



Traditional Myths and Development Thought: Insights from the Murang Community in Bangladesh

Md. Mojahar Rahman Shah ^{a++*}

^a Department of Ethnography & Decorative Art, Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh.

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.9734/sajsse/2024/v21i8870>

Open Peer Review History:

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc. are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/120772>

Original Research Article

Received: 21/05/2024

Accepted: 30/07/2024

Published: 08/08/2024

ABSTRACT

Aims: The study aims to understand the role of traditional myths in making and unmaking development thought among the Murang community in Bangladesh. It explored the traditional myths related to development thought, interrelations between the myths and conventional development, and how different myths make and unmake development thought in line with sustainable development goals.

Place and Duration of the Study: The fieldwork was conducted at the Alikadam in Bandarban district of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh from May to June 2022.

Methodology: Data collected by In-depth interview, Case study, KII, and validated through FGD. Data were analyzed thematically based on interlinked contents and themes.

Findings: A total of 13 traditional myths are found among the Murang community about safeguarding their traditional culture, heritage, tradition, livelihoods, and biodiversity. The

⁺⁺ Assistant Keeper,

^{*}Corresponding author: Email: mrs1plabon@gmail.com;

interrelations between the myths and the development thought are ambiguous. These myths are too little connected to conventional development thought and interventions. Myths denote the thought of coexisting with the environment, biodiversity, food preservation, global warming, indigenous knowledge, forest preservation, balanced resource distribution, health, hygiene, water management, social solidarity, and normative social behaviors. These thoughts are akin to sustainable development goals, and are transmitted from generation to generation. The community unmakes the thought of infrastructure development and makes own development thought.

Conclusion: The development policies and interventions should integrate local culture, language, knowledge, politics, and bio-cultural diversity of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Traditional; myth; conventional; sustainable; development; making; unmaking; thought; community; CHT.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the traditional myths of the Murang community is about cosmology. This myth provides them the wisdom of practicing sustainable development daily. The Murang people do not cut trees and bamboo randomly from their community forest. They want to preserve the plants and biodiversity of their forest so that they can get a healthy living environment, e.g., fresh air, food, water, housing resources, and fuelwood for them and future generations. For making houses and everyday use as fuelwood, they only cut those trees that have become dead dry.

However, there are 50 small ethnic groups living in Bangladesh, along with the Bengali population [1]. The Chittagong Hill Tracts (hereafter as CHT) in Bangladesh comprise 11 small ethnic groups, including Murang, also known as Mru, Mro. There are 52,463 Murang people living in the country, and among them, 50.98% are male and 49.02% are female [2]. About 80% of Murang people are literate in their own alphabet [3], but only 45% are literate in Bengali [4]. They used to live in the Arakan Mountains, now reside mainly on the high hills around the Sangu and Matamuhri rivers at the Bandarban in CHT [5]. Their traditional myths provide a source of uniqueness, influence their economy, politics, religion, kinship, environment, and development.

In the CHT, the GOs and NGOs have implemented development projects within the Murang, e.g., a rural development project by the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and the Asian Development Bank. The average poverty rate in the country is about 30%; whereas, the poverty rate in the CHT is 65%. The average income of this region is 26% less than the average income of Tk. 84,000. About 72% of the people depend on agriculture for their livelihood

[6]. Many development projects in CHT have failed due to a lack of supportive infrastructure, trade policy, and land rights. The projects were not implemented to increase land fertility and capacity building in traditional institutions [7]. Therefore, the development projects are ambivalent in the CHT, which needs to be understood within the cultural context of the particular community.

However, there has been a positive relation among traditional ecological knowledge, sustainable practices, land and resource management, climate change adaptation, and disaster risk reduction strategies [8]. For example, the Munda ethnic groups of Sundarbans practice water management strategies through their social practices and indigenous ecological knowledge [9]. The post-2015 sustainability agenda emphasizes the importance of examining the relation between sustainable development and indigenous knowledge, which is different from western knowledge [8]. The academic literature on the traditional knowledge is extremely limited in the CHT of Bangladesh [9].

In this context, the study of the traditional knowledge of ethnic culture, e.g., wisdom of myths and its practices in achieving sustainable development is significant. Every society has some myths which are embedded in history and provide real knowledge of life and livelihood. Myths explain and argue the rationality of knowledge about the present situation of the world from the sources of the past [10]. This study examined how myths related to development are influenced by Murang people's life experiences, needs, and socio-cultural contexts. It explored how traditional myths shape the perception of development and thought against conventional development by focusing on

their cultural background, traditional behaviors, and customs.

1.1 Research Objectives

The study aimed to investigate following three particular objectives:

1. To explore traditional myths related to development in the Murang community.
2. To analyze the interrelations between traditional myths and conventional development interventions.
3. To examine how these myths make and unmake development thought in line with sustainable development goals.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have focused on land rights and socioeconomic status of the Murang community and CHT. For example, K. S. Saifee [5] mentioned that Bandarban is a district in the CHT which has a unique situation for small ethnic groups with remote mountainous terrain. The Murang group are largely uneducated and live with poverty due to their geographical location and socio-economic conditions. They struggled to maintain their identity and cannot adapt to changed environments. It leads to the loss of their culture. Implementing a bottom-up approach to development programs could help these groups to achieve their desired development paths. The study reveals that Murang culture's 'superstitions' hinder their development and education. However, the roots of these beliefs remain unexplored. Thus, exploring the traditional myths are crucial for understanding Murang development thoughts.

A research [11] shows that ethnic groups are the poorest and most marginalized people in Bangladesh. One-third of the people in CHT depend on *Jhum* cultivation. This traditional slash and burn technique of cultivation make them economically poor. This study did not identify Murang culture, which is determined by traditional myths. Therefore, the relation between myth and cultural perspective with development remained unexplored. Another study of Haque [12] examined the perceptions of small ethnic groups in the CHT regarding the Bangladesh Army's role in sustainable development. Traditional development interventions aim to modernize societies by adopting a top-down model. Ethnic groups are considered to be underdeveloped. The state implements projects

focusing on poverty alleviation, health, education, gender inequality, safe water, sanitation, industrial innovation, infrastructure development, sustainable cities, hill forest protection, improved life, peace, justice, and sustainable institutions to achieve sustainable development goals. However, the study could not propose a new outline of development by understanding the Murang development thought through the analysis of myths.

Khisa and Mohiuddin [7] studied the decline of *Jhum* cultivation in the CHT due to the construction of Kaptai Dam and ongoing migration. The study criticizes government initiatives to improve socio-economic conditions of CHT. It also focused on the lack of proper measures for land fertility, soil conservation, and cultural processes. And criticizes development projects taken for *Jhum* cultivation. The lack of infrastructure, supportive services, and land rights uncertainty further exacerbates their poverty. The livelihoods related to the traditional *Jhum* cultivation techniques are shrinking today for a variety of reasons. It is affecting their cultural context, which can be solved by extracting their knowledge from myths, and the community's perception of development.

Another paper by Roy and Chakma [13], discusses the undervaluation of ethnic groups in Bangladesh's cultural heritage, ecology, and SDGs. It highlights the lack of implementation of the CHT Peace Accord of 1997, which aimed to protect the rights of ethnic people and their cultural practices. Ethnic groups remain unidentified due to ignorance, discrimination, and extreme nationalist thought. The article recommends recognizing culture as the fourth pillar of SDG; and emphasizes safeguarding of ethnic people's culture and identity to promote indigenous development. The study focuses on Bangladesh's constitution and the 1997 CHT Peace Accord, but excludes specific focus on the development of the Murang.

The above-mentioned studies have focused on land rights, human rights, and the vulnerability of ethnic cultures. The Murang community has faced challenges by the development projects due to perceiving them as primitive and uncivilized. However, this study aims to address the gap in development studies on the Murang by examining the interrelations between the traditional myths and the development. The study will help by identifying methods for integrating

traditional culture into development studies, policies, projects, and interventions to achieve the SDGs in CHT.

3. METHODOLOGY

It was a qualitative study to grasp the unique culture and tradition of the Murang. Because doing fieldwork in the remote top hills of the Alikadam in Bandarban was a big challenge. The community was also very disinterested and suspicious of all outsiders. Thus, formal survey-based methods were not appropriate to apply. In this context, the ethnographic fieldwork approach was instrumental in understanding the culture, heritage, and experiences of the Murang. It provided insight into their ways of life, knowledge systems, social organizations, and religious practices. The Ethnographic approach also helped to articulate the perception of culture and development. During the fieldwork, it helped to build rapport and trust with the participants by building a credible relationship with them. The approach helped to use verbatim quotations and detailed descriptions of many events. It helped to get a deeper understanding of their daily lives.

To collect data, the researcher conducted 30 In-depth interviews, 10 Case studies, 10 Key informant interviews (KIIs), and 03 Focus group discussions (FGDs). The collected data was manually presented and examined rigorously to identify recurring themes and meanings. Afterwards, within the framework of thematic analysis, relevant topics were identified, categorized, and then redefined as new themes to facilitate the examination of the collected data. Data from case studies, KIIs, and In-depth interviews were compared to FGDs for triangulation to ensure credibility. Free and prior consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality were ensured to maintain ethical standards.

4. FINDINGS

Traditional myths of the murang: In this section, a total of 13 traditional myths have been described concisely by extracting from the original stories of the Murang people. The names of the myths are used here given by the researcher, since some Murang people could not tell the story names.

4.1 Sacred Tree

In the ancient period, Krimtui, a man, was cursed by an evil spirit. He became ill because he cut

down an Aswatha tree for fuelwood. That tree was a living place of some deities. No one dared to use any part of those trees. To recover Krimtui, many Vaidyas (folk healers) offering worship for the deities. Despite several attempts of worship, Krimtui's illness was becoming complex. Some Vaidyas advised to offer the blood of white pigeons and goats in the river near to Krimtui's Jhum (hill for cultivation). But Krimtui could not recover from the illness. Krimtui's condition was becoming worse. One day, Krimtui died of his illness. In fact, this myth teaches to preserve plant and tree diversity in their habitats.

4.2 Formation of the Earth

Before the creation of the earth, there was no soil in the universe. An old woman and her grandson, Klangcha, lived on a rock called the universe. Klangcha instructed a wild animal, Pakcharuya to cover the ocean with soil to create the earth. Pakcharuya stole soil from an island, but a whale took it away. The formation of the earth remained incomplete. Grandmother said, stolen soil is not appropriate to form the earth. After getting some advice from Grandmother, Klangcha went to the king and informed him of the plan for creating a universe. They created a universe with three parts for water and one part for land. Seeds of conflict, disease, criticism, robbery, and adultery were planted in various locations.

Klangcha instructed the reed to grow, but it wanted to grow on plain lands and river banks. *Barakh* (a type of bamboo) wanted flat land, while *Dolu* (a type of bamboo) was unable to grow quickly. They made a forest with various plants, trees, animals, and reptiles. Bulbuli (a bird) created night and day on earth. Grandmother taught him about farming techniques and the importance of preserving food year-round. Klangcha's grandmother made him marrying a girl Masiwa. Klangcha and Masiwa became the original parents of all human beings. In fact, myth provides the knowledge of balancing life in their ecosystem and ecology.

4.3 Curse of Bird-Killing

At the beginning of human life, the earth was a heaven, and heaven was a hell. A woman married a man of heaven and had three children. One day, the woman's older son died. Then her brother went to see the dead body of nephew in heaven. He was surprised to find the dead body in heaven. Because nobody had to die on earth. One day, the woman's brother killed a sacred

bird. He told his sister that a family member had died. When her sister arrived on earth, she found a body of a dead Tikrukukui bird. Then she cursed that people of earth would die from that day and people of heaven would never die anymore. The meanings of that myth are that destroying biodiversity may imbalance livelihoods, ecosystems, and biodiversity.

4.4 Ruler of the Sun

The Wimokma Mo is a god, and the ruler of the sun and the moon. If the sun did not listen to the god, get punished by the demon. It was the sun's eclipse when Wimokma Mo punished the sun. People used to set fire to an animal's skull to pray for the sun's release. People offered dead human flesh to Wimokma Mo; the god released the sun. Once, the sun was a female and the moon was a male. The moon was violent, creating a severe drought on earth. People informed the god Thurai about the moon's oppression, and then the god became angry to the moon. The god punished the moon, and washed it with banyan glue to decrease its energy. This story narrates the Murang beliefs on drought, scarcity safe water, and extreme sun heat.

4.5 The Deity of Jhum

Kampala was the only daughter and loved by her parents. Her brother Krongtong died of an unknown disease, and another brother became ill. After that, her father Menkong, arranged cow killing festival for ill brother's recovery. The traditional healers were unable to cure the boy. One day, the father dreamt that if they separated his son and daughter, their son would recover. The father left his daughter Kampala in a jungle. He prayed to the deity of the *Jhum* hill to look after his daughter. The deity took care of the daughter as a disguised old man. Kampala grew up with the deity.

After one year, the father and his son went to the forest to find the daughter to take back. The old man allowed taking back the daughter. The father took his daughter to the house. The daughter was crying, and then the deity came to her as the old man. The daughter was happy to see the old man. But her brother dishonors the old man. Then the old man took the daughter to the forest one night. The parents and brother went to find the daughter in the forest, offered worships, but nothing worked. This myth says that the forest, hills, and Murang people are

integral parts of each other. The deforestation and the cutting of hills are destructive for them.

4.6 Restricted Hill

Taipao stayed at home to maintain household chores. She weaved looms for her daughter's wedding. For earning more money, they prepared the restricted Rengkrom hill for cultivation. But the villagers advised them not to go there. It was forbidden to cultivate there for snakes and a monk. Her husband Khonchang refused to listen to the villagers. He planned to make snakes leave the hill with the help of a *Vaidya*. Khongchang began cultivating *Jhum* on the hill. And his family members became affected by cholera. The king snake became hostile to his family and for this Rengkrom died. The myth tells that the hills and the forests should be reserved to save biocultural diversity.

4.7 Pond and Dragon

The Tarochoyo clan is a distinct clan from other Murang clans. They lived in a village called Bokapara. One day, a young woman lost a weaving tool. She asked a boy to get it back. But suddenly, the boy disappeared. Similarly, cows, goats, ducks, and hens were lost in the village. The villagers discovered a large cave in the jungle with various bones and skeletons. They suspected a snake was eating these animals and children.

A group of people decided to hunt the large snake using a fishing hook and rope. They killed the snake in the cave, but could not pull its body out. They cut half of the snake's body and distributed it to every family. They also organized a cow-killing festival at night to celebrate the victory. The villagers danced and had fun during the festival.

However, a family named Matongcho did not cook the flesh of a snake. They dreamt that dead snake told them to return his head. Next day, they returned the snake's head in the cave. Suddenly there was a catastrophic flood, and many of them died. The Murang people believed that the cave is connected to the sea. The snake that had been killed was a sacred dragon. It was carrying the weight of the earth. Therefore, they refrain from killing snakes. This myth has transmitted a knowledge of keeping biocultural diversity, social unity, and avoid hunting.

4.8 Garland Beads Tree

A young boy in a village lost his parents. He was leading a single life. One day, villagers hunted a deer and distributed the meat to all villagers. The boy could not cook the meat. He went to the hill for cultivation. After coming back, he found someone who had taken care of his house and cooked food. The boy was surprised by the new look of his house. He had been trying to find out who made it. He caught a deer girl in his house. He offered her a marriage proposal. They got married and started a happy life.

They became parents of two daughters. Once, the deer girl became upset over her husband's unnecessary loud calling. She turned into a deer and went to the forest. The man searched for the deer girl but could not find her. One day, villagers hunted a deer and distributed its meat to all. The deer girl told a daughter in a dream that not to eat meat and to keep its bones hidden. The daughter kept the bones under the soil. A tree of garland beads had grown, which became their deer mother. The daughter told her father about the story. But the father became angry and cut down the tree. The Mro people believe it was their sin, and the garland of beads tree does not grow in the hill. The myth narrates that some anthropogenic activities are responsible for poverty, gender inequality, imbalanced consumption, conflict, bio-cultural diversity loss, climate change, and other environmental degradation.

4.9 Curse of Dishonesty

A conjugal couple lived in a village near a fountain. They were unfriendly to the villagers. They cooked pigs, but never invited any neighbors. The couple disrespected their old guardian's advice about helping the villagers. The villagers criticized the housewife for not being helpful. They played Rina Plung and sang when someone died in the village. The villagers tried to make them understand, but the couple did not listen to them. The villagers cursed the couple.

Their old guardian knew a mantra to become a demon after death. One day, the old man died. The villagers guarded the dead body. But suddenly, the dead man had turned into a demon. The villagers fled away. The demon attacked the young boy and killed him. The demon ran to catch the housewife, killing her. By using some mantras, the villagers killed the

demon, and started to live happily. This myth teaches them to maintain peace and justice, engage in responsible consumption, and reduce inequalities.

4.10 Rina Plung

Rina Plung is a traditional flute of the Murang. The word Rina Plung means the flute of Cholera. It is played by the villagers when someone is affected by cholera or other diseases. Once, a cholera epidemic in a village caused many people dying. Despite various attempts, including worship, no changes were coming. One night, an old man had a dream where a priest taught him to play a flute to get rid of cholera. The priest told him to play the flute seven times. The old man shared his dream with the villagers, who agreed and created a flute based on his description. The flute played seven times, then the cholera affected people were started recover. The villagers were delighted to see the scenery. This particular myth advised them to keep social solidarity, good health and wellbeing.

4.11 Impurity and Rebirth

The Murang people believed in rebirth after seven days of death. After rebirth, the body had to shower by hot water with the sacred *Naingsa* tree. Then the person began to follow the life cycle again. This was a general go of Murang life. But when an old man from a village had died, he came to home after rebirth. There was a new housewife in the house who did not know this rule. She got afraid of seeing the rebirth of a dead old man. She went to hurt the old man with a broom. For that reason, the old man turned himself dead again. The family members were so upset, but it was too late to explain. The Murang people do not get rebirth then, because the broom symbolizes the highest impurity and profanity. The myth describes purity are impurity, which is the causes of ill health, and disharmony in society.

4.12 Elephant as Descendent

A couple lived in a village near with their children. During summer, the couple left their children at the *Jhum* house. The children could not find water anywhere. They searched for water in various places. They called their parents, but their parents could not hear their calls. The Sailakotum River was known as forbidden by the villagers due to its black magical power, which could turn anyone into an elephant. Children

were unaware of this, they drank the river's water and bathed in it. After sometimes, their noses and ears turned into elephants. Their parents returned to the *Jhum* house, and saw that their children had been turned into elephants. They were given banana trees as food. The child elephants refused to stay at home. One day, the child elephants went to the forest forever. The Murang people believe elephants are the species of the Klangto clan, and the Klangto clan does not eat elephant meat. The myth provides them with the wisdom of thinking humans as an integral part of biodiversity.

4.13 Deity of the Air

A young man cultivates *Jhum* for living. He was a skilled trapper who caught wild animals. He was respected by the people for his skill. But he was unable to get married to his daughter due to poverty. One day, he found a big pig destroying his crops. He spent several days hunting the pig. He found an old woman's house, living alone in the forest. He asked her about the big pig. But she denied seeing the pig. The man helped her with household chores. One day, he discovered that the old lady had many pigs, and the pig was there too. The young man killed the big pig. Then the old lady started crying and hurting her own mouth. The young man returned to his village with the pig's body. The villagers had a feast by equally distributing the pig's meat. The old lady had become weak and vanished somewhere. The Murang people believe the old lady is the deity of the air. This myth provides a learning of maintaining own crops, responsibility to older, and balanced resource management.

Myth and Conventional Development: This section details the interrelations between traditional myths and conventional development, including other non-conventional development-related thoughts.

Myth and environment: Traditional myths reveal their wisdom and role in ecosystems. In this regard, one of the participants of the research, Riong Mro (32) said,

See in my village what a big village forest we are keeping. We have meetings with everyone in the village. Whoever needs bamboo can cut it from the forest, but cannot be sold. And now there are no animals in the forest, we no longer hunt animals in the forest. If you hunt, all the animals will perish. Klangcha's grandmother told her that

there will be other animals for the human beings in the world, it is necessary.

Myth and biodiversity: The Murang believe the earth, soil, flora, fauna, and humans are interconnected and should be safeguarded. Kritai Mro (52) was describing the significance,

We people are not different, the tree has life, important for us, animals and insects in the forest have importance, we don't want to kill every animal, some of them are prohibited to kill, Klangcha the first man of earth created soil first, then plants, trees, crops, and finally the man. Look, all of these made the earth live well, only Mro cannot live.

Extreme sun heat: Murang people believe that extreme sun heat harms their health and environment. One of the participants, Mennao Mro (70) said,

At the beginning of life on the earth, the Mro people prayed and conducted worship to the god of the sky to diminish the violence of the sun. Then people and animals could survive on the earth, but now you see it sun heat is increasing every year. We can't get springs, streams, and rivers as we did in the past. We suffer from a lack of water; we get infected skin diseases due to lack of freshwater.

Reserved forest and hills: They have myths about worshipping gods and spirits to maintain reserve forests and hills. Linkok Mro (35) said,

Hills and forests have spirits, gods, deities, and demons live there, we don't go to that hill or that forest where the demon lives, we do worship the god or deity because they live in those particular hills, and forest. There are some hills and forests in our region that are prohibited to go, let alone taking resources from these hills and forests.

Food preservation: The myths of the Murang society teach them about food preservation, consumption, and seed storage. One of the respondents, Klockdoy Mro (31) said,

*We have saved all kinds of crops for cultivation in *Jhum*; we will sow seeds in *Jhum*. Again, we get our year-round food from *Jhum*. I save the rice. Due to a shortage of paddy in *Jhum*, we bought it for two months last year. But we do it because our*

ancestor Klangcha did it, or we will die of starvation all year long.

Indigenous knowledge: The Murang People share the utilization of their indigenous knowledge and practices learning from myth. One of the respondents, Lairui Mro (42) opined,

I learned how to build a house and preserve crops for future use from our aged people. We learned about medicinal value of plants and herbs from an old man. Living near the jungle, we encountered both good and bad animals. The ancient story taught us when to go to the jungle and how to save them, guiding us in our journey. I follow the direction of our elders, recognizing the importance of practical knowledge.

Social solidarity and helping: The Murang community's traditional myths describe social solidarity, unity, feelings and helping others. One of the participants, Dolwai Mro (50) said,

During natural disasters, it is the key to learn from past experiences and adapt to new routes. Community meetings and discussions are essential for resolving common problems and overcoming disasters. Working together is essential for a better society. Living together and maintaining unity among individuals is essential for overcoming challenges and fostering positive change.

Balanced distribution: Their myths teach them to maintain the good practices of the balanced distribution of resources such as food and work. One of the participants, Botlai Mro (68) said,

When someone gets animals from the forest they come to the village, and then distribute them equally to all villagers according to their family members. Sometimes when they arrange cow killings festivals or slaughter pigs, cows, or other animals they distribute them equally to all. When it is the time of preparing Jhum or cultivating then all villagers go to the hill to help that family together.

Water resources: They have myths narrated that they had enough water resources. But resources are decreasing rapidly nowadays. Senlok Mro (30) was narrating about water crisis,

The old water sources, rivers and streams, have been decreasing due to rising

temperatures, tree cutting, and pollution from brick fields. As a result, fresh water is not being obtained from these sources. People are resorting to fetching polluted water from nearby sources, which is a significant issue in their community.

Health, illness, purity and impurity: Traditional myth of the Rina Plung tells them to play flute to combat cholera. Bauring Mro (34) was depicting the matter,

Cholera was a prevalent disease in our locality, and we used the Rina Plung to treat it. A village was affected by cholera, and people suggested playing the flute and dancing around the village to help. Forest plants are also used as medicine. We organize flute playing and dancing ceremonies, and some people even hold cow killing festivals to combat the disease.

One of the participants, Parau Mro (45) said about the perception about purity and impurity,

An old man died a few days ago in that house when his dead body came to the house with rebirth but the girl rushed to the man and bit the body with the broom. You know brooms are very impure, so the dead person who came to his house went back again since then no dead person came back by rebirth.

Development Thoughts: This portion described the Murang people's unmaking and making development thoughts as narratives that reveal their development thoughts.

Disinterest in chemical fertilizer: About 25 years ago, they started to use chemical fertilizers in the *Jhum* farming to improve soil quality. But now they are disinterested to use, Menlong Mro (45) said,

Our grandfathers used no fertilizer in their Jhum, which was soft. Today, we use white fertilizer, which makes the soil harder. We now only get one hundred pots of paddy instead of two hundred. We want to avoid using white fertilizer, as it could cause the soil to become soft again. The soil, created by Klangcha at God's command, has life, and we don't want to harm it.

Against manmade forest: The community has given a plan to build such a type of forest that is suitable to their environment and culture. One of the respondents, Mongpre Mro (35) said,

The owner gives the condition that the jungle should be cut and cleaned. It does not matter

if you cultivate Jhum in it. But I will give you timber plants, and you will plant them. But we know that when a timber tree is planted in a Juhm, the Jhum becomes infertile. You know, helicopters have been used to scatter timber saplings in the British era. Ancestor Klangcha said without cultivation we would die.

Unnecessary interventions: Some brickfields were causing environmental and socio-economic imbalances. One of my respondents, Kamsum Mro (30) said,

The river water is not good now. There is a lot of waste in the river. If I go to take a bath in the river then I get affected by a skin problem. There is a brickfield that has been set up and pollutes all water. One day, some government administrative officers had come here to stop the brickfield. But then the brickfield started again, it was polluting the water too much. We want our hills and forests back.

Unable to capitalize the development: The Bangladesh army made roads for mass transportation in CHT. But the Murang people still do not understand their usefulness or how to capitalize on them. Kauplau Mro (37) said,

This road is good and bad too; vehicles can go through the road and carry the products. But what happened now? It becomes so hot due to the concrete road. Our previous road was just as thin as our fingers. No vehicle could go, we were well then.

On the other hand, Riong Mro (32) said,

Our road was very thin; it was very cold weather as there were only hills and forests everywhere. Now, this pitched road is remaining busy with transportation, and the birds and animals of the forests have gone away due to the noise and acute sound of the vehicles. This road is good too because we can go anywhere by vehicle and carry the crops also.

Forest is declining: Hill dwellers in Alikadam Upazila are facing a decline in natural forests. Kauplau Mro (37) said,

It is used to be available, but now there are no more trees and no medicine available. There are currently no large trees and the trees are being cut down so the trees are being finished. I will give you 800 takas. Then you cut down the tree. Trees are

needed for various purposes. I do not understand. Am I wrong?

“The jhum will be lost”: The *Jhum*, a major livelihood source for the Murang, is facing decline due to cutting hills. One of the participants, Kamsum Mro (27) said,

Every land has an owner and there is a headman in the area. We have to get land from the Bengali by talking to the headman. The owner says that you can cultivate anything but I will plant Segun (a kind of wooden tree) in the hills. What will happen after planting Segun, it will be ten to twenty years, in the meanwhile, you cannot use the land for cultivation. The Jhum will disappear in the next five years.

Decreasing crop production: The Murang are experiencing a decreasing gross production rate. One of my participants, Pongrey Mro (32), said,

Now all types of crops are less than before. From paddy to sesame, chilies, and pulses everything is decreasing. Now our families do not get food for the entire year. Maybe sometimes we buy and eat rice for two months or one month. Earlier I used to get a lot of rice. Now it is slowly decreasing. The reason for this is that if a Jhum is cultivated repeatedly.

Increasing fruit garden: The *Jhum* community is considering growing fruit on their land, despite the decline of banana farming. They prefer their traditional cultivation system for survival. Khingro Mro (45) said,

Planting banana trees in the ground will not harm the soil. The banana plant decomposes and mixes with the soil, increasing the fertility of the land. Now we could not manage all our food from the Jhum, I have a Jhum where I want to plant mango trees. The Mango gardens are more profitable than the Jhum.

No safe drinking water: Natural water sources are becoming polluted by brickfields, chemicals, and waste. These are causing various diseases and skin problems. Pongrey Mro (32) said,

The village's tube well is not functioning due to its insufficient depth to lift water from the ground level. The wells should have been placed deeper to ensure water supply. The tube well needs repair. The village's drinking water is affected by us dumping waste into the river.

Lack of sanitation: The participants lack knowledge and infrastructural support for sanitation. They lack hygienic toilets for use, and are not educated about the necessity. Pongrey Mro (32) said about,

Many people use toilets, but many don't due to the declining jungle and lack of bushes for hiding. Despite making toilets, many people lack knowledge on maintaining healthy use due to their lack of education. NGO workers have rarely visited the village to discuss proper toilet making and usage, as many people lack the capacity to create.

No outreach health programs: The Murang lacks access to public health-based programs and services. Himiching, a 32-year-old woman who had been anemic for a long time, said,

I was suffering from blood shortages and was struggling to recover with the help of a local healer. When I could not continue, I went to Upazila hospital, where discovered I had blood shortage. If a primary physician had been present at our locality, I might have got treatment.

Lack of education programs: The Murang lacks proper outreach programs for elementary, secondary, and higher education. Only a few students live at charity hostel for education, but few families can afford the yearly charge of 15,000 Taka for accommodation and food. Menla, a 26-year-old BA student said,

A primary school in Murang village has 20-30 students, with occasional attendance from teachers and irregular students. Children prefer to help their parents in Jhum, while another NGO school with 15-20 students runs regularly. If one school can run properly with all support, there is no need for two schools in the same village.

Impacts of the army: The Bangladesh army's presence is often avoided but significantly impacts their lives. One of my participants, Riong Mro (32) mentioned,

This road was set up by the army, about fifteen to eighteen years ago. I don't know

whether the road is good or bad for us. I can't tell anything. This pitched road brought extreme heat in this area. If you go to our village there are a lot of trees and a small forest, there is no heat like this road.

Different layers of development: The concept of development varies significantly among the Murang people. Pongre Mro (22) said,

Development means the main issue is we need water. Many of us are uneducated, if they become educated, they can use the toilet. If there is no toilet they would go to the nearest jungle as they are uneducated, but the educated person knows how to develop the environment. Development means gradually becoming good from the bad. Become educated from uneducated, get a job for a living, more income than poverty.

On the other hand, Chamri Mro (27), told,

What I cultivate in my land so that I could eat yearlong. My grandfather gave me the land; this is a token of my grandfather. If I could eat food for a year, then this is my happiness and peace. Now I don't have to buy paddy for my family, my family is doing well, this is my development.

5. DISCUSSION

Category and scope of traditional myths: Mythology is classic narratives that share numerous characteristics with different kinds of tales [14]. It is always to be kept in mind that the intermediary role that an anthropologist or ethnographer plays cannot be avoided [15]. Anthropologists study myths, examining key themes about civilization and culture, including creation, cultural heroes, and animals, to understand the origins of the community [16]. The Murang community has a diverse range of myths, including protecting forests, preserving biodiversity, preserving land, keeping unity, maintaining health and sanitation, and adhering to social rules.

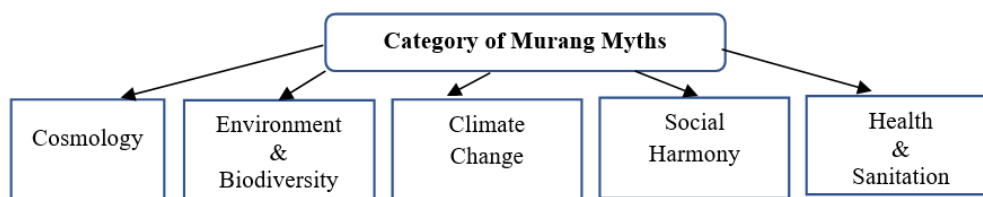


Fig. 1. Types of traditional myths of the murang community in CHT, Bangladesh

One of the salient features of the Murang myth is that it owns a holistic worldview. These offer a holistic perspective on life, society, nature, and the economy with considering all aspects of the tale. This holistic perspective focuses on mind, body, individuals, society, and environment to go through and define one another. It is a valuable theory for understanding the complex subject matter of human nature [17]. Moreover, their myths symbolize their current situation and ongoing problems, such as poverty, deficient education, and diseases like skin problems and malaria.

Minimal link between myth and conventional development: The Murang's development thought is based on traditional myths. Their thought focuses on *Jhum*-based food, deep forests, housing, wood, water, and land. These kinds of beliefs are influenced by their specific livelihoods and living patterns in hilly and forest lands. Development policy and practice appear to have been periodically regenerated and reformulated with new ideas and thinking [18].

The traditional myths are too little connected to conventional developments and interventions, e.g., paved roads, buildings, billboards, and setting up brick fields. They lived a wealthy life before the settlers arrived and used indigenous medicines for treatment. Their myths focus on preserving resources, maintaining social harmony, and equitable wealth distribution. People were friendly to the forest and its biodiversity and wanted to keep it alive. The myth 'Curse of Killing Birds' teaches that killing a bird could turn the habitat into a hell, which indicates the relationship between the forest and biodiversity.

Development is not reaching: Bangladesh development projects in the CHT focus on building roads and bridges on hills, with military checkpoints and camps for monitoring. GO-NGOs raise awareness about issues like coronavirus, village courts, preventing malaria, fruit gardening, community mobilization, seed preservation, and crop selling points. However, these programs' banners, festoons, placards, and billboards are primarily written in Bangla. The community cannot read Bangla to understand these messages. They often lack understanding of the benefits of roads and do not use vehicles for transporting their crops. Regular outreach programs also create obstacles to their access to awareness-raising messages.

Original affluence and SDGs: The 'original affluent society's hypothesis suggests hunter-gatherers' lives provided material comfort and security. It had allowed them to live affluently by satisfying their material needs easily; as presented by Marshall Sahlins in 1966 [19]. As the Murang people live in extreme poverty, they cannot manage the basic needs of life nowadays [20]. They focus on three meals daily, wood-bamboo for housing, and hills for farming. Their needs are similar to the ancient hunter-gatherer society of the Sahlins; and related to the SDG goal of eradicating poverty [21].

Jhum land is shrinking due to factors like Bengali settlers, roads, industries, and tourism. It is causing the loss of traditional land ownership, fertility, and forest resources. This result decreased food productivity, affecting food security [22]. Rivers and fountains are suffering from reduced water flow and shallowness. It is leading to a severe water shortage. Due to a lack of purchasing power, they occasionally depend on livestock and poultry for meat. However, the SDGs aim to eradicate hunger and malnutrition by focusing on sustainable agriculture [23].

The Murang depends on natural water sources; e.g., streams, *Chhara*, *Jhiri*, *Khal*, rivers, etc. [24], especially in remote areas. Tube wells in villages are often nonoperational due to shallow pipes, and having access to clean drinking water is a big worry [25]. They believe that safe drinking water and other water sources are critical for their survival. They want to install deep tube wells to provide the necessary water. However, SDG goal 6 aims for universal access to clean water by reducing pollution, waste, and doing infrastructure investment [26].

Although SDG goal 6 focuses on improving sanitation and hygiene [27], the community suffers from diarrhea and skin diseases due to inadequate sanitation practices, including toilets, latrines, clean water, and dish cleaning. That negatively impacts socioeconomic status, job loss, medical costs, and health [28]. Despite NGOs' billboards, people are unaware of sanitation due to inconsistent outreach programs. Younger generations demand full-fledged outreach programs and latrine infrastructure for remote villages, or at least they could be professionally trained.

The community faces social inequalities based on age, sex, gender, religion, and leadership. Their society is male-dominated that faces widespread discrimination, with women working

in home and *Jhum*. There is a clear wage gap between men and women in CHT [29]. Gender equality is emphasized in SDG goal 5 [30], but gender awareness programs are less outreaching to the community. They face *Jhum* land shrinkage due to the settlers' ownership. They lack social safety net program support. Despite Bengali leaders seeking their votes, they face discrimination in benefits like VGD, VGF, old age allowance, and solar panels. And SDG goal 10 targets to empower lower-income earners and promote economic inclusion via financial, wage, and social protection policies [30].

People are suffering from pollution and loss of natural balance due to industrial development, government infrastructure, and tourist attractions. The region's natural beauty is being destroyed. They prefer their previous state of forests and hills. Despite new infrastructure, they lack electricity in the hills, and only a few households can afford solar panels. The state and NGOs are less active in providing solar panels without cost, although SDG goal 9 emphasizes equitable access to infrastructure for all [31].

The education status of Murang is lower than that of other communities due to living in remote hills, a lack of access to education, and more involvement in *Jhum*. They desire free hostels in Alikadam, more primary and secondary schools, and education programs that include Bangla and Murang language and culture. There are 28 government primary schools; all are situated near major roads or at Alikadam Upazila. Four high schools are located in Alikadam town [32]. However, the SDG goal 4 focuses on inclusive, quality education for all. It is aimed at free primary and secondary schools, equal access to vocational training, and universal higher education [33].

As per SDG goal 16, social peace, stability, human rights, and effective governance, addressing global division, promoting rule of law, and strengthening global governance institutions are necessary [34]. The local community enjoys peace and social harmony, but outsiders seize their resources like land, forest, wood, and bamboo. It is leading them to poverty and tensions of conflict. They lack proper justice, such as receiving wood for housing and hills for *Jhum*. They are deprived of VGD or VGF cards. It is destroying their mental peace and causing them to live a life of deprivation.

Finally, SDG goal 15 emphasizes immediate action to preserve natural habitats, biodiversity,

global food and water security, and mitigate climate change [35]. The community is facing food insecurity and biodiversity decline due to land occupied by the settlers. Thus, it is necessary to preserve natural hills, forests, water resources, and biodiversity for their survival.

6. CONCLUSION

The study recommends that the development projects should consider the local culture, language, politics, conflict, and diversity of the CHT in Bangladesh. The projects should be developed in consideration of preserving and protecting biodiversity, the environment, forests, climate, and hills. Infrastructure-based development should benefit small ethnic groups like Murang. The Go-NGOs should provide free or least cost transport services for community members to transport crops to markets.

Moreover, health and sanitation should be addressed regularly through outreach programs and community training. Government housing projects should follow traditional house designs. Deep tube wells and sanitary latrines should be provided in every house. Social safety net programs should include every ethnic community. Solar panels should be provided to all ethnic households at low cost or free, especially for poor households, as electricity is difficult to reach in forests and hills.

Finally, gender rights, land rights, and access to forests should be prioritized in development projects. Illegal land occupying and planting timer tree plants should be stopped in CHT. The government should legalize customary land rights for ethnic groups. The local union should be formed with reservation of member posts representing all ethnic groups in the area. Ethnic groups should receive waivers or deductions for education costs and hostel fees for secondary level education. Enough hostels should be built to ensure high school access in town areas, as high school is not accessible in all hill areas.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of manuscripts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research was funded by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs (MoCA), Bangladesh, in the fiscal

year 2021-2022. Moreover, the researcher is grateful to the local Murang community of Bandarban, the Bangladesh National Museum, and the MoCA, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

1. Ministry of Cultural Affairs [MoCA]. Bangladesh Gezette. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Government Press; 2019, March 19.
2. BBS. Population and housing census 2022: National Report (Volume 1). Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning; 2023.
3. Siegel W. Mro; 2023, March 15. Available:<https://www.omniglot.com/writing/mro.htm>
4. Rashid M. Few ethnic minorities benefit leaving Hill Bengalis in the lurch. Bangladesh: The Daily Observer; 2022.
5. Saifee KS. MRO- CHA- A hub for mru indigenous people promoting the “mru”; retaining their ethnicity. brac University, Bangladesh; 2013.
6. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare [MoHFW]. Health sector support project (hssp) including additional financing. Updated Framework for Tribal Peoples Plan (FTPP). Dhaka, Bangladesh: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; 2018.
7. Khisa SK, Mohiuddin M. Shrinking jum and changing livelihood in the chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh. In C. Erni, Shifting Cultivation, Livelihood and Food Security New and Old Challenges for Indigenous Peoples in Asia (pp. 3-40). FAO, IWGIA, AIPP; 2015.
8. Magni G. Indigenous knowledge and implications for the sustainable development agenda. Eur J Educ. 2017;437–447.
9. Perucca C. Social water management among munda people in the sundarban. Dhaka: University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh; 2010.
10. Ceglarska A. The role of myth in political thought. Krakowskie Studia z Historii Państwa i Prawa. 2018;11(3):343–355. Available:<https://doi.org/10.4467/20844131KS.18.023.9049>
11. MoHFW. Bangladesh health sector support program (HSSP). Framework for tribal peoples plan (FTPP). Bangladesh Health Sector Support Program (HSSP), Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh; 2017.
12. Haque MR. Is militarization perceived as sustainable development for chittagong hill tracts (CHT)?: A case study on CHT, Bangladesh. Ide Discussion Paper No. 717; 2018.
13. Roy RD, Chakma MK. National seminar on indigenous peoples in Bangladesh: Human rights and sustainable development goals. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum (BIPF); 2015, December 10.
14. Todorov T. Introduction To Poetics. Univ of Minnesota Press; 1981.
15. Boskovic A. Anthropological perspectives on myth. Anuário Antropológico. 2002;25(1):103-144. Available:<https://doi.org/https://periodicos.u nb.br/index.php/anuarioantropologico/artic le/view/6767/7424>
16. Hasty J, Lewis DG, Snipes MM. Myth and religious doctrine. Retrieved from The LibreTexts libraries; 2022, August 06. Available:[https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Anthropology/Introductory_Anthropology/Introduction_to_Anthropology_\(OpenStax\)/13%3A_Religion_and_Culture/13.04%3A_Myth_and_Religious_Doctrine](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Anthropology/Introductory_Anthropology/Introduction_to_Anthropology_(OpenStax)/13%3A_Religion_and_Culture/13.04%3A_Myth_and_Religious_Doctrine)
17. Schultz EA, Lavenda RH. Cultural anthropology: A perspective on the human condition. Oxford University Press, USA; 2013.
18. Pokharel B. Theories and practices of development: An anthropological perspective. Dhaulagiri Journal of Sociology and Anthropology. 2013;7:1-30. Available:<https://doi.org/10.3126/dsaj.v7i0.10435>
19. Sahlins M. Stone Age Economics. Routledge; 2017.
20. Rahman MM. Life and society of the mro ethnic group of Bangladesh: An Ethnographic analysis. Iarjset. 2023; 10(6):294-309. Available:<https://doi.org/10.17148/IARJSE T.2023.10644>
21. UN. Department of economic and social affairs: Sustainable Development; 2023. Retrieved from United Nations Available:<https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>
22. Nahar A, Akbar MA, Biswas JC, Gafur A, Uddin MF, Rashid S, Hamid A. Household

- demography and food security of jhum farmers in Bandarban district, Bangladesh. Journal of Applied Agricultural Economics and Policy Analysis. 2020;3(1):8-14. Available:https://doi.org/10.12691/jaaepa-3-1-2
23. UNDP. Clean Water and Sanitation; 2023 Retrieved from Sustainable Development Goals. Available:https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/clean-water-and-sanitation
24. NGOF. In quest for safe water in CHT: Alternatives Water Technologies. NGO Forum for Public Health; 2016.
25. UNICEF. Many tracts one community: UNICEF'S Work in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. UNICEF Bangladesh; 2019.
26. UNDP. Gender Equality; 2023.Retrieved from Sustainable Development Goals Available:https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/gender-equality
27. UNDP. Goal 4 Quality Education; 2023. Retrieved from What are the Sustainable Development Goals?: Available:https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/quality-education
28. Mahmud MS, Amin SM, Rashed MA, Mahmud R. Water, sanitation and hygiene practices among ethnic communities in chittagong hill tracts, Bangladesh. International Journal of Current Research. 2020;12(08):13269-13275. Available:https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.38401.08.2020
29. ADB. SPRSS: Bangladesh: Second Chittagong Hill Tracts Rural Development Project. Asian Development Bank; 2011.
30. UNDP. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; 2023. Retrieved from Sustainable Development Goals: Available:https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/industry-innovation-and-infrastructure
31. UNDP. Life on Land; 2023. Retrieved from Sustainable Development Goals Available:https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/life-on-land
32. National Portal. Different Institutions; 2023. Retrieved from Alikadam Upazila Available:http://alikadam.bandarban.gov.bd/en
33. UNDP. Peace, Justice and strong institutions; 2023. Retrieved from Sustainable Development Goals Available:https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/peace-justice-and-strong-institutions
34. UNDP. Reduced Inequalities; 2023.Retrieved from Sustainable Development Goals https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/reduced-inequalities
35. UNDP. Zero Hunger; 2023. Retrieved from Sustainable Development Goals: Available:https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals/zero-hunger

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of the publisher and/or the editor(s). This publisher and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.

© Copyright (2024): Author(s). The licensee is the journal publisher. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Peer-review history:

The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
<https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/120772>