

The Livelihood of Marma Community in Bangladesh

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Though Islam is the dominant force, Bangladesh is a multi-cultural and multi-religious country shared by Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Buddhist and a few animists. The Buddhist community of Bangladesh comprises various ethnic minority groups, such as Marma, Chakma, Kheyang, Lusai, Tanchanga, Chak, Murng etc., all of whom follow the Theravada Buddhist Traditionally. They reside in different regions; use different languages, scripts and follow different socio-religious popular culture. Among them, all other communities are termed as Tribes or Adivasi (Indigenous people) and resides in the hilly and littoral regions of Chittagong Hill Tracts, the south – eastern side of Bangladesh geographical identity. According to 1991 Census, the Marma is second largest group contained 1, 42, 339 people within the tribal groups. Here I will describe the livelihood of Marma Buddhist in Bangladesh through their origin, group or clans, residential areas, administration, housing, food habit, profession, utensils and tools, musical instruments etc.

Origin of the Marma:

The Marmas are known to the Bengali origin people as ‘Mag’. The word Marma has significance meaning and history and various opinions are found as to it. Some scholars think that the word ‘Marma’ is derived from the Myamm, a Burmese (Myanmar) word. According to them, its changes as follows: Myamma > Mamma > mara > Marma. Some others think that it derives from Chinese word ‘Ming’ or ‘Mirma’ and in China these two words are used to denote the Burmese of people of Myanmar. They also believe that the Marmas are the Mangoliad origin. From the old Myanmar’s coin it is learnt that the Burmese were called Meyama. Some others think that the word Burma is derived from Sanskrit Brahma and as they are inhabitant of Burma so that they are called Marma. It is true that the forefathers of Marmas were the inhabitant of Myanmar. As their origin was in Myanmar so that they prefer to call them as Marma. So it can be deduced that the word Marma is derived from Myanmar.

The Marmas are not Bangladeshi origin. They are migrated from Arakan. Arakan was a country which was incorporated into the Myanmar’s geographical identity in 1795.

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The history says that the first large wave of Marma immigrants came to settle in Bangladesh in the 15th century when Arakan king Ali Khan (1434-1459) occupied the southern part of Chittagong. But the present Marmas are those who came to Bangladesh after 1794, when king Bodawpaya of Burma (Myanmar) conquered Arakan and annexed Arakan with Burmese kingdom. Being oppressed by tyranny and inhuman torture of the Burmese, these Arakanese people were compelled to leave their homeland and took their asylum in Chittagong. King Bodawpaya threatened the British Government, now and then, to hand him over all the Arakanese immigrants in Chittagong, which ultimately turned to the Anglo-Burmese war of 1824. In the war, the British came victorious, which made the position of the Arakanese immigrants more secure to live in Bangladesh. With the help of British Government, they settled in various place of Chittagong Hill Tracts. However, some years back many Marmas went back to Arakan when they were promised to give shelter by U. Nu, the then prime minister of Burma. It is noteworthy that they speak Arakanese, a form of Burmese dialect, and use the Burmese script. The religion of Marmas has been described by Claude Levi-Strauss as a 'Syncretic religion', in which elements of ancient animistic cults continue in spite of the official confession of Buddhism. It can be said that Buddhism practiced by the Marmas is not different from that of Burma.

The monasteries of them have typical characteristics of Burmese temples. Nowadays, although the Marmas live in Bangladesh and considered as Bangladeshi but they do not like to introduce themselves as Bengali.

Group or Clans: There Marma Community consists of many small groups or clans. They are: Rigre-cha, Pelain-cha, Pelainggri-cha, Kekdain-cha, Wein-cha, Sorung-cha, Phrangroya-cha, Kyakpia-cha, Cereyan-cha, Maro-cha, Savok-cha, Chrokkhya-cha, Teingtachiyat-cha, Kyakma-cha, Langudu-cha, Melhuin-cha, Rakhain-cha or Rakhain etc.

Residential Area: All the Marmas live in Chittagong Hill Tracts (Khagrachari, Bandarban, Rangamati and Cox's bazaar), the south-eastern hilly region of Bangladesh, where communication is very difficult. In the village area electricity is not reached till date and vehicles are not run.



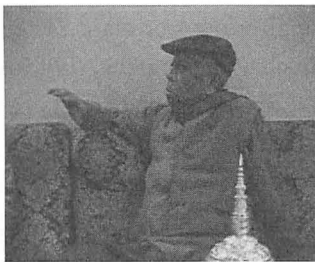
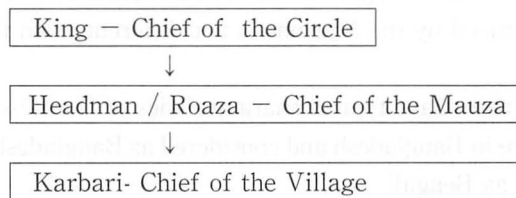
Residential area

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Only town areas about soling (brick structure) Road is found. Moreover, school and colleges are also very few. They make their house in the top of the hills. However, a group of Marma, called Rakhain, live in Patuakhali and Coxes Bazar District, the littoral regions of Bangladesh.

Social Administration: Though the Marmas follow and every regards for the Bangladeshi National Jurisdictions, they have their own administrative body of jurisdiction. The Marmars are divided into two circles and there are two administrative bodies that control the Marmas. They are: Bomang Circle and Mong Circles. The Marmas who live in the Bandarban region follow the Bomang administration and who live in the Khagrachari follow the Mong Administration. Every circle has a king. The Bomang king is known as Bomang king or chief. The present Bomang king is Kyashipru Marma and the present Mong king is Penglhapru Marma.

The administrative body of both circles is formed thus:

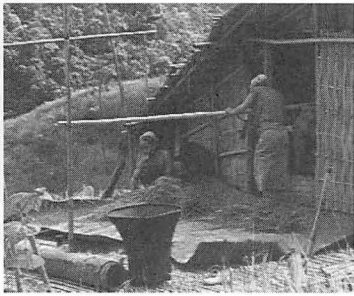


Every circle is divided into following administrative steps or formation: Circle → Mauza → Village. Every village has a chief who known as Karbari. He solves all judicial problems of the village and controls the village peoples. Every Mauza has a chief who known as Headman or Roaza, who controls the Karbaris, the head of the Villages. Finally, the king controls all these administrative bodies. If a Karbari is failed to solve the problem, then the case is placed to Headman, and thus, Headman to King. The King collects the tax from his subjects (people) through Headman and Karbari. Through these administrative bodies the Marmas solve their all judicial problems. However, nowadays, if anybody is dissatisfied with the verdict of the administrative body, he can place his case to the

Bangladeshi National Jurisdiction, but it is very rare.

Profession:

More than 80% Marmas are dependent on cultivation. They cultivate vegetables, fruits and paddy. But they paddy field is quite different from that of Bengali culture. As they live in the hilly regions, they have to plugging the paddy on the hills, where they face problems with the water. So, they do it in the rainy season. Before rainy season, they make clear all the herbs and unnecessary things from the field and make fire on it. Ashes of them are scattered in field. So, it is called Jum Cultivation. But this sort of paddy cultivation is depressing, because it is costly and laborious. As a result, they emphasize to cultivate vegetables and fruits as they are easy to cultivate. Moreover, as the fields are fertile, vegetables and fruits produce abundantly. Besides this occupation, they also engage in weaving. Especially, most of the women engage in weaving and their cloths earn high reputation to other peoples. They earn noteworthy money from it. The women also do firming poultry and fig.



Jhum cultivation In the hills

About 20% people engage in Service. Previously most of the Marmas were dependent on cultivation, at present they are not confined simply to firming, but are engage in many high status professions as well. Nowadays, one will find among them scores of distinguished doctors, engineers, judges, professors, teachers, lawyers, businessmen, government officials, politicians and the like. As they are backward in education, the Bangladesh government has preserved scope for them to enter into the government services without competition. But it is noteworthy that first they have to competition with themselves. As the education is spreading in the society, they are inclining in the services than cultivation. They despise begging. Even, the poor, the hopeless and widows who are incapable of earning their livelihood are not found begging, instead, they work hard to the best of their ability. No kind of labor is disgraceful in this community. Whatever, their profession, everybody enjoys equal rights.

Family Structure:

Though many tribal groups are Matrimonial, but the Marmas are Patrimonial. All the

members of the family live together. In their family father is chief, but mother also plays a vital role. The Marma women are very laborious than men. Not only in the domestic activities but also in the farming women take part with men. But their labor wage is low than men.

Housing:

Housing is the basic human need for any society. However, the type of housing and design and the use of construction materials vary according to place, environment and culture of the respective society. People in the primitive societies also lived in houses they made for themselves. In the hill districts of Chittagong, it is the common phenomenon for all the tribal societies that they live in bamboo made raised houses with an open platform locally known as Machang.



The Marmas also live in such houses. The houses are constructed on pegs about 6-7 feet above the ground level, the materials used for these houses are bamboo, wood and sun grass which are collected from the forest. The reason for making the houses from the flooding depth of water during run-off in the rainy days. The houses are arranged in rows adjacent to each other. The individual house has no fencing. Each house has some common characteristics as regards the Machang, room arrangements, etc. Normally a piece of bamboo or a thick branch of a tree with cuts steps are used to climb the Machang from the ground level. Each house has a bedroom with an attached dressing room, a sitting room which is also used as the guest room, a kitchen and a store room. The Machang is used for various purposes like drying of crops and clothes.

The crops which are dried on the Machang include paddy, mustard, chilly, Mestas and tobacco leaves. At one corner of the Machang there is a small poultry hen for laying eggs. The space underneath the Machang is used for storage of firewood, pig sty, and for weaving. Houses are made by the male members in making bamboo strips used for tying the materials.

Living room:

The first room adjacent to the Machang is the living room which is usually the largest room in the house. This room is used for entertaining guests who normally sit on a home-made sheet on the floor. The elderly members of the family often sleep in this room at night. The floor is made of wood and bamboo. Normally there is a small window on one wall of the room. Sometimes raised shelves are made in this room for storing different items.

Bedroom:

Behind the living room normally there is a relatively small room which may be called the bedroom. This room is usually used by the young married couple or by the grown up daughters. Normally unmarried male adult members of the family live at night in the community house.

The Marma people normally sleep on a mat and home-made sheet called posso (home spun cotton sheet). They also use pillows.

Kitchen:

In one corner of the house, usually adjacent to the living room, the space is used as kitchen. The floor of the kitchen is usually made of bamboo. Entrance to the kitchen is normally through the living room. The hearth (smaal ladder) is made on the bamboo floor on a slightly raised platform made of earth. Cooking utensils, pot, pan etc. are kept on a shelf in one corner in the kitchen room. Stored water is kept in earthen or aluminum pitchers, Okha (pitcher).

The families who are engaged in brewing wine have special arrangements in the kitchen for this purpose. Their kitchens are slightly larger in size and the floors are less raised than the other room and even sometimes the hearth is made at the ground level.

Latrine:

There is no special provision for latrine in the Marma house, as they normally relieve themselves in the nearby jungle. However, in almost every house there is a small room adjacent to the kitchen which is used for washing and as urinals at night. Sometimes children use this room for relieving at night also. The floor of this room is made of bamboo stripes but with wider space in between.

Furniture and Fixture:

The marma people do not use many furniture in their houses. The most common furniture seen there is the bamboo-made cradle for the families with small children. They

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use mats made of bamboo in the cradle to sleep on. They also use posso sit on as well as to sleep at night. Bamboo made baskets of various sizes is commonly used for storing different materials including agricultural products.

The young members of the marma families prefer to hang colour pictures and cinema posters in their houses. Most of the elderly people expressed no interest for these pictures and posters, but they do not mind younger people hanging those on the walls of their houses.

Cost of making a typical Marma house:

The Marma people do not usually estimate any cost for making their houses. Most of them collect the required materials namely, bamboo, sun grass and log wood from the jungles. As such any estimation of cost for making houses is not easy. However, after discussions the requirements for various kinds of housing materials and their corresponding market prices have been estimated. A typical Marma house costs about Taka 20,000/- if it is made of bamboo and sun grass only. However, for those houses where wood is used for flooring and for pillars, the cost of the house has been estimated to about Taka 80,000/-. A few families in some villages made their houses with tin roof and wood and thick mud walls. The cost of such houses is much higher.

For making the traditional Marma house it is a traditional practice for the male members in the village to put in their labour for which no cash payment is made. This giving of labour is reciprocated by other families.

Every year the Marma people change the roof of their houses if it is made of sun grass and they repair the bamboo walls from time to time. As mentioned earlier, I noticed the changes in the style and design of the Marma houses. Some houses have either wooden or mud walls with roofs. These houses are not constructed on a raised platform. This is a significant change from their traditional “Machang” –type houses with sun grass roof. This reveals the influence of the culture of the plain land people on the life style of the Marma people. It is interesting to note that such changes have taken place among the relatively well-to-do Marma families having contacts with the plain land people.

Food Habit:

Rice, meat and fish are the staple foods of the Marmas like the other people of Bangladesh. Vegetables and other cereals are also common to their daily foodstuffs. But they like to take the boil vegetable in which chilly is not used. This is called *Apreng* in Marma language. Lunch and dinner are their major meals. In addition, they also take rice

items in dried form and eat them later during the rainy season mixed with dried fish. Recently I observed a change in their use of vegetables. They now use cabbage, cauliflower, tomatoes, etc. Most of the vegetables they prefer to eat green. But the people do not prefer drinking milk. Even the children do not drink milk. Sometimes, they prepare curd and keep it bamboo containers to sell it in market.

Though contrary to Buddhism, the Marmas, like other tribes, like to drink the homebrewed wine which is made by them and they also indulge in hunting birds, wild animals and fishing. Some popular food items of the Marma people have been described below:

Cakes and sweets:

The Marmas make and enjoy various kinds of cakes. Among them the famous are called Chilangmung, Kyangdamung, Chesmamung, Rifrimung and Fukyemung in Marma language. A few methods of cake making are described below. Chilangmung is made with rice powder, coconuts, banana, sugar or molasses and oil. First they mixed the rice powder, coconuts, banana, sugar or molasses with water and make a liquid then it puts on the hot oil. Thus, this kind of cake is made. The Kyangdamung is made with rice powder, coconut and molasses. Its making method is peculiar. First the mix the rice powder, with coconut and molasses with a few water and make a past, then it puts on bamboo, then the bamboo is burnt. Thus, this cake is made. The Chesmamung is made with rice powder, coconuts and sugar. First coconuts are fried with sugar, then rice powder is fried in an iron pot with a little oil and on it the fried coconuts is placed. Then it is wrapped with Chapatti or Rut made of wheat. The Fukyemung cake is made with rice powder, coconuts, sugar and banana. First, all these ingredients is mixed with water and make one kind of hard past, then the past is placed wrapped by banana leaf and are boiled at least one hour. Thus, this kind of cake is made. These sorts of cakes are different from Bengali food culture. They also take various kind of sweet like other people of Bangladesh.

Rice thomoh:

The people prefer to eat unperboiled rice which is cooked in water. Most of them do not like soft cooked rice. However, they serve soft cooked rice to the children as well as to the sick persons. They always eat rice with other items like vegetables, dried fish, etc,

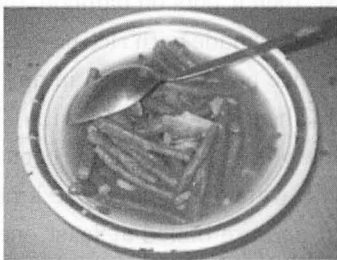
Nappi:

Nappi is prepared with shrimp and salt. The mixture of shrimp and salt is dried for two days in the sun and then bottled.

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in the early morning as their breakfast. For breakfast normally they take the left over rice of the previous night together with roasted dried fish and chilly. They make a special pickle of chilly mixed with salt, garlic, ginger and dry fish (called *Ñochuigrulik*), to take the boil vegetables. This food is different from Bengali origin people. They prefer to eat frog and tortoise rather any meats. Dried fish is also very characteristics food among Marmas, although it is shared by other people of Bangladesh. But the Marmas do not eat beef. They have a food called Nappi, which is made of dry fish through a complex way. This food is enjoyed only by the tribal people and the Bengali people do not eat it. The Marma people eat almost all kinds of vegetables depending on their availability in a particular season. Commonly used vegetables, among other

include beans, marpha (special type of cucumber grown in the hills), squash, brinjal, okra and bamboo shoots, etc. As bamboo shoot is available mostly in the rainy season, it is a very common and popular food item among the Marma during that time. Besides, they also eat different types of arum potato and yam and various leafy vegetables and herbs. They do not prefer to eat fresh fish. However, they are now seen to eat hilsha fish, especially on the market day when such fish are available in the market. They eat meat only on special occasions and during festivals time. Kra (chicken) and wah (pig) meat are their popular meat items. They also eat various insects which include among others ants, crabs, cricket, beetles, snails, etc.



During the season when insects are commonly available, the children and the women of this tribe are found to be busy in collecting such insects from the underground.

The people of this society also eat the meat of different birds. During Jhum cultivation, particularly they catch and kill different birds and they eat their meat in roasted form with wine. The most common bird is dove.

These people also like to eat various fruits of which jack fruit, guava, banana, lemon and tamarind are very common ones. Besides, they also collect other jungle fruits, various types of leaves, herbs, and crops from the forest. During winter they preserve these food

pepper for one month. During this period they also eat dried fish but they are restricted from eating vegetables which are better in taste.

Cooking timing and eating customs:

In the Marma families cooking is normally done twice a day, once in the morning between 10-11 a.m. and the again in the evening. In the early morning they always eat cold rice usually cooked in the previous evening. Together with this rice they also eat cooked vegetables left over from the previous night.

Normally cooking in the morning is done after the female members of the household return from the field. In the evening normally they complete their dinner soon after sun-set. Normally all members of the family eat together. There is no preference for male or children to eat earlier. The utensils they use for eating is plates both tin and earthen plate. After finishing their meal they normally pour water in the plate and drink the same. In some families, however, glass and aluminum pots are for drinking water. Normally they eat sitting on the floor. Sometimes however, on special occasions and for specially invited guests they serve the food on low, wooden tables.

Smoking of solik (cigars) is very common for both the male and the female Marmas of all ages. They also prefer to chew betel leaf and nut. The Marma men are fond of liquor. Liquor is, however, less popular among the women and children. In this society no festival is complete without liquor. They use special small size glasses while drinking liquor. Many of them even drink liquor directly from the bottle. The Marma woman and children smoke home-made cigars primarily.

I am also observed some changes in the food habits among the Marma families. For example, some family takes breakfast in the morning which includes tea, bread, biscuit, etc. purchased nearby shop. They are, however, rich persons and have contracts with the plain land people. Perhaps this has influenced them to change their food habits and to discard the traditional Marma breakfast items.

Domestic Utensils, Agriculture Implements, Fishing Tools and Weapons:

The utensils used for cooking are similar with that of Bangladeshi. It is noteworthy that most of the utensils that made of wood, cane and bamboo are made by themselves. Domestic utensils which primarily used for cooking, collection of water, storing of water and other domestic uses include pots, pans and pitchers of different sizes. But the utensil use for carrying things is very different from Bengali people. In their language it is called 'Paroing'.



These bottles are then put in pits for about a month. During this time the colour of the materials in the pots turns blackish.

Vegetables with nokroh (dry fish):

In preparing thi item various kinds of vegetables are cut into small pieces and mixed with dried fish together with powdered turmeric, green chilies and salt . The whole thing is cooked for a short time on fire.

Houtsa(meat):

In preparation of pig meat they cook the meat in oil mixed with onion, ginger, garlic and dried chili. As for chicken, however, they eat mostly boiled chicken. Chicken is boiled in water together with ginger, garlic, green chili and salt. The water part of this preparation is also used as soup.

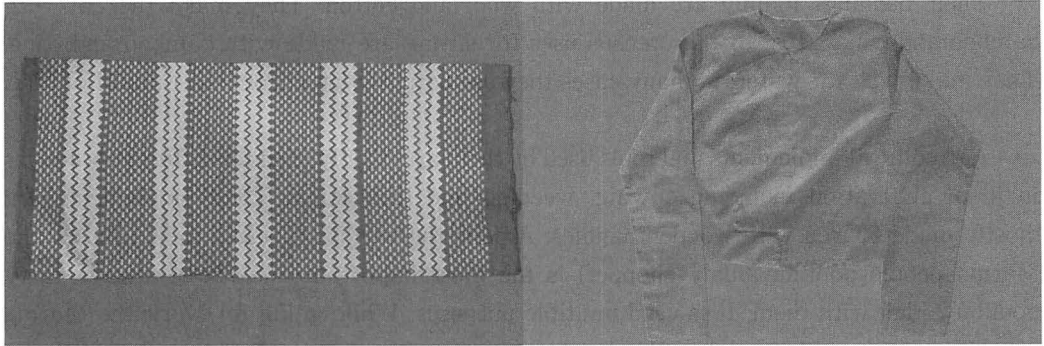
Nokrop (dry fish) with mrohtsee (green chilli):

In the preparation of this item slices of dried fish are put in a stick like sate and roasted in fire. The Marma people eat this with rice.

Sometimes they mix small pieces of dried fish, particularly dried shrimps, with green chilies and some leafy vegetables with salt and make a paste of this mixture. Similar preparations are also made with other insects and snails mixed with vegetable, onion and salt.

Special food for children and sick person:

Breast feeding is very common among the Marma people. Another common food item for children is paste rice with salt. Other than no separate meal is prepared for children. Normally no special food is prepared for sick persons either. However, their rice is cooked softer. Although there is no prescribed food for pregnant mother, they prefer to eat items which taste. After the child is born the mother eats rice with boiled chicken with salt and



They wear petticoat under the thobai and a brassier under the bedeangi. They use a small cloth to cover the upper part of the body, especially to cover the breast. They also use bangle in hands, gold or silver ring in ears.

The young women usually use a long cloth of various and gorgeous color called Thubuing in Marma language to cover the lower part of the body. They use brassier called Krudang in Marma language to cover the breast and on it they use a blouse called Bedai in Marma language. They use bangle in hands, ring in ears, chains in neck and waist that are made of gold, silver and of various colors.

The use of undergarments among the Marma women is very common. They wear petticoat under the thobai and a brassier under the bedeangi.

The aged men usually use Dhuti (*Khayaka*), one kind of long white color cloth, to cover the lower parts of body. They use white shirts called *Rangji Apru* to cover upper parts of the body. They use a turban called *Goubong* on their heads. The general men use longi, one kind of clothe sewing both side, to cover the lower part of the body, and use T-shirts to cover upper side of the body. Marma men to cover the upper part of the body which is like a waist coat with long sleeves, six pockets in front with no collar.

Now-a-days it is observed that the marma men do not wear this typical dress. Instead they use a second hand shirt of any design purchased from the market. At present only the Karbari (chief of the village) and few elderly persons wearing the traditional dress.

There is no typical dress for the children. When they are very young, they wear second hand cloths mostly shirts, pants and other common dresses of the plainland people purchased from market. From 9 to 10 years of age they use the typical Marma dress for men and women respectively.

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Their beddings mainly are made with wool and cotton. They make the cot with bamboo and cane. Most of the utensils uses for sitting are made with bamboo and cane. They make well for water; in many cases they use natural water from the rainfall of hills.

Agricultural implements and tools used by them are mainly used for different practices in jhum cultivation including sowing, weeding and harvesting. These implements are mostly made of iron with wooden handles. Among the various types of tools used by the Marma people ponkhuyaidah (chopper) is the most important one. They always carry ponkhuyaidah with them. It is used multiple purposes. While going for work the Marma men tie up the ponkhuyaidah on back and women put them in the baskets which they tie up behind the head and on the shoulder. They use it for cutting jungle for jhum crop, for harvesting the jhum crops, cleaning the jungle, cutting bamboos and preparing different bamboo materials, i.e. basket and other items. Sometime they also use the ponkhuyaidah as a weapon for protecting themselves from wild animals.

Dress:

The Marmas have their typical dresses. There dresses are different from Bengali people but similar to other tribes to a great extent. Dresses are, however, different for men and women among the Marmas. Women's dress comprises of thobai, bedeangi and gong-bong. Thobai is the lower part of the dress which covers the body from waist upto the ankle which looks like a stitched skirt. In older times they used to make thobai (marma dress for woman) with single coloured homespun materials only. Now-a-days, however, they purchase printed materials from the market for thobai. This is more common among the women. Bedeangi is like a blouse to cover the upper part of the body of the Marma women. The traditional bedeangi is such that it fully covers the upper part of the body from neck to waist with a series of decorative buttons on the left side of the body.

I observed some changes in the design of bedeangi among the young Marma women. The bedeangi now-a-days almost looks like a blouse used by the plainland women. But the elderly women normally do not wear bedeangi. Instead they wrap their chest with a piece of cloth named langsong.

The Marma women cover their heads with a piece of cloth, gongbong, particularly when they go for work outside and also when they attend religious festivals. The use of undergarments among the Marma women is very common.

lemon juice. In addition, they also use a kind of fruit of jungle tree to clean their hairs. They believe that the use of this fruit not only cleans their hair, but also helps in getting rid of lice from hair.

Travels and Transport:

Walking is the common practice of the Marma people to go from one place to another. In older days there was no road link in these hilly areas. Both men and women, therefore, had to walk even with heavy loads of fuel wood, bamboo, sun grass and various crops harvested from jhum cultivation. To cross a river they use a boat called “kemo”. These “kemos” are of special design which has a narrow and long body with low hackery. In recent times, however, there have been some developments. Some of the thana headquarters have passengers and goods carrying services with the help of very old jeeps and vans. These services are, however, very irregular and risky. Some important locations in the hill districts have good road network and therefore bus services are available there.

But the Marma people told me that they do not enjoy riding bus as they are not accustomed to this and they feel sick and often vomit while riding on a bus. Rickshaw is used as a local transportation for short distance near the urban areas only. Some Marma people in the urban areas ride bicycles

Music and Musical Instrument:

The Marma society has distinct culture of its own which includes, among others, typical music and dance. Their music and dance are very closely associated with the social, culture and religious life. I observed the marma people celebrated the following occasions with music and songs. These, among others, include the funeral ceremonies of important persons like the vicu (priest) and the members of the Raj family and rajpunna (annual jhum tax collection ceremony) festival.



The Marma people have special type of music and dance for funeral ceremonies of distinguished persons. This is called soing dance.

Soing- This is a kind of stick dance performed by various groups around the coffin. The coffin is placed on a bamboo made pagoda decorated with colored papers.

They play different traditional musical instruments including special type of drums called bungpai. Khrekhong- A special type of mouth organ made of bamboo is also played on this occasion. The

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The use of shoes/sandals is rather a recent phenomenon among the Marmas. They never use shoes/sandals inside their houses. Their use of shoes/sandals is more common among the men compared to the Marma women. It is note that the use of shoes and sandals was earlier limited to the members of the Raj family only.

The Marma men wear a black coat in addition to longi and angi at the time of their wedding. It is common practice to carry a dah (chopper) a posso (homespun sheet) by a Marma man at the time of wedding if the groom goes to his father-in-laws house for living. The symbolic meaning of the dah and posso is that while the dah symbolizes active life which implies that the man carrying the dah will engage himself in earning his own livelihood, the posso stands for his wife's house where he will live for his life time.

Ornaments:

The Marma women are fond of wearing different ornaments. The common are pailinodah (earring), lokoh (bracelet), lakhiah (anklet), toagro (waistle) and shoegrudali (necklace), these ornaments are commonly made of silver.

The chain with silver coins, taingloijore is very popular among the Marma people. The use of gold ornaments is not very common among the Marma woman of rural area. They use of imitation jewelers.

I observed the Marma families living in the urban areas and who's economically well-off started using gold ornaments. The Marma women are usually fond of using flowers for beautification.

Personal care:

Normally the Marma people go to the field twice a day every day either for jhum cultivation or for collecting fuel woods, sungrass and food items, etc. As a matter of normal practice, they take bath in the nearby stream or river every day while returning from the jungle or field. Other than the Marma people are not much serious about general cleanliness.

They do however; wash their teeth every day in the morning with charcoal. The Marma men also use twigs of neem or guava tree as tooth brush, whereas the women and children commonly use charcoal and salt for cleaning their teeth. Most of the children, however, do not clean their teeth.

Hair doing is very popular practice among the Marma woman. They seem to be quite serious and careful about their hair. To clean their hairs the Marma woman use soap and

other instruments played on this occasion are pree, hnee (flute made of bamboo), ching-choak (small brass plate), khoraleo (a kind of flute made of bell metal), mong (made of bell metal), paioah (made of bamboo), chong (made of bamboo), bango krinang (metallic bell with wooden hamper), ching (made of bamboo), khoa. They also sing a song name kappa and arowing.

Kappya song is sung memory of the life of a dead person whereas arowing song is sung to express satisfaction that the dead person will go to heaven, Likewise during rajpunna , they play the tradition musical instruments and also perform pankhung which means recitation from mythological story book.

The Marmas celebrate the harvest ceremony of jhum cultivation with song, music and dance. The performance include troh, ruddha which are the songs sung by the young boys and girls to express their feeling of joys.

In addition these people also practice different kinds of group songs on different occasions. Some of these are listed below:

Ragaing - At the time of draught the people in groups sing the song on an open field. They believe that song will bring rain to facilitate their crop production.

Aing - This is very special kind of song sung after winning a competitive game or specially during boat race.

Oing- This is a popular dance among the Marma people performed by the young girls specially in a marriage ceremony. Another common dance performed at the wedding is called simuing (candle dance) which is an expression of respect to the elderly people who are present there. The other popular dances of Marma people are baing (musical dance), longbaianka (plate dance), bamboo dance etc.

On the special occasions I saw groups of performers coming from the neighbouring areas of the Bandarban, Cox's Bazar and Rangamati.

Games/ Play:

The Marmas enjoy their traditional games. They enjoy very much their traditional games which are different from the Bengali people. Among the traditional games, which are not found in the Bengali culture, the followings are noteworthy: Alari, Kuyang (dha-thu), Gudu, Kangchi, Magrong, O-kucheng, Peyingjik, Aing, Paing, Rimiang. Here some of them are describes.

Alari: A of seed mimosa scan dens, the seeds are locally called 'Khaiyang-Da' or gilla is

used to play it. First, players are divided into two groups containing 5 to 10 players. There are popular games for the young boys and girls.

Khuyang-Da: It is played with wheel of wood. Players are divided into two groups containing 5 to 12 players.

Rimiyang: This game has a fantastic history. Players are not limited in this game. First, one player is turned into crocodile. He wishes to eat other player. If he touches any player he or she becomes crocodile. Then along with him, the crocodile tries to touch other players gradually. In such, the more he touches the more players are turned into crocodiles. This game is interesting to play into the water.

Aing: The most popular indoor games in “Aing”. In the Marma literature “aing” has been mentioned as one of the most popular games. Small thin sticks of about 7” long made of bamboo is used in this game. In addition, there is a little thick called the Queen stick or “Aingma”. Twenty five or forty sticks are required to play this game.

In addition to these traditional games the Marma young boys and girls now-a-days play carom, football and badminton.

Now I introduce a few religious festivals:

Buddhist religious practices:

The Marma tribal people are quite regular in performing certain daily rituals on individual basis. These rituals are the following:

In the morning after they come back from the field (hills) at about 10:00 a.m. the members of each family offer their prayer in their respective houses by keeping some food items like rice and boiled vegetables or curry in front of the idol or the picture of Lord Buddha and bow their heads. Some families then send cooked food called *suiang* (meal to the *kiang* (temple) for the *viccu* (Monks) and others living there. This practice of sending *suiang* (meal) is performed by almost all families under. The families assigned to send *suiang* (meal) to the *kiang* on a given day take their meal only after they send *suiang* to the *kiang*. Normally the distribution of *suiang* (meal) is done before noon. The *viccus* (Monks) as a matter of discipline do not take their meal after mid-day.

In the evening just at sunset after they return from the field (hill) the members of the Marma families light lamps and put them in front of the idol or the picture of Lord Buddha in their respective houses. Such lights are either *kupies* (small kerosene lamp in a tin container) or candle lights. They also bow their heads showing respect to Lord Buddha.

Purnima Festival (Labray):

The Purnima festival is closely related with the full moon of each month. The Marma design it “Labray”, a word of Burmese origin, corresponding to Bengli word “Purnima”.



Worshipping the Buddha in full moon day

The people consider every purnima (full moon night) as an auspicious religious occasion. However, three such purnimas in a year are regarded as very important because of the religious festivals which are celebrated with great honoure, forvour and geity. These are:

- Baishakhi purnima(Kasunglabre).
- Ashari purnima(Oaso) and
- Ashwini purnima(Wahgiwe).

Description of religious festival:

Kasunglabre (Baishakhi Purnima/ Buddha Purnima):

For the all Buddhist of Bangladesh, Buddha Purnima is the most sacred and most festive occasion observed with due solemnity. The Marma Buddhists also observe it with religious fervour. The Buddha Purnima is associated with three events of the life of Gautama Buddha, i.e., birth, enlightenment and death. As these three events of Buddha’s life happened on this full moon day so it is called Buddha Purnima. It observes it the first month of Bengali Calendar (April).The monastery is decorated with lamp, festoons, balloons and flowers for this purpose.

On the Buddha Purnima day all the Marmas take leisure from their jobs. They get up from bed very early in the morning, take shower and put on clean or new dress and prepare to go to the monastery to take part in every affair of worship. They go to local monastery in a procession with various items of worship, such as delicious foods, incense, candle and a consecrated pot filled with water, leaves of mango sprouts and bo-tree sprouts.

A group follows the procession singing devotional song and playing instruments. This spectacle is very festive and impressive. All these things have symbolic meaning. The Marma considers and offers food for not to face any sorts of food scarcity, candle and

incense for enlightenment and wisdom, water for peace, leaves for long life and devotional songs for enjoyment and drive away the evil spirits. After reaching in the monastery, they first offer the worship materials in a decorative manner and lighting candles and incenses in a dais in front of Buddha statue. Then they sit in the floor of the shrine for offering prayers in a pose of worship. The high priest of the monastery directs the occasion. He utters the traditional verses that common to all Bangladeshi Buddhists and the lay Buddhists follow his uttering. At first, all monks and lay Buddhists take refuge in three Jewels, i.e., Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha and take the vow of five precepts called Panchasila. Among the aged, those who are interested, take vow of observing eight precepts called Astasila. Then they offer offerings uttering the offering verse. After prayer they entertain the monks with delicious food that they carried. They also give donation in cash and kind. They also entertain poor people with delicious food.

In the evening they also perform same worship except offering food. Those who take eight precepts they do not take any food in the night, but they can drink juice and water. Though the Marma Buddhists practice killing and taking hand brew wine but on the Buddha Purnima day they abstain from it. The whole day they absorb in religious devotion and practicing meditation. Some monastery observed the day for three to seven days projecting various programs.

The Marma lay Buddhists, as answer to my interview, report the following popular objectives of the observation of this festival : They observe it in a hope to : 1) *obtain enlightenment*; 2) *get ride of sufferings*; 3) *reborn in heaven*; 4) *get wealth*; 6) *not to do sins* and 7) *not to fall in misery*



Offering in the monastery

Oaso (Ashari Purnima):

Oaso is another important religious festival for the Marma Buddhists next to Buddha Purnima and solemnized with due religious favour. This Purnima day is associated with the following important incidents of Buddha's life. On this day : 1) Buddha was conceived in the womb of Mayadevi; 2) Buddha renounced his home; 3) Buddha preached his first sermon;

4) Buddha introduce first rain retreat; 5) Buddha went to Tavatimsa heaven to preach the dhamma to his deceased mother and other gods; and 6) Buddha exhibited his twin-miracle.⁵ In order to commemorate these significant events of Buddha's life they observe it.

Realizing the significance the Bangladesh Government declared the sacred day as an optional holiday. Besides, the peasants are free from their farm work in this season. As a result many attend in this festival. They take part in mass worship and perform all religious rites and rituals similar to that of Buddha Purnima.

Pavarana Purnima/ Ashwini purnima(wahgiwe).:

This Purnima festival is very significant for the Marma Buddhist and equal in status to the Buddha Purnima as is evidenced by its widespread celebration. Pavarana means 'fulfillment of wish', 'satisfaction of desire' or 'the day of completion of study and meditation'. This is the ceremony that is performed at the end of rain-retreat of the monks. It is held in the Ashvini month (September-october), the sixth month of Bengali Calendar. So, it is also known as Ashvini Purnima. Like other Purnima festival this Purnima has also some relation with some important events of Buddha's life. For example, on this day Buddha came down to this world after preaching the Abhidhamma to his mother and other gods in Tavatimsa heaven. In the same day Buddha urges the monks to take the responsibility for spreading the faith and welfare of all beings. Besides, from this Purnima day, the yellow robe offering ceremony is held in all monasteries for one month. Moreover, This Purnima festival not only provides monks with comfortable living quarters and suitable clothing, it also provides opportunity for lay devotees to earn merit.

To observe the festival the devotees decorate the monastery with many colorful lamps, cartoons, flowers, balloons and garlands. Many flags are hoisted, gates and walls of the monastery are decorated with lamp and banana trees, decorated pots are placed on both side of the monastery gate. They come to the monastery with various articles of worship and with accompaniments of music. They carry a Celestial-tree which is decorated with all kinds of pleasurable things that a man needs in his every daily life and all the things hanged in this tree are donated to monks. The idea is that if they donate all these things, they will get thousand folds in heaven in return. They perform all rituals like that of Buddha Purnima. The flying of the 'sky lamp' known as Panusbaji, is the most interesting aspect of this Purnima festival. The 'sky lamp' is big balloon made of paper. One part of it remains open and is connected with a bunch of cotton ropes or jute fibers, which are soaked with oil and fed with fuel gas. The ropes of the balloon are burnt and it gradually released. It raised slowly ascending high in the sky, a thrilling night under the clear sky of the autumn season.

The Livelihood of Marma Community in Bangladesh

When the sky lamps fly in the sky scattering light, it looks like a moving rocket. The objective of flying sky-lamp is to worship Buddha's hair relics. Two legends are found in the Marma society in this regard, which run thus:

When Buddha renounced his home, he cut his hair and threw it into the air, saying 'if my aim and mission of renunciation are fruitful, this tress of hair will go to upwards.' The Marmas set off the sky-lamp as symbol and commemoration of Buddha's emphatic prediction.

Another view is that Buddha going to Tavatimsa heaven is shown by this flying of sky-lamp. Regardless of the factual accuracy of these legends, they fly the sky-lamp as part and parcel of their religious custom.

The compulsory performance of Pavarana has its practical implications. It seems to us that the Buddha made it compulsory because it provides an opportunity to perform yellow robe offering ceremony and during the festival monks make a confession of guilt. From this day the monks preach the dhamma to the lay devotees and thus, encourage the lay community to give up sinful life and to lead honest life. The popular objectives of this festival are same to that of Buddha Purnima.

Social Norms:

The Marmas also follow some obligatory social norms and rituals like other communities of Bangladesh. Here I shall just introduce it in briefly. As social norms, they follow some obligatory rules regarding birth, marriage and death. They believe many god and goddess, worshiping many things such as house, tress, river etc they observed many religious festivals as Buddha purnima, Asari purnima, Pavarana purnima etc. There are various taboos in Marma society. It is also influencing the people's every day decision making.

Conclusion:

Though the Marmas live in Bangladesh, they have their own ethnic identity. Through the above mentioned ingredients they keep their distinct identity as an ethnic and a separate community. Their administration, family structure, dress, food, games etc. are quite different from Bengali culture.

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