8 Scope of employment

Among the Mros, employment range is quite uncommon. The main reason could be that Mros don't talk to people outside of their society very often and don't get much exposure to the outside world.

29.9 Health facility

The Mro dwelling area has extremely limited access to health facilities in terms of Medicare, family planning, water supply, and sanitation. They utilize an open area as a bathroom. For daily needs, the majority of Mro households utilize water from wells or fountains.

The aforementioned circumstance suggests that there is a serious lack of awareness among government organizations and NGOs about the requirements and issues of the Mro Community.

30. RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the study, the Mro's condition is precarious in terms of economic, social, cultural, and human rights aspects. However, the following ideas may be made in light of the demands, issues, and proposals of the Mro's development interventions:

- i.) The Mro community needs help with development right away from the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) if it is to stay together and grow.
- ii) The government and non-government development organizations may first provide certain relief-oriented services like affordable housing, primary healthcare, clean drinking water, etc.



- iii). To make the Mro economically and socially sustainable and self-sustaining, initiatives such as human resource development training, credit assistance for EIGAs, and animation programs may be adopted.
- iv) Tailoring and other home-based EIGAs may get financial, technical, and marketing help in order to enable Mro women to become viable wage earners. Furthermore, the inheritance of lands and recourses for Mro women should be established by law.
- v) Primary non-formal education should be included in education programs.
- vi) It's time to start general, vocational, adult, and social education. In this regard, Mro should be the primary language of teaching through class V, and in Mro-populated regions, at least one-third of the school's instructors should be from the Mro community.
- vii) In places where Mro people live, government organizations and non-profit organizations should provide comprehensive health programs that include Medicare, public health, facilities, family planning, and reproductive health services.
- viii) The government, human rights groups, and members of civil society should work together to stop land grabbing, evictions, harassment, discrimination, and other bad things people do.
- ix) A land commission led by the district judge and made up of members from the GA, NGO, and indigenous groups, specifically for the ethnic living regions, may be established to address land-related issues.
- x) Since the majority of Mros are underprivileged, they cannot afford legal representation in court. They should be helped whenever it is required.
- xi) It is important to start raising awareness among the general public in order to foster an understanding and peaceful attitude toward the Mros and other ethnic groups.
- xii) The preservation of Mro cultural heritage may begin via the provision of multiple musical instruments and financial assistance.
- xiii) There may be measures made to guarantee Mros' involvement in the development agencies' planning and policy-making bodies.

31. PROPOSALS ON LAND AND SECURITY

The Mros have the following proposals to prevent land grabbing:

- i) Effective administrative actions taken by civil and law enforcement agencies;
- ii) legal compliance;
- iii) increasing knowledge of laws and regulations pertaining to land.

32. PROPOSAL ON WOMEN RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT

Regarding recommendations for women's development activities:

- i) sewing instruction and sewing machine supplies;
- ii) instruction in agriculture and crafts;
- iii) simple loan for small business;
- iv) product marketing facilities.

33. CONCLUSION

Mro are highly egalitarian people who don't have many inherited roles or castes. They pride themselves on being calm and tolerant and are quite non-confrontational. All villagers have an equal say in all matters. This group of native people is one of the few that has always kept its own unique culture, traditions, and beliefs. Without working leadership or hierarchies, they can't take part in group efforts for "growth" or to keep their culture alive or work with others to do so. They are one of the least "modern" hill tribes because of this, and they keep their unique way of life on purpose. The Mru are known for their ethereal singing, strict clothing, exotic looks, and wearing their long, flower-covered hair in topknots.

Curiously, unlike other indigenous peoples, the Mro have no concept of being "tribal." They see themselves as simple flocks. Mro value their freedom above all else and only want to live a traditional life without being oppressed or taken advantage of.

The Mro community needs the freedom to live on their ancestral land while retaining their traditional way of life. They grow their crops naturally, only use what is necessary, and are very happy because they live within their means. Their future, however, remains uncertain. Current society has been impacted by modern advances. The Mro youth are aware of contemporary technology and desire to be a part of its world, despite their culture and traditions still being strongly held within the community. The Mro men are dressing in Bangladeshi style, doing away with the 'dong' in favor of the lungi (male sarong), and cutting their hair short as everyone else does there. The Mro universe will eventually adapt and develop, but for the time being, it is still quite similar to how it was fifty years ago.

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