

**Labour Migration, Inter-ethnic Relations and Empowerment**  
**A Study of *Khyang* Indigenous Garments Workers, Chittagong Hill**  
**Tracts, Bangladesh**



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**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of  
Philosophy in Gender and Development Department of Education and Health  
Promotion, Faculty of Psychology,  
University of Bergen, Norway  
June 2009**

*Dedication*

This work is dedicated to my parents, Tahera Begum and Abdul Jalil.

Also *Khyang* indigenous community.

## Acknowledgement

I am indebted to my all Khyang informants who gave me their valuable time. I am grateful to them for welcoming me into their homes and sharing their lives experiences with me. Without their assistance this work would not have been made possible. I hold dear the times I spent in the field in Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts. I have learnt a great deal from this encounter which has highly enriched my experience. I will forever treasure the memories. I would never ever forget Masa Khyang who made this unknown journey possible, took me to every villages with other key informants and also he worked as an interpreter in the Khyang villages. Without Masa I cannot imagine my field work, my gratitude would always be there for him. I am also thankful to Tone K Sissener, CMI who first gave me the contact of the factory president when I was in Norway.

A greatest thanks also goes to Caroline Bauer, Peter Bauer, Manzurul Haider, Kamrul Islam Masud, in particular and also to the Bangladesh Spinners & Knitters (PVT) Limited and Youngone factories who assisted me in my fieldwork in Chittagong EPZ and other factories. I am also indebted to Arun Laibresho for his unlimited support during the course of the research. Without his help it would have been impossible to visit the *Rajsthali* Khyang student hostel, *Arachori para*, and *Rangamati*. It is with a heavy heart that write this acknowledgement about him, knowing that his dream was to see the finalization of my thesis on the *Khyang* community. May his soul rest in perfect peace. My thanks also goes to the BEPZA official Mahmud Hasan and the many people who helped me during my field-work in Chittagong and CHTs. A special thanks also goes to John, parents and brother of Masa Khyang, Ching Shaw Khyang, Minu, Headman and *Karbari* of *Arachori* and *Keplang para*.

My heartfelt thanks goes to my supervisor, Dr. Haldis Haukanes for the support and guidance she provided me throughout my research. Her comments, guidance and suggestions enabled me to consistently improve upon my work every step of the way. I am particularly grateful for the patience she has displayed towards me. In recapitulating the contributions I received, I owe my thanks to Professor Naila Kabeer. I first met her during her short visit as a guest speaker at University of Bergen. I got the opportunity also to meet her in Dhaka just before starting my field work at CHTs, Bangladesh. Her suggestions and contribution towards my research work simply made me grateful. Her renowned work 'Power to Choose' was the constant source of inspiration for me in the path of acquisition of knowledge and to think about garments workers of Bangladesh.

Sincere appreciation also goes to the assistance of the staff of the GAD programme at the Department of Education and Health Promotion: Kristin Senneset, Tone Lund- Olsen and Alis Lund- Johansen for their continual and prompt cooperation and help with all administrative matters. Without support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), my studies and stay in Norway would not have been possible and for this, I am very grateful. My heartfelt thanks goes to Kristin Paulsen, the NORAD coordinator who was always there to help with questions and problems.

Thanks also goes to my dearest friends Dinah Ohenebimah Agyepong, masters student of English department, Uib, Kathrine Nærum, Økonomi og Administrasjon, Høgskolen i Bergen, Doris Annan Nortey, HEMIL center and Godfried Nortey Nortey, System Dynamics who helped me so much throughout the year with child care so I could continue my work. Without their support and co-operation it wouldn't be possible to finish this thesis today.

And last but certainly not the least special thanks to my husband Ranjan and my parents in Bangladesh for the support and encouragement that they have given me during the entire process of fieldwork and thesis writing. Without their love and best wishes for me from across the miles, the task of completing my thesis may not have been as smooth. I am extremely grateful for their presence in my life. I am also grateful to my two small daughter Prarthona (twenty three months old) and Prokriti (six months old). In order to finish my work, they sacrificed a lot.

Bergen, June 2009

Jebunnessa Chapola

## Abstract

There has been a growing trend among the *Khyang* indigenous people of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh to migrate from their traditional occupation (*Jhum* cultivation) and take up new occupations (mostly garments factory work) in the big cities. These changes have led to critical shifts in the social and gender relations, institutions of the indigenous people and in the *Khyang* indigenous women's empowerment. Using my research in the Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) and Chittagong Hill Tracts which are situated in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh, I juxtapose *Khyang* indigenous garment workers' experience in the new city environment to understand their challenges in their living arrangements, work place and social life in the city compared to their life in the villages. These indigenous people move from a semi-egalitarian society to a capitalist patriarchal society. In the thesis, it is argued that *Khyang* indigenous women have challenged and renegotiated complex interethnic interactions within their work place, housing compounds and new forms of living arrangement through their involvement in paid labour. The thesis also articulates that my *Khyang* informant's access to wage labour may improve their existing position in their home communities and increase their chances for better and delayed marriages. It may also enable them to raise their voice in family decision making and encourage their questioning of unequal practices and ethnic discrimination. In addition, it can increase their sense of self reliance and bargaining power. Despite the wage earning and the subsequent empowerment of *Khyang* women, there are, however, several negative aspects of their migration into city and the life worlds of garments factories. Firstly, their participation in garment's work is not always well regarded by people in their home communities. Moreover, the working conditions in the garment's factories are not safe and healthy and they experience stereotyping and ethnic discrimination from the majority society due to their different language, accents, religion, food and dress. The latter may be minimized if cross cultural communication in city life, working places and housing is improved. Moreover, if wage, working and living conditions can improve for factory workers then it would be possible to increase the social acceptance for *Khyang* indigenous women which could possibly challenge the majority Bengali mainstream culture.

*Key words: Empowerment, labour migration, Garment's work, Ethnicity, Inter-ethnic relations, indigenous societies.*

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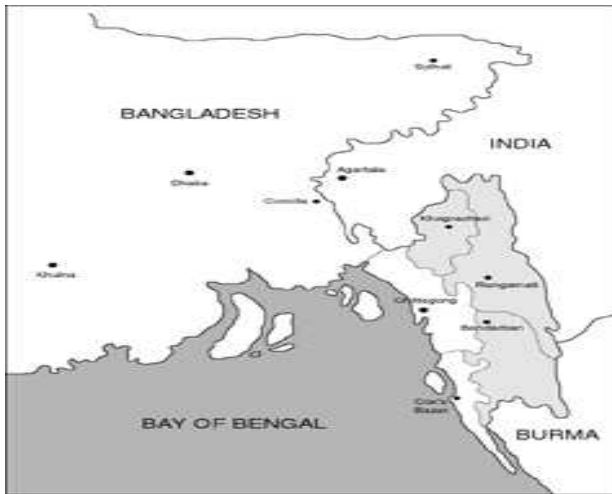
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## Map of Bangladesh



Source: <http://geography.about.com/library/cia/blcbangladesh.htm>

## Map of Chittagong Hill Tracts



Map by Jorge Monrás, 2000

### Chittagong Hill Tracts - Indigenous Ethnic Groups

BA Bawm CH Chakma KH Khumi KY Khyang LU Lushai MA Marma UC Uchay MR Mru PA Pankho SA Sak TA Tanchangya



Source: <http://www.iwgia.org/sw28364.asp>

## **List of abbreviations**

CHTs- Chittagong Hill Tracts

PCJSS -*Parbatyooa chattogram Jana Samhiti Samiti*

BEPZA -Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority

EPZ-Export Processing Zone

CEPZ- Chittagong Export Processing Zone

DEPZ- Dhaka Export Processing zone

NGO- Non Government Organisation

ILO- International Labour Organisation

SSC-Secondary School Certificate

RFs- Reserved Forests

PFs- Protected Forests

USFs-Unclassified State Forests

HR-Human Resource

MD- Managing Director

FGDs-Focus Group Discussions

BIDS- Bangladesh Institute of Development studies

## Glossary of Bengali Terms

*Burkha*-over-garment worn by some Muslim women observing *purdah*

*Bashcowl*-Bamboo Shoot

*Bokhate Chele*- Street Hooligan

*Bideshi*- foreigner

*Binni*- One kind of rice

*Biri*- local cigarette

*Bang* – Frog

*Bekub*- foolish

**Bengali Settlers-** The Chittagong Hill Tracts have been populated by the indigenous people who have their own culture, language, religion which is completely different from those of the plain Landers. It is during Bangladesh period the Government launched programme of bringing them within the mainstream of the National population. Therefore, Bengali speaking Muslim people from the mainland were allowed and officially encouraged to settle in the Hill Tracts to make the hill people minority in their own home land. The Bengali settlers are land less from the plain land districts of Bangladesh, majority are from Chittagong, Noakhali, Comilla and Sylhet districts. They were known as settlers in the hilly region. The result was very bitter culminating into the conflict and war.

*Chandabaj* –Hooligan those demand money illegally

*Chemree/chemra*- Filthy words/ local common bully

*Didi*- sister

*Darwan* - Guard

*Eid*- Two major Muslim festivals; the first Eid follows Ramadan,the month of fasting, the second celebrates Abraham's sacrifice

*Gila*- Jungle fruit's seed

*Galagali*- Filthy words/ bully

*Headman*- The headman is the administrative head of a *mouza* according to the traditional administrative system. He is appointed by the Government but nominated by the chief of the circle. He is responsible for keeping the tax lists, handing over of field taxes to the Chief .In legal matters, the headman is empowered to adjudicate in disputes according to customary law of the respective community (Shafie,2000).

*Haramjadee*- Common and bad local bully

*Hat*- Weekly market

*Jonglee*- who lives in jungle (derogatory way)

*Jhum chash*- slash and burn style of shifting cultivation on hill slope

*Jumma*- Thirteen ethnic communities in CHTs are collectively identify themselves as the indigenous *Jumma* people

*Khyang*-CHT have been the home to 13 indigenous ethnic minority groups, *Khyang* is one of them

*Khyang Kallan Songstha* - An organization to protect *Khyang* culture and heritage

*Kunajor*- A look with bad intension

*Khunta* -Indigenous knife

*Kauta*- Tortoise (In a derogatory way)

*Karbari*- Head of village, informally elected by the villagers and acknowledge by the administration; responsible to deliver the field taxes to the headman.

*Kuttar Baccha*- Son of a bitch (very bad local Bengali Slang / bully)

*Lengti*- Man dress, covering only the genitals

*Mouza*- smallest regional unit of fiscal administration; in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, under the authority of a headman; normally made up of several small, independent villages- administratively united irrespective of ethnic composition

*Mishtanno*-One kind of rice pudding

*Meye manush*- Women

*Nappy*-Fermented fish

*Orna*- A long cloth to cover up breast which needs to wear with *Shalwar- Kameez*.

*Oshobvo*- A Bengali derogatory term meaning is 'uncivilized' and 'Primitive'

*Purush manush*- Male/ Men

*Parbotyo Chottogram*- Chittagong Hill Tracts

*Para*- Village neighborhood

*Pahari* –Hilly/ Hill people

*Pahaira* -Hill people in a derogatory Bengali word

*Purdah*- Female seclusion, custom of segregation of sexes

*Puja*- Worship, adoration

*Pitha*- One kind of cake

*Ramadan*- month of fasting

*Razakar*- Collaborator with the Pakistani army during liberation war of Bangladesh (1971).

*Shalwar- Kameez*- Loose trouser and a long shirt

*Saree*- the principal outer garment of a woman of Bangladesh, consisting of a long piece of cloth worn wrapped around the body.

*Shuor/ shukor*-Pig/ Pork

*Shuorer Baccha*- Bloody swine (very bad local Bengali Slang / bully)

*Shobbho*- civilized / modern

*Thami*- Traditional indigenous women dress .Skirt like (sometimes ankle-length) garment wore by women. It is similar with *lungi* but fasten it differently from Bengali men.

*Tk*- Taka ,Bangladeshi currency, Tk 69 =1 US\$ (During the research period)

*Thana*- The smallest administrative unit of the Government of Bangladesh. This comprises of a few unions, which again is formed of a few villages.

*Tamak pata*/ pipe -tobacco leaf

*Thrung*-One kind of bamboo made basket

*Upojati*- The term *upojati* refers to the indigenous people in general

*Gram* (village)- A village is the lowest unit of local Government in the rural area of Bangladesh

Note: All photos presented in this thesis were taken by the researcher during field work in Chittagong city, CEPZ and Chittagong Hill Tracts.

## Chapter One

### Statement of the Problem

There has been a growing trend among the indigenous people of Chittagong Hill Tracts (hereafter CHTs) to leave their traditional occupations and migrate into the city to take up new activities. These changes have led to critical shifts in the social relations and institutions of the indigenous people. The economic activities of the hill people have become increasingly mediated by the market, involving the sale of production and labor, borrowing money as well as increased purchase of consumptions and production inputs. The traditional community based management of *Jhum*<sup>1</sup> cultivation and common village forest can no longer be practiced by many *Pahari* (Hilly) communities because of the loss of their common land. It is important to find out why indigenous people have migrated from their traditional occupations to the big cities. It could be due to the factors associated with the government resettlement policy, counter-insurgency (military action), political oppression and administrative pressure, displacement, deforestation pulling factors, prosperous labor markets, and search for better living condition. My study was conducted in the Chittagong city which is the second capital city of Bangladesh. Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) and Chittagong Hill Tracts are situated in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh. The Chittagong Hill Tracts *Jumma* people<sup>2</sup> are distinct and different from the majority Bengali population of Bangladesh in respect of race, language, culture, religion and ethnicity. There are thirteen<sup>3</sup> indigenous ethnic groups in CHTs and my study concerns a minority indigenous community known as *Khyang* . Although there have been some studies undertaken to assess the reason

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<sup>1</sup> Slash and burn technology of agriculture practiced mainly by the people of pre-plough age. *Jhum* is still practiced in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). *Jhuming* or shifting cultivation, popularly known as Sweden cultivation or cultivation of slash and burn, is the most prevalent form of cultivation in the hill areas of Bangladesh. Most indigenous people are well acquainted with this type of farming. *Jhuming* is practiced on sloppy hills outside reserve forests.

<sup>2</sup> The word *Jumma* derives from the word *Jhum*. There are thirteen ethnic groups in CHTs. These ethnic people are collectively identifying themselves as the indigenous *Jumma* people. ([http://www.ijpnus.org/the\\_chts](http://www.ijpnus.org/the_chts))

<sup>3</sup> There is a controversy about these thirteen indigenous communities. In different literature it is also mentioned about eleven to twelve indigenous communities in CHTs.



of the migration of indigenous people and their life styles, the *Khyang* garments workers migration cause and empowerment remain unaddressed. Given this, it is expected that this study will throw valuable light on the facts on *Khyang women's* migration, their garments wage, and changing face of gender role. It is hoped that the findings of this research will also produce new knowledge for further academic interest, Bengali mainstream society and the study might inspire *Khyang* Indigenous people to understand more of their situation.

### **Research Objectives:**

1. What are the causes of migration for *Khyang* indigenous women from CHTs to the Chittagong city?
2. What are the living and working conditions of *Khyang* indigenous women in the new city environment, and how do they integrate and negotiate with majority ethnic groups in their living and working place?
3. Which challenges do *Khyang* female garments workers face because of their indigenous ethnic identity?
4. How is the *Khyang* Indigenous women's factory work regarded by their family and the local community and have their decision making power in the family been changed by their involvement in a factory work?

### **Background of the Study**

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) is the only mountainous region of Bangladesh, which is located in the southeast of Bangladesh. The indigenous people living in various lowland regions are scattered in the greater *Rajshahi-Dinajpur* region in the northwest, the greater *Mymensingh* region in the central north, the greater *Sylhet* region in the northeast, and the greater *Patuakhali-Barguna-Cox's Bazar* region in the South (Roy,2002 :6). There are thirty different indigenous communities living at the different parts of Bangladesh (Robidas, 2002). The *Khyangs* are one of them. The geography of the region, in contrast to the rest of the

country's plains, is comprised of hills, valleys, and a dense semi tropical monsoon forest. A part of the Hill Tracts is covered with crowded forest, while the valleys are well timbered. CHTs, geographically, is a part of hilly regions that branches off from the Himalayan ranges to the South through Assam and Hill Tripura to *Arakan* and Burma (Currently known as Myanmar). The three districts in the Chittagong Hill Tracts are known as *Rangamati*, *Bandarban*, and *Khagrachari* (Gain et al., 2000).

The field materials for this thesis were collected at several field sites in Chittagong Hill Tracts and in Chittagong city garment factories (the *Khyang* indigenous garment workers in some local and Export Processing Zone factories). In addition to this, I visited the *Khyang* villages in *Bandarban* and *Rangamati* district. My research field was in five different villages of *Keplang para* (Under *Roangchhari thana*<sup>4</sup>, *Bandarban* district), *Arachori para* (Under *Rajasthali Upazila*<sup>5</sup>, *Rangamati* district) , *Gunguru Moddhom para & Dolbonia para* (under the district of *Bandarban*,) *Chandroghona* (under the district of *Kaptai*).

From thirteen indigenous groups, *Khyang* community is the smaller indigenous communities within the CHTs. *Khyang* have the same origin as the Chin of Burma<sup>6</sup>; *Khyang* 's language is similar to that of the southern Chin with a partial influence of the Burmese language (Shafie, 2000). The total *Khyang* population is approximately 2, 500 (Total number of family is approx. 400) according to a 2001 census. However, according to Bangladesh *Khyang Kallan Songstha*<sup>7</sup> 2006 survey, the total *Khyang* population is 3800 (1767 male and

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<sup>4</sup> **Thana** an unit of police administration. Under a regulation issued on 7 November 1792 by the government of the Bengal Presidency, the district magistrates were asked to divide their respective districts into police jurisdictions called '*thana*'. The area of a *thana* was not to exceed 'ten cross square'. Initially, a *thana* was purely a police jurisdiction headed by a junior police officer, namely the officer-in-charge (OC). With the creation of circle system, particularly after 1961, *thana* became the main centre of development activities with most of the development departments of the provincial government having their own functionaries at that level. ([http://www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs/HT/T\\_0137.HTM](http://www.banglapedia.org/httpdocs/HT/T_0137.HTM))

<sup>5</sup> After 1982, each *thana* was upgraded into a upazila (sub-district).

<sup>6</sup> Burma is presently known as Myanmar

<sup>7</sup> *Khyang Kallan Songstha* is an organization to protect *Khyang* culture and heritage which is based on *Rajasthali Upazila* in *Rangamati* district. The president of the organization was Arun Laibresho.

2033 female), (*Khoborer Ontorale*<sup>8</sup>, 20 July 2006). These threatened people are concentrated in the remote areas of the *Rangamati*<sup>9</sup> Hill district. No. 332 Jimram, No. 334 *Kukkachhari*, No. 335 Dhanuchhari, and No. 336 *Arachhari Mouzas*<sup>10</sup> in the *Rajasthali* Upazila (sub-district); this is also where some of their main concentrations are located, which they consider to be their original habitats. However, there are pockets of *Khyang* settlements in *Roangchhari thana*, *Ramu* and *Thanchi* in *Bandarban* Hill District; *Farua* union, *Baliachhari* Upazila in *Rangamati* and *Chandraghona Sadar* in *Kaptai* Upazila (Ibid).

There are two kinds of *Khyang* communities, the *Kongtu Khyang* and the *Laitu Khyang* (more at chapter four). The first category of *Khyang* people live on top of the mountain and are mostly converted to the Christian (Seventh-Day Adventists) from the Buddhism. Another group lives in the plain land of the valleys in CHTs, and they are mostly Buddhist. I observed and came to know from village leaders and elderly people that the involvement of *laitu Khyang* people in plough-cultivation. I also observed, *Kongtu Khyang* people's life styles which is more dependent upon shifting cultivation (*jhum chash*) because of their remote high altitude level. They hardly feel the need to come down from the top of the mountain as shifting agriculturists have limited economic and social relations with the outsiders. They retain a large degree of cultural autonomy compared to the *Laitu Khyang*. It is very difficult for Bengalis to enter the *Kongtu Khyang* area. The *Laitu Khyang* villages are mostly surrounded by the Bengalis. It is partly because of their low and leveled land of the valleys location.

The studies show that there is a long and tragic history of subjugation, harassment, and oppression of the hill people living in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The precarious conditions of the *Khyangs* are no exception from other indigenous communities in the CHTs due to insurgency, counter-insurgency, militarization, and Bengali settlement (Adnan: 2004, Mohsin: 1997). The

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<sup>8</sup> *Khoborer Ontorale*- A Bengali weekly magazine.

<sup>9</sup> *Rangamati* is located in the South-east corner of Bangladesh and approximately 600 kilometers away from Dhaka city

indigenous require vast land areas for their *jhum* cultivation but, in recent days, they have been losing their land. A big percentage of *Khyang* families have disappeared from their homes because of harassment and forest cases after the expansion of the reserved forest. In some instances, entire *Khyang* villages have disappeared (Ibid). Many are believed to have moved further up towards the mountain. The absence of private ownership of land in CHTs provided opportunity to the Bengali neighbors to exploit them in many ways. The threat to the indigenous livelihood is accompanied by government policy as they are being forced not to carry out *jhum* cultivation or use the forest in their traditional way. The amendment of 1900 Regulation in 1928 divided the Hill Tracts to forest reserves where no one was allowed either to live or to grow crops. The forest department of Bangladesh Government plays a vital role in the process of land allocation for shifting cultivation. The Reserved Forests (RFs), cover about 24% of the CHTs, the Protected Forests (PFs) cover about 1% of the CHTs and the Unclassified State Forests (USFs) cover 75% of the CHTs (ibid). Deforestation has taken place in all of the RFs in the CHTs without exception, but the extent varies from forest to forest. Deforestation and destruction of natural reserves in the CHTs was further intensified by development activities such as dam, high way road construction, and other infrastructure development (Gain, 1998). The principle victims of deforestation are the most under privileged people, the majority of whom are indigenous women. Their problems and those of the environment are very much interrelated. Deforestation affects indigenous women more than indigenous men because women's primary responsibilities such as cooking, fetching water, and gathering fuel wood pose hardships when ecological degradation of forests occur. The scarcity of these materials deprives indigenous women from earning. The impacts of deforestation on indigenous women have affected their economic well being, health, and social status. There is no other population in the entire region who has been as badly affected by the expansion of reserved forests and plantations as the *Khyang* indigenous people (Gain, 2005: 54). Life became extremely difficult for them after the banning of *Jhum* cultivation. Some *Khyang* families have developed fruit gardens, but most have lost their livelihood means. Many *Khyang* families earn their income by selling labor in plantations. Many families rely on a very small income from collecting and selling of fuel wood, bamboo, etc. that can still be extracted from the bush. The *Khyangs* used to grow most of their

subsistence crops. Foods from the jungle were also abundant. Nowadays indigenous people have to buy most of their necessities. As can be seen, these factors have forced them to link with market places that are too far from their villages. Both men and women struggle for food and other necessity as they are required to have to walk long distances. With a very low literacy rate, the *Khyang s* are now in a critical condition. A small number of the *Khyangs*, except for those living in *Chandraghona* ( a developed *thana* where people have some modern facilities), are able to have basic education. In spite of initiatives of some missionaries to assist in the socio-economic upliftment of the *Khyang* community, it has been impossible for most of the *Khyang s*, scattered throughout the remote hills, to get basic education. There is hardly any public school that the *Khyang* children can reach. To be enrolled in any public school, they need to have adequate accommodation. For example, the *Khyang* children living in *Rajasthali* Upazila must have accommodation in *Rajasthali upazila Sadar* to attend public schools. Without accommodation, they will need to walk 20 to 30 kilometers every day. While setting some primary schools in the remote villages are necessary, a hostel for the *Khyang* boys and girls in *Upazila Sadar* can be of immense help to strengthen their access to education. This situation became evident as I had the opportunity to visit and interact with the *Rajshthali upazila Sadar Khyang* students in *Rangamati* district during the field work. If all the above mentioned causes of migration could be rectified then the migration of indigenous people from the villages to the city in search of a better life could be reduced to a minimal.

Given this situation, this thesis is about the *Khyang* indigenous women's life and struggle in a new environment. Gender inequality, marginalization, unequal power relations and systemic inequalities in traditional patriarchal society will be discussed through *Khyang* indigenous women's garment's job, village and city life.

### **Review of Literature:**

Several authors have analyzed aspects of the women garment workers in Bangladesh. The problems and the working conditions of female workers have received the greatest attention. However, an equally important issue remains largely unaddressed: the experience of indigenous women workers, particularly women's challenges as labourers, their strategies for

survival and their struggles to advance and organize in a different cultural environment. Thus, there is the lack of literature on Bangladeshi Indigenous women garments workers. Here, literature on Bangladeshi women garments workers migration and empowerment will be reviewed for better understanding of the lives of Indigenous women workers in CHT.

According to Anthony Giddens (2001:260), the increase in female migrants is closely related to changes in the global labour market, including the growing demand for domestic workers. Differing from Cohen he shows that the migration consists of forced or voluntary movements from an original homeland to a new region or regions; where a degree of tension in relation to the host society often occurs (Ibid: 260). Therefore, my first intension is here to investigate, could push factors and pull factors be associated to make influences on indigenous individual women's mind regarding urban paid job? Considering the push and pull factors, it is important to clarify, how power is being transformed as an ability to choose for migrant paid job, and whether it plays a role in changing indigenous women's status within her family regarding decision making power, such as consumption (food, cloths, and ornaments), child education, child bearing and so on. The push factors that force people to migrate are the government resettlement policy, counter-insurgency (military action), political oppression and administrative pressure, displacement etc. By pull factors I mean, the city's better opportunities which attract people to prosperous labor markets, better living condition and so on.

Kabeer (1997: 301) explained that new wage opportunities for women in Bangladesh have brought about positive changes in numerous ways. First, in the garment industry, women's wages have made structural changes in their lives. Such changes are in areas like the labour market, household management, marriage practices and migration patterns. Secondly, garments wage enhances women's individual entitlement in different ways, such as the ability to control their domestic life, give better life to their children, make their dreams come true and choose a life partner. Habiba Zaman (2001: 146) argues that women's multiple responsibilities and specific social locations as women and paid workers create distinctive forms of activism and political consciousness. In addition, she suggests that the intersections of women's lives in the family and the workplace and their networks with other women create

what Morgan and Bookman (1988) quoted by Habiba Zaman (2001: 146) call "double consciousness". This double consciousness generates multiple forms of resistance and social movements against the nexus between the states, multinational and local entrepreneurs.

Paul-Majumder and Zohir (1996) state that Women's employment in the export-oriented garment industry has improved their self-esteem and self-confidence which has consequently affected their conjugal life, matrimonial relationship, fertility, age at marriage, sharing of domestic chores, and decision making. They state that more than 90 percent of female garment workers have expressed that they have a high opinion about themselves, compared with about 57 percent of female workers in non-export oriented industries (survey of 1993). About 37 percent of female workers have taken employment in the garment industry against the wishes of their family members. By contrast, they show that garment work has a very little influence on the social status of male workers. However, female garment workers suffer from social insecurity associated with their employment. They face an uncongenial work environment, unsafe transportation, and housing. These factors do not affect many male workers. Pratima Paul-Majumder and Anwara Begum (2000) claim that in Bangladesh, women's employment in export-oriented industries has narrowed the gender gap in many spheres including participation in labour force, social prestige, control over income and active participation in decision making. Ruchira T. Naved, Margaret Newby and Sajeda Amin (2001) have examined the effects of migration and entry into garment work on marriage for young women in Bangladesh. They show that many workers contribute financially to their natal families in order to maintain social networks and maximise security in marriage. However, they also explained that weak social networks and changes in living arrangements and household structure associated with migration often dictate that migrants adopt non-traditional and less secure marriage arrangements. Cecile Jackson and Richard Palmer-Jones (1999) study also criticises the industrial work as industrial work does not recognize the arduousness of women's labour. They explain exigent long time less paid work is connected to ill body and poverty. They state the arduousness of women labour as threats to women's health. Similar argument has been made in Kim's (2000) study. He criticises "the industrial wage labour as women are more likely to be low paid if they are young, single, or less educated or if they are employed in service occupations, retail trade, agriculture, or personal services". In

industrial wage labour as he explained, 19 percent of women in their prime working years who were paid low wages lived in poverty, while 36 percent lived below 50 percent of the poverty level. Thus, whereas most women who were paid low wages escaped both poverty and near poverty, nearly one-third lived in families whose income fell below 50 percent of the poverty level, and approximately 1 out of 5 who were of prime working age lived in families officially defined as poor. Not surprisingly, a substantial percentage (79 percent) of female workers who were poor received low wages.

However, Petra Dannecker (2002) explains that the garments work for Bangladeshi women has been a great opportunity to expand their rights and power. She also explained that even though women are more discriminated in industrial wage labour, women earning wage helps to improve their socio-economic situation. She states that garments work gives women the chance to work and earn an income and therefore strengthen their position within the family and most important, it brings them “out of the house”. It is argued that women work in the garment industry in Bangladesh is a “deviation” (Hossain, 1990: 46) which is determined by the socio-economic changes in the rural areas, pushing women to seek work outside the home, thus changing the rigidity with which a family adheres to male dominated culture. Likewise, Bangladeshi Garments work and the garment sector have created employment opportunities for indigenous young women who are mostly exposed to Bangladeshi and indigenous male dominating culture. Similarly, Kibria (1995) explained that women’s entry into the garments industry in Bangladesh increased largely women’s ability to control. These socio-economic changes affected women’s income control by shaping the symbolic meaning of women’s income. Hossain (1990) states that in Bangladesh, poverty plays a significant role as a driving force but does not seem to be a sufficient explanation for the active participation of young women in the labour force, nor does the development of the garments sector. Bengali main stream culture and poverty are important aspects in every indigenous woman’s life, interwoven with Bangladeshi male dominated notions of women propriety. It contains women’s mobility and visibility and is as such part of the indigenous asymmetry male centred culture and of women’s subordination. Nevertheless, it is necessary to look beyond the formal rules to the ways in which indigenous women strategise and informally negotiate their position in various cultural situations (Bengali main stream and indigenous local notions).



## **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This study is based on the theoretical framework of empowerment. I will also look into ethnicity. I will draw on different aspects of the above mentioned theories which I find are the most appropriate for my research. The concept of empowerment is extremely pertinent to my study as I will be attempting to explore whether the *Khyang* women experienced a process of empowerment through the decision to work outside the home/ hilly village and how it enhanced their decision making power or transformed their lives at their family level and communities that they are a part of. According to literatures Indigenous people have been historically excluded from the mainstream Bengali society. To explain the situation of this disadvantaged group, concepts related to ethnicity is a very useful lens through which to understand the exclusion of *Khyang* indigenous people from the majority Bengali Society. To understand the forms of their interaction and negotiation processes with majority of the ethnic groups it would be very supportive. Relation to this theory of intersectionality would be useful to explain the oppressed minority Indigenous women. This theory began as an exploration of the oppression of women within society. The *Khyang* indigenous women are the minority within the Bengali society, secondly they are the minority group among other indigenous communities, thirdly they are marginalized as ‘women’ in the male centric culture and finally they are oppressed because of their indigenesness i.e. they are not only women their identity is ‘indigenous women’. Because of multi-dimensional marginalization in terms of ethnicity, religion, class and gender *Khyang* women are a dis-advantaged class in the society.

### **Theory of Empowerment**

“Empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes”. The concept of empowerment is propounded by Naila Kabeer. In this study empowerment theory would be helpful to clarify *Khyang* women’s wage labour and it’s relation with women’s empowerment as it “implies process of change” (Kabeer, 2003:2). Crewe and Harrison (1998) argue that ‘empowerment’ is about gaining power, power is not an object or commodity nor has fixed

quantities but it is about the relationship between individual and groups. According to Visvanathan, Nalini (1997) [invoking Lean (1993) and Escobar: (1995)] empowerment refers to greater equality for women in the performance of their productive activities. Kabeer (2005) also argues that the central idea of empowerment is the idea of power; 'power' is the ability to make choices and empowerment is the power which entails change. So, power is related to the self-confidence approach i.e. how people see themselves and their own abilities. Therefore, it would be helpful to focus on indigenous women's labour migration and its effective transformation patterns; why do indigenous women migrate for different kinds of urban jobs, how is the money spent and to what extent does it have a transformative potential?

But while Kabeer insists to discuss empowerment's positive changes on women's life chances many of Gender and Development scholars including Kabeer raise questions concerning working conditions, insecurity, lack of training and promotion, health hazards, low wages and absence of social security benefits (Edgren, 1982 qtd by Cecile Jackson and Ruth Pearson 1998). Many sociologists argue that often exploitations are inter-connected with women's wage employment. Women's employments are some time treated as low wage, double pressure (working time) and less social benefits (Ruth Pearson: 1990). Ruth Pearson also shows that female in labour market are often treated as an undifferentiated group of cheap and exploitable labour. So, in this process I also would like to keep my eyes open to this possibility i.e. the factors that may contribute to women's oppression in the labour market. Finally, I would like to explore feminist social criticism ( Brooke, 2000) which would help me to understand how indigenous women's urban paid job challenge generally accepted values, practice and norms to advocate for the survival at their family level and secure in their own life. As Ackerly Brooke (2000:26) states, "Social criticism should be reflected, that is critics should be able to criticize, the values, practices and the norms of society according to principals which are themselves open criticism" So, in this process I would like to see how indigenous women in pragmatic way challenge traditional norms and values and how they are regarded in their family and community.

### **The concepts of Ethnicity, Minority and Majority:**

The concepts of ethnicity, minority and majority are important to my study since my research objective is to gain knowledge about the forms of interaction and integration process of minority *Khyang* ethnic community and majority Bengali. According to Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan (1975:1) qtd by Eriksen (2002) “Ethnicity seems to be a new term”. The term was first used by an American Sociologist; David Riesman in 1953. The word “ethnic”, however, is much older. It is derived from the Greek word *ethnos* (which is in turn derived from the word *ethnikos*), and originally meant heathen or pagan (R. Williams, 1976: 119) qtd by ibid. The term ethnicity has been important in social and Cultural Anthropology since the late 1960s and it remains a central focus for research after the turn of the millennium. The close relation between ethnicity and the *classification of people* and *group relationships* has been endorsed by all the approaches of Anthropology. Yelvington (1991) cited by Eriksen (2002:13) notes that “ethnicity is an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction. It can thus also be defined as a social identity (based on a contrast vis-à-vis others) characterized by metaphoric fictive kinship”. Eriksen (2001:263) explains that “Ethnicity is a result of cultural differences and occurs when cultural differences are made relevant through interaction”. The distinctiveness of two cultural groups alone does not create ethnicity; in addition there should be a minimum of contact between their respective members. This means that apart from being different, members of two distinct ethnic groups must also have something in common-some basis for interaction. Distinct language, distinctive customs (dress, marriage rituals, cuisine, religion, and so forth) and a strong sense of identity determines an ethnic group.

Likewise, the twin concepts of minority and majority which are commonly used in the analysis of ethnicity, are relative and relational. A minority exists only in relation to a majority and vice versa, and their relationship is contingent on the relevant system boundaries. By definition, minorities are seen as subordinate groups that are held in low regard by a majority or dominant group in a society. In addition, for many minority groups around the

world, there is the question of how to deal with conflicting cultural norms, values, and demands of the majority and the minority culture (ibid).

Eriksen (2002:121) defines an ethnic minority as a group which is numerically inferior to the rest of the population in a society, which is politically non-dominant and which is reproduced as an ethnic category. (Minority Rights Group, 1990:XIV). Barth (1966) cited in Harald Eidheim (1977: 68) clarifies the process of *assimilation* and of *ethnic incorporation*. According to him, assimilation is the process by which an individual from a minority group obtains a majority identity; and ethnic incorporation is the process by which ethnic membership is made relevant to the mobilization of group spirit and joint political action vis-à-vis the majority population.

I will try to explore, how the ethnic minority become a victim of negative stereotypes, social derogation, and exclusion. As mentioned by Eriksen (2001:264), “stereotypes are simplistic descriptions of cultural traits in other groups which are conventionally believed to exist” The living and working conditions of *Khyang* indigenous women in new city life and the forms of interaction and negotiation processes with majority ethnic groups, and the way they remain distinctive under different social conditions will also come under scrutiny.

### **Intersectionality Theory**

The term "Intersectionality Theory" was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1991). According to Knudsen (2007:1), “Intersectionality may be defined as a theory to analyse how social and cultural categories intertwine. The word intersection means that one line cuts through another line, and can be used about streets crossing each other. Intersectionality implies more than gender research, more than studying differences between women and men, and more than diversities within women’s group’s or within men’s group’s. Intersectionality tries to catch the relationships between socio-cultural categories and identities. Intersectionality focuses on diverse and marginalized positions.”

Feminist and anti-racist scholars idea of intersectionality can be defined as "the view that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity" (Ritzer, 2007: 204). These scholars state that cultural patterns of oppression are not only

interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society, such as this include race, gender, class, and ethnicity (Collins, 2000 : 42). The theory of intersectionality also suggests that discrete forms, and expressions, of oppression actually shape, and are shaped by, one another. Thus, in order to fully understand the *Khyang* women garment worker in Bangladeshi main stream society, one must investigate and examine the ways in which ethnicizing structures, social processes, and social representations (or ideas supporting to represent groups and group members in society) are shaped by gender, class, sexuality, etc. Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity (Collins, 2000: 42). Thus, oppression of *Khyang* women garment workers can be better understood through various degree of intersectionality Bengali, a woman, a poor, an indigenous, a *Khyang* indigenous women at the same time.

These theories discussed above are connected in a fundamental way as these discuss the systematic subordination and marginalization of women as a group and all of those theories are saying that structural and institutional factors are responsible for the exclusion of women and thus these are giving new knowledge for bringing the women in formal position.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Research Design**

This chapter presents the research method of the study. All procedures such as choosing qualitative research method, interview process, data collection, as well as reliability, validity, ethical questions and limitations of the study will be presented here.

#### **Access into the Garments Factories:**

To conduct this research, I decided to interview both male and female indigenous garments workers. When I arrived in Bangladesh, there was a strike movement going on by the garments workers against low wage, unsafe working environment and lack of security. The news papers were dominated by the news of the strike movements. The Dhaka Export processing Zone (DEPZ) was severely affected and it almost collapsed. The Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) was also affected. It was therefore extremely difficult for me to get permission from the management of these factories, as I was always suspected of being either a rights advocate from an NGO or an investigative journalist.

Garments workers are usually very busy during their working hours. In fact, I started making arrangements when I was in Bergen, Norway. I obtained a contact address from the University of Bergen and wrote to one of the renowned EPZ factory's president in CEPZ to seek permission to conduct research in the factory. In response, I was told by the President that they would not be able to give me access to their factories since that was the busiest season (May- August).

The factory president's reply made me a little panicky and disappointed. I was worried about access. I replied back and made it clear to him that I was not going to take a lot of the workers' time during working hours. Upon reaching Chittagong on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2006, I met the president who sounded very cordial. In the meantime, I was thinking of obtaining permission from other factories. As a result, I knocked on the doors of other factories directly showing the recommendation letter which I received from my university but I was refused by all other factories. They told me to get permission from the Bangladesh Export Processing

Zones Authority (BEPZA). It was almost impossible to meet the BEPZA Chairman as he is a high ranking Government official. Due to the labour movement and the fragile situation in the country, the Chairman did not give me official permission to do research in the CEPZ but he introduced me to a junior officer of BEPZA and asked him to assist me personally. This person became my research's "key informant" to getting access to the group of interviewees. The whole connection built itself up like a chain, as factory managers informed one another of my work and they were willing to help me to find interviewees. This was mainly possible because of the help that I received from the junior officer from the BEPZA. His connections enabled me to gain a relatively easy access to various factories.

When the interviewees agreed to participate in my interview sessions, a date and time was set for each interview. Before the interview, the participants were informed about the aim of the research and were provided with the interview guide as well, to ensure a better understanding of the entire process. I gave interview guides also to Gate keepers' (three –four persons), factory managers and BEPZA officials mostly. For the most part, I found it was difficult making the gate keepers understand why I had gone all the way from Norway to conduct a research in CEPZ. The gate keepers were overly suspicious about my work and purpose due to the labour movement that was going on. In this regard, they thought I was a spy who could be working in favour of the labour movement. They were skeptical to talk to me, but as a student from a foreign university they also felt they should give me priority. Thus, they were finally willing to talk with me. Garment workers also asked me a lot of questions in an attempt to establish why I was talking to them such as "what will you do with all these information", "why are you asking personal questions", "as a native Bengali woman why are you talking with indigenous people", "why do you have an interest in Chittagong Hill Tracts? They asked lots of questions regarding my work, but after explaining my research objectives to them, they were willing to talk to me and they felt happy after talking with me. I visited them either very early in the morning or after 9:00 pm. As part of my methodological approach and strategy, I did not want to use their working time. I therefore, took opportunity of whatever free time they had like during lunch break. To familiarise with them, I also tried

to adopt their dressing style by wearing such dress as ordinary *Shalwar- Kameez- Orna*<sup>11</sup>, *slippers* just like them. These gestures helped me to ensure their acceptance and cooperation.

### **Informal Informants**

The first week in Chittagong, I had come into contact with different community indigenous workers informally. I started by talking to people randomly, that is, from streets, market places, small tea stalls, bus stops and on the way to CEPZ factory gates. I spoke randomly with different indigenous people such as *Chakma*<sup>12</sup>, *Marma*<sup>13</sup>, *Tonchonga*<sup>14</sup>, *Tripura*<sup>15</sup>, *Bawm*, *Pankhu* male and female workers and any worker with an indigenous appearance who gave me time to talk. Most of them were in a hurry to go back home after work and gave me their contact details to visit them at their house in their leisure time. I used to visit them at their houses to have informal talks with them, and was also curious to see their living arrangements and daily life styles. Through such visits I got to know about other indigenous people from my host.

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<sup>11</sup> *Shalwar* is a sort of loose *pajama* like trouser. The legs are wide at the top, and narrow at the bottom. There is a drawstring at the top of the waistband to hold up the *shalwar*. It is known also by *churidar pajama*. The *kameez*, in *shalwar kameez* suit, is a long shirt. The side seems are left open below the navel, which gives the wearer greater freedom of movement. The word *kameez* is derived from the Latin *camisia* (*shirt* or *tunic*). Women wear a long scarf or *shawl* with *shalwar kameez* called *Orna/ dupatta* around the head or neck. For Muslim women, the *dupatta* is an alternate to scarves. The *dupatta* is useful when the head must be covered, for *hijab* or for prayers. *Shalwar Kameez* is a traditional dress in India and Pakistan. *Shalwar Kameez* is the national dress of Pakistan which is also a regular and common dress mostly for single women in Bangladesh. Women prefers to wear simple *Shalwar-Kameez* at their work place also at home as a regular wearing. (<http://www.salwar-kameez.net/salwarkameez/salwar-kameez.asp>)

<sup>12</sup> The *Chakma* are the largest ethnic group in Bangladesh. According to the Census of 1991, the total number of *Chakma* in the CHT was 239,417. In addition, an estimated 150,000 *Chakma* live scattered about in the states of Tripura, Mizoram, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in India. A small number of *Chakma* also live in Cox's Bazar district and in Myanmar (Burma). ([http://www.pbm-cht.org/indigenous\\_people.html](http://www.pbm-cht.org/indigenous_people.html))

<sup>13</sup> The *Marma* are the second largest indigenous ethnic group in the CHT. The 1991 Census puts the total number of *Marma* in the CHT as 142,334.

<sup>14</sup> The *Tanchangya* number 19,221 in the CHT according to the Census of 1991.

<sup>15</sup> According to the Census of 1991, the total number of Tripura in the CHT was 61,129.



Simultaneously, I was visiting factories as gate keepers gave me access for a very short time (Like: five to ten minutes) to talk to different indigenous group workers. Mostly, they (factory management) used to call workers to meet me in their conference hall. In factories, I was also meeting workers randomly and used to visit them at their house at night as I only used to take their contact details in the factory due to their paucity of time in the factory and busy working hours. But, from factory and street I was searching for informants from different indigenous communities (Like: from 13 ethnic communities). However, I ended up focusing on only the *Khyang* indigenous community.

### **Justification for Choosing One Community**

One particular incident involving a *Khyang* man and his *Chakma* neighbors made me change my mind about any other indigenous group and to concentrate on *Khyang* indigenous people. In my factory visits, I met one *Khyang* male worker (*Masum Khyang*) from a joint venture factory. Like other informants, I visited him at his house and I found that in that particular area, he was the only *Khyang* indigenous man living amongst lots of *Chakma* people. It happened that when I visited *Masum Khyang* and spoke to him, the *Chakma* neighbors became overtly curious about my presence. After the interview with *Masum*, all the *Chakma* neighbors complained and asked me why I interviewed a *Khyang* worker instead of them. They went ahead and castigated him for talking to me. I was also asked why I did not sought permission from the majority *Chakma* neighbors before interviewing the *Khyang* worker. At that moment, I realized that the *Khyang* man who was from a minority indigenous community bore the brunt of being part of a minority. This incident confirmed the domination of the majority over the minority and gave me a new insight to concentrate on the minority indigenous group; the *Khyangs*. This incident also gave me a useful insight into the power relations between the various indigenous communities.

### **How did I get Key Informants?**

After the above mentioned incident I started to find more *Khyang* informants. I found out that *Khyang* garments workers were very hard to find. I asked *Masum Khyang* to provide me with information about other *Khyang* workers, and he gave me the contacts of a girl (*Sonali Khyang*) from whom I got information about one more informant who is her youngest

sister (*Rupali Khyang*). In the same processes, I also found six additional informants. *Rupali* gave me the information about two cousin sisters *Shorna* and *Jhorna*. Finally, I got four sisters' (*Rita, Mita, Maya, Mou*) contact details from *Shorna and Jhorna*. These four sisters live with four other *Khyang* boys. In fact, I used snow ball sampling to find these *Khyang* informants. I did in-depth interview and participant observation among these nine *Khyang* informants for the core material of my thesis. However, I also profited from information gathered in factories in the initial stages of the research (visits to factories, interviews with other indigenous workers and factory managers). I found that my informants came to the city through distant relatives or siblings or with village friends. My nine key informants did not know each other before coming into city. Till now, those living in Chittagong city do not know each other as they do not have any chance of meeting each other. *Khyang* church or Buddhist temple or *Khyang* organization could be a possible opportunity to meet each others. But, there are no such organisations in Chittagong city. Finally, I ended up with thirteen informants; eight *Khyang* women and one man totaling nine, as key informants, and four additional *Khyang* men.

I divided my work into two parts based on two places, that is, the city and their villages (the places of origin). The interviews took place from the end of May, 2006 to end of the August 2006. During these three months, I initially stayed two months in the Chittagong city and spent the remaining time in five villages of Chittagong Hill Tracts, mostly in *Bandarban* and *Rangamati* districts. During the second part of my research period, I had to shuttle between the city and the villages. I requested a total of nine *Khyang* male and female workers from the garments factories to accompany me to their villages in different regions of CHTs. I used to visit those unknown villages according to my informants' choice. I had to rely on their choice because I had plans of seeing their places of origin to make a comparison between their village and city life.

### **Interview Strategies:**

The first part of my research in the factories was conducted during working hours towards the end of May 2006. The factory gate keepers allowed me only five minutes to talk with each informant due to time constraints. But, other factories gave me the opportunity to

meet informants in their conference room where representatives of the factory management were together. The representatives were concerned about my interview questions. Sometimes they wanted to give answers on behalf of my informants. My informants were extremely scared to answer my questions in the presence of their factory managers and supervisors. On such occasions, I just asked their contact information, and I used to go to their houses during the weekend or night when they were coming from work. I was told by my informants that after coming back from their houses, factory officers asked my informants what I did in their houses and what I had asked them. After going to informant's houses, neighbours and their roommates asked me, why I was working with indigenous people and what my intention was. There was also the difficulty of getting access to workers who lived in 'Working Women's Hostel'. I had to seek special permission from the factory officials which was again difficult as they did not allow researchers inside the hostels. In such instances, I chose to meet my informants in local restaurants so that interviews are not interrupted.

In the second part of my research, I visited some informants' from one particular ethnic group (see below) villages, usually travelling with one or two of the women workers. I visited 5 villages and stayed with them in their village 7-8 days to know more about their respective communities. This gave me the opportunity to conduct Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the villagers. Most of the villagers were quite interested in talking to me as I am studying abroad and also came into those remote villages only to know about them. The infrastructure of these villages made them quite inaccessible. I should here mention that for a non-indigenous woman like me to do field work in *Khyang* indigenous villages was a risky venture because of the insurgency problem in the interior areas of the state, and more so because hilly roads are very dangerous. There are very little transportation, buses are in bad conditions and roads are very dangerous and bad. After getting off the bus one needs to walk six to seven hours to reach the remote villages, sometimes a whole day. Inside the deep forest, one comes across falls and water to walk. Hilly roads are very slippery and busy. I was seriously in doubt whether it would at all be feasible for me to complete the field work braving such odds. During my stay in the villages, I was an observer-learner among the indigenous people. In fact, sitting, asking, listening and participating in their daily life's activities were the main techniques of data collection. I explained my honest and sincere

intention to them. Initially, I stayed in my informant's house until when I felt that the villagers have accepted me cordially before I stayed in other village houses to establish my relation with the community people. I would say that eventually these different kinds of accommodation provided me the good opportunities for participant observation which is an important research technique in my work. Sharing the hilly cuisine and food (*bash krol*, snail, jungle fruits, *jhum* and hilly vegetables, *Nappi*, pork, homemade rice beer etc) from their daily consumption allowed me to come closer to the local people. Staying in their houses enabled me to take part in various regular events like: accompanying them along a long hilly way to fetch drinking water, going with them to the natural falls which is far from their houses to take bath, using their bamboo made toilets, using the high wooden ladder to get into their houses, having a chat in the small roadside tea stalls, joining them in the *jhum* cultivation etc. made me intimate with them. Therefore, I was allowed to talk to whomever I wanted and to ask them whatever I wanted to know about their life and culture. I interviewed them for the most part throughout the day without wasting their time such as during cooking, weaving, *jhum* cultivation, washing clothes in the falls, rearing babies, at the market, during lunch and dinner. This exercise enabled me to find out how these *Khyang* garments workers are regarded by their community. Interestingly, it also enabled me to understand a bit more about the status of a *Khyang* woman in her community, role of women in the family and the role of men within the family and in the society at large. The day I left the village, all villagers were sad and some of them shed tears as they came out to say good bye to me.

I recorded all the interviews (in city and village) using a tape recorder with informant's full consent. To get as much details as possible, the informants were allowed to speak openly. After taking interviews transcripts were made. These transcripts were written every night after an interview (Transcription of all interviews took a month) using pen and paper. In these transcripts, I wrote the pauses, sarcastic laughs, weeping voices, emotional talks, etc. which were very important in conversations. I marked these with brackets or sometimes with dots in the text. Smaller sounds like "hmmm", fumbling tone, etc. are important as well. The face to face interviews' transcripts were made word for word without any changes.

### **Ethical Considerations:**

As a researcher, I considered several ethical considerations, for example assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. In this study, the participants were informed about the study, the name, e-mail address and phone number of the researcher so that they could get access to the researcher (Silverman, 2001). These processes gave them the opportunity to choose either to contact or not to contact the researcher. At the time of the interviews, the interviewees got the same information verbally. I have changed names (used fictitious names) and details of the interviewees. Emotions and feelings were sincerely considered during the interview, such as one *Khyang* woman who became very emotional while she was interviewed in the garments factory. She started weeping when I asked her the reason of her migration from CHT to the city. She became emotional and could not answer any question as she burst into tears. But, I consoled her to take things easy, and interviewed her another day. I also appreciated their hospitality as they offered me to have lunch with them or to go for a cup of tea.

### **Reliability and Validity:**

As a researcher, I was always careful to make the indicators as good as possible to get answers to the basic assumptions of my studies. The interviews were done in the same way, with a tape recorder, the informants were asked to speak freely about their lives, and in case a question was asked, it was asked in a way to minimise the leading function. I was very much aware about interviewees, about questioning not to hurt them. The interviewees decided the place and time of the interviews. The interviewees had the phone number to call me as a researcher at any time in case they changed their minds about participating. The atmosphere during the interviews was calm, without any stress or disturbing events or circumstances. By using the tools of empowerment theory in gathering of the data, and in the analysis, the claims of reliability are aimed at being find out my objectives my research.

The internal validity depends on the connection between theory and empirical findings in the study. In this study, empowerment theory and theories of ethnicity have been used. For example, describing the present situation in cities and garments factories, and the situation in village communities to validate the findings. In case of any deviant thoughts or stories, these

have been taken under consideration and been analysed. The sampling processes and finding the participants have been a natural process.

**Limitations of the study:**

Indigenous people's situation in Chittagong Hill Tracts is a very sensitive issue in Bangladesh. Therefore, it was very difficult to work on this topic especially, as a female researcher. It is not appreciated by the native Bengalis. When I started this research, I faced criticism and negative comments from the native Bengalis and also from my family members and relatives. Moreover, it is not safe to walk in the deep forest, and the high hills were dangerous. As a researcher, I was mentally upset and became frustrated sometimes as my family did not initially allow me to be involved in this research and friends did not encourage me to work in this research field.

During the research, there were several limitations I could not overcome such as access problem in the garment factories. Inside the factories, I was being guided by the managers and as a result, I was not able to talk with the workers freely and missed the open, warm reactions and answers from them. *Khyang* language, scarcity of interviewees, (both *Khyang* female and male workers), cultural barrier and time factor forms part of the limitations of this study.

## Chapter Three

### The Changing face of Indigenous Women's lives

#### Migration and Entry into the Garments Factories



Changes before and after migration

This chapter sketches out the general historical background of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs). It shows how indigenous garments workers have been forcibly migrated for the social, economic and political conditions of this region. The narrative is selective and focuses on the objectives of this study. Indigenous women's migration into city is not a new issue but their entry into garments factory is recent in Bangladesh. The chapter also gives an insight into the reasons and means of migration. Finally, it explores some of the factors which help to explain employer preference for indigenous people in a country where Bengali people have long been perceived as having the sole rights to take factory work and hence enjoyed privileged entitlement to mainstream forms of employment.

#### Historical Background of the CHT

Including *Khyang* community the CHT have experienced drastic socio-demographic changes during the twentieth century. The most critical roles in bringing about this socio-demographic transformation have been played by various kinds of migration and forced population movements (Mohsin, 1997:29). The CHT indigenous people have migrated to various places from their own land. These include natural immigration, state-sponsored transmigration, eviction and forced displacement, out-migration under coercion, internal displacement and exodus of refugees across the international border (ibid: 103). Forced

migration has been more preceded by the state process. Adnan (2004:44) explains that this process as “demographic engineering”. To know about the reasons for the migration of indigenous people from CHT to other places, it is very important to know the political history of CHT’s dating back to British colonialism. The brief discussion is arranged in terms of the British colonial period (1760-1947), the Pakistani period (1947-1971), the Bangladeshi period, (1972- 1990), before Peace Accord (1991-1996) and after the Peace Accord (1997-present).

### **British colonial period (1760-1947):**

The CHT was surrendered to the British East India company in the 1760s. The CHT was important to the company because it had the ports and also served as a frontier district for the British. CHT was occupied by the British and they made it a district of their colony of British India in 1860. It is they who named it ‘Chittagong Hill Tracts’ (*‘Parbotyo Chottogram’* in Bengali).The British was guided by two main objectives to secure it; (a) protection of the political, economic and military interests of the British, (b) keeping the Hill people segregated from the Bengalis. Initially, the British did not establish any administrative structure in the CHT. As an administrative unit Chittagong Hill Tracts were a colonial creation (Mohsin, 1998). The initial contacts of the company with the Hill people were limited to the exaction of cotton tribute from the chiefs; and even this was not made directly but through Bengali Commission agents of the company. The policy might appear to be a benign one, but in the context of the Hill people vis-à-vis their relations with the Bengalis for the first time introduced the element of superior versus inferior; as agents of government the Bengalis held a superior position to that of the Hill people (Mohsin:1998).As quoted below,

Historically the relationship between the Hill people and Bengalis was marked by ambiguity and suspicion. The Hill people had viewed the Bengalis as exploiters while the Bengalis viewed them as plunderers. This perception of the Hill people towards the Bengalis was accentuated during the British period for it opened up opportunities for the exploitation of the hills and its people. ( Schendel qtd. by Mohsin , 1998:28)

Revenue increase by the company was perceived as a threat by the Hill people and they united under the *Chakma* chief to resist it. As a consequence, a war started and the war



came to an end in 1787 through the surrender of the *Chakma* chief *Jan Bakhsh Khan*, after the British had imposed an economic blockade on the Hill people. The chief accepted British suzerainty and agreed to pay cotton tribute to the Company on a regular basis, in return for trading rights between the hills and the plains. Initially, the tribute was paid in kind in the form of cotton, but in 1789 was changed to cash. In return the British agreed to preserve the autonomy of the Hill people and to restrict the migration of Bengalis into the hills of Chittagong. It is obvious that the British period is directly responsible for the alienation of the Hill people of CHT from the Bengali population of the plains of Bengal.

### **Pakistani period (1947-1971)**

After British rule in 1947, the CHT was placed under Pakistan's central government. The erstwhile colonial policy of keeping the CHT isolated from the rest of the country became a liability to the Pakistani government whose primary interest was to explore the rich natural resource of the CHT. (Adnan, 2004: 23). From 1962, the government of the Pakistan made major changes in CHT which redefined the category of outsider or non-hill man and permission to have settlement or cultivate land. (RCK Roy, 1996:44). The predicament of the Hill people during the Pakistani period began with the building of a hydroelectric dam at *Kaptai* (the *Karnafuli* Multipurpose Project) in 1962 by the Pakistan Government which flooded 1036 sq. km (400 sq. miles) of land, submerged 40% of the best arable land and displaced 100,000 Hill people from their ancestral homes.

### **Bangladeshi period, (1972- 1990)**

After the independence of Bangladesh (1971), transmigration program was conceived highly of by various political regimes (Ali, 1993:189 and Mohsin, 1997: 112, 217) thereby, worsening the problem of the Hill people including *Khyang* indigenous people in CHT. In 1978, resettle rules had been changed drastically by the President Zia regime and sponsored migration of Bengali settlers into the CHT, providing land grants, cash and rations. In this period, land settlement and ownership in the CHT now could be granted to any 'deserving person' (Roy: 1998). In the name of counter-insurgency, the *Khyang* and other Hill people have often been detained and tortured by the army. Thousands have perished in the armed encounters, extra-judicial executions, tortures, rapes and so on. During this period (1980-

1996), countless Hill people, including *Khyang* people were displaced and started to migrate into cities and neighbouring country India. In the same time, the Bengali settlers were provided with lands which belonged to the indigenous people. As an example stated by C. Roy shows that the Government of Bangladesh was bringing 450,000 plain people (Bengali Settler) from different parts of the country and settling them in the CHT. This was carried out together with militarization policy with nearly one-third of the country's military camped in the CHT (Adnan, 2004:23). The following statistical figures can more explain the causes of indigenous people's migration to urban areas to become among others, garment labourers, refugees in India and homeless labourers in their own land. The available estimates indicate that 30,000 Bengali families (Mohsin: 1997, 112) or 100,000 persons were brought in during the first phase (1979-81). Another 250,000 Bengalis were said to have been settled during the third phase (ibid). Thus, even without second phase, the total number of Bengali settlers is reported to have been about 350,000 (Mohsin qtd by Adnan : 2004, 49). Hence, unlike Adnan (2004) Mohsin shows that the net addition from transmigration to the CHT population is likely to have been in the range of 300,000 to 340,000 (excluding natural growth after entry into CHT) in the last three decades. Another study shows that almost 55,000 Indigenous people have been migrated across the international border and 100,000 Indigenous people were rendered homeless and destitute by the counter insurgency operation including transmigration and forced evictions (Roy: 1994, 21).

### **Peace Accord (1991-1996) and after the Peace Accord (1997- present)**

After several rounds of negotiations, a peace accord was eventually signed between accredited representatives of the Bangladesh Government and the Indigenous Representative Organization PCJSS (*Parbatyooa chattogram Jana Samhiti Samiti*) on 2 December, 1997. But the agreement was not backed by any constitutional guarantee or provisions, making it susceptible to potential violence and modification by subsequent regimes coming to power ( Roy, 1998c), nor could a brief document of this nature deal adequately with deep rooted problems of poverty, land alienation and ethnic conflict afflicting the people of the CHT. But the situation has not improved for the hill peoples even after the peace accord and the new legislation for the revamped hill district councils. (GOB: 1998a, 1998b, 1998c). The accord

was opposed by the front associations among students, women and other sections of the hill people (Mohsin, 1998: 106-107). The main reason for such opposition was the view that the provisions of the accord will fall short of meeting the needs and grievances of the hill people. Significant figures of the Bangladesh holding positions in the civil and military bureaucracy, as well as development agencies, private institutions are biased in favor of their own 'kith and kin' as opposed to the hill peoples (ibid).

For these reasons, no settlement transfer, leases and compulsory acquisition of land in the CHT may be made without the consents of the concerned district councils excepts in certain specified areas (Roy, 1998d). However, the existence of such legal constraints has not stopped instances of the forcible takeover of the *Khyang* and other Hill People's land in CHT by Bengali settler and the state. Counter insurgency and ethnic conflict have continued up to the present (Adnan, 2004), and also mal-development, economic and cultural dislocation (Halim, 2004). Adnan (2004:138) explains that transmigration of Bengali in the CHT and Indigenous people's displacement has brought about critical changes in the occupational structure of the CHT. The author has explained that there has been growing trend among the hilly peoples to shift from their traditional occupations and take up some of the new activities. Loss of access to lands and forest has also compelled a growing section of the hilly people to become wage labourers (ibid).

### **Reasons for Migration into the City**

The analysis in this section is based on my qualitative interviews with *Khyang* men and women workers in the city and in the five different villages. All informants from the city were indeed young and single. Interestingly, I did not find any married *Khyang* woman Garments worker. However, a preliminary discussion with married *Khyang* women in the villages revealed that the married *Khyang* women do not usually come to the city because they have to take care of their family, husband, and children and help in the *Jhum* cultivation, and also because their husbands do not allow them to go to the city. On the contrary, unmarried women can take the chance and challenge to go to the city as their parents allow them to go. Zohir and Paul- Majumder (1996) found that the average age of female garment workers to be between 19 and 25, with 80 percent below 25 years (qtd from Naila Kabeer,

2000). But, my observation of the *Khyang* women worker age differs from Zahir and Paul-Majumder's study. In the case of my informants, they mostly have come to the city right-after finishing their SSC degree or at the stage of eighth/ ninth grade from school, they are mostly 15- 20 years old. In this section, I tried to explain how 'education capital' transforms into a 'social capital' (Reinhard Kreckel :1983 & Pierre Bourdieu: 1982) and how it becomes one of the main reasons for migration into city in the case of my informants.

As previously explained all my *Khyang* informants could not continue their studies after grade seven –eight since there are no secondary schools in all five observed villages. The situation regarding primary and secondary education in many parts of Bangladesh, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts is that of a high dropout rate of children and higher rate in rural areas. Conducting teaching in Bengali medium is another significant cause for remaining high indigenous children dropout rate in CHT. Moreover, indigenous people mostly are living in the remote areas, and indigenous students have to walk long distance (3-4 miles) to and fro school. The lack of secondary schools in their villages sometime compels them to come to the district or sub-urban areas for their further education. Most of the indigenous families cannot afford the educational expenses (hostel rent, food, book, transportation costing etc) of their children in sub-urban districts. When these students come to the city for the first time for their further education, mostly they do not have enough logistical support for studies in the sub-urban district and in most cases they could not afford their everyday expenses. When they finished their savings they try to get more financial support from their families back home, but indigenous family can hardly economically support their children in sub-urban areas. In addition, city life is far expensive than the indigenous rural areas. Thus, most of the indigenous students come to the city or sub-urban areas with no financial support, and they cannot afford electricity, gas, water, housing rents etc. As a result they cannot continue their everyday life and education expenses. On the other hand, my informants reported that they cannot go back to the village as it is a matter of prestige issue for them. They usually see "their economic inability" as a source of shame. As a result, they decide to look for a job in the city with their undone education. This ambition or intention can be explained as their "social capital" which helps them to get an easy access in garments factory in comparison to the mainstream labour force who may have little or no education at all. Most of them I

interviewed, expressed their desire and dream to continue their studies after saving enough money from their garments job. Here, I do not want to say that they have migrated first in search of work only. They also explained that they were attracted by the prospects of a better life (electricity, gas, water, attached bathroom, road, transportation, better education etc). They are informed about the availability of employment into garments factories and cheaper shared housing facility in the city (though it is not very healthy in comparison to village life).

The informants *Sonali, Shorna, Jhorna* and *Masum* migrated into city because they could not pass SSC (Secondary School Certificate) examination. *Rita, Mita, Maya, Mou* could not manage to finish grade vii- viii. Therefore, they also had a desire to study in future. When *Sonali* could not pass the SSC exam she got frustrated and it became impossible for her to manage a job in *Chanroghona*. Moreover, she did not have any earning member in her family. *Rupali* passed the SSC exam but she migrated into city to get a better job and to earn better to support her family where she does not have any earning member. She is little ambitious than other informants due to her SSC passed degree. *Rita, Mita, Maya, Mou* and four boys have migrated into cities due to poverty. Because, they do not have cultivable land in the village and their relatives are in the jail. Also, they are the only earning member at their family as their mother is old and do not have primary education to work in city or to migrate. Their father is in the jail due to insurgency. *Masum* came into city though the economy of his village is better than others. His reason of migration is SSC failure and to get a better city life and job. *Shorna* and *Jhorna* also have migrated to support their family in the village. Their father and relatives had been in good communication with Bangladeshi Army, therefore, *Shanti bahini* tortured their family and their family became vulnerable.

### **Means of Migration**

I found different ways and means by which *Khyang* men and women migrate in the city, but mostly they migrate with siblings or distant relatives. According to Kabeer (2004), the Bengali women were most likely to say that they had migrated on their own i.e. individually or in association with parents and husbands. But this study found that *Khyang* women workers migrated with their siblings or distant relatives. In *Khyang* village, most of them are from the same kin groups . So when they migrate, they do not migrate ‘individually’

mostly, they try to migrate as small groups (one man with two women or two men with two women so on). There are also some exceptions. For instance: my informant *Shorna* and *Jhorna* migrated with the help of Bangladeshi military as their father and relatives had close relationship with them.

My data confirms Halim's claim (2004) that indigenous people are informed about city life and garments job from the Bengali settlers. They generally have inadequate information and knowledge about city and city job life. The indigenous women feel insecure to move with Bengali men in the city because of the rampant incidents of rape and kidnapping around the village and city. In addition, the grabbing of their lands and *Jhum* products by their Bengali neighbors and displacing them from their own land with the help of Bengali military and administration has created some kind of rivalry and hatred between them. Also, indigenous people are often stigmatized and described in derogatory terms by the Bengali people. Most of them negatively stereotype indigenous people's life style, language, culture and food habit. In the case of indigenous people, men have been migrating first, then being followed by the women. For migration, they seek help from each other and try to avoid Bengali settlers. Many of the women in my sample were relatively recent migrants in the Chittagong. Almost half had arrived within the last five years.

Due to their primary or high school education they can manage garments factory job within two to three days by taking help with other indigenous friends or relatives right after their migration into city. It is important to explain here in this regard that there are different kinds of garments factories which has different kinds of facilities and problems in working conditions. Now, I am going to explain about different kinds of factory.

#### **Difference between the EPZ and Local Factories:**

According to BEPZA there are three types of garments factories in the EPZ such as 100% foreign ownership, the joint venture, and finally, 100% local venture garments factory. The first two types of factory buildings are operated in the export oriented custom bonded industrial enclaves. The EPZ zones are distinct areas enclosed within an export oriented custom bonded industrial area. The CEPZ (Chittagong Export Processing Zones) is located at

*South Haliashahar* which is 2.40 Km from the sea port, 5.63 Km from the main business center, and 4 k.m. from the Chittagong International Airport. The primary objective of an EPZ is to provide special areas where potential investors would find a congenial investment climate, free from cumbersome procedures. It came out from BEPZA<sup>16</sup> that in order to stimulate rapid economic growth of the country, particularly through industrialization, the government has adopted an “Open Door Policy” to attract the foreign investment in Bangladesh. The government’s target is to attract, promote, and facilitate foreign investment in the EPZ. BEPZA is the official organ of the government to work for the promotion of foreign and local investment in Export Processing Zones. Therefore, the EPZ Company attracts both foreign and local investment. The study of Rodgers and Berik (2006) showed that the EPZ factories have better utility services (water supply, storage capacity, gas supply, power supply etc), infrastructural facilities, and business support services in compared to the other types. These also have better administrative facilities, fiscal and non-fiscal incentives, custom services, and in house security services.

On the other hand, the local garments factory buildings are not situated in the EPZ industrial bounded areas, these factories mostly operate in residential building areas in the city center or in suburban areas. The local garments factories often have lack of proper infrastructure. In most cases, the workers are suffering from extreme exploitation and lack of safety. Rodgers and Berik (2006) indicate that most local factories have common poor fire safety equipment and evacuation procedures, poor ventilation and poor maintenance of equipment, inadequate and unsanitary toilet facilities. This coincides with my findings. The local factories operate in residential buildings and they mostly do not have fire alarm systems. In some cases, fire is followed by collapse of the building, and there is not even a special fire exit.

Nevertheless, my study found that there are some common problems for garments workers in both EPZ and local garments factories. All my informants repeatedly mentioned their

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<sup>16</sup> [www.epzbangladesh.org.bd](http://www.epzbangladesh.org.bd)

negative opinions about low wages, lack of increase in wages, forced overtime, non-payment of overtime, excessive hours of work, continuous work without having days off etc.

### **Recruitment Procedure in the EPZ and the Local Factories:**

In local factories, employers recruit workers by references and informally. EPZ factories recruitment procedures are mostly based on workers educational qualifications. They offer advertisements into newspapers or in the factory notice boards, or put a banner in front of the factory entrance gate. In EPZ factories indigenous workers are often preferred in relation to Bengali workers because of their weaving efficiency, honesty, sincerity and good reputation. According to my informants the majority indigenous communities such as *Chakmas* are always prioritized rather than those from the smaller communities. Members of majority indigenous groups are often found in supervisor or managerial positions. As a result, they enjoy the benefit or facilities more compared to minority indigenous communities. On the contrary, according to both an indigenous Managing Director and my informants, Bengali people are preferred in local factories as there are very few indigenous employers (MD, manager, and supervisor) who work in local factories. Nevertheless, all my informants started their careers in local factories first. After coming into the city within two days or within a week, my informants' found their job mostly in local factories through informal networks. Their friends or neighbors from the same village or distant relatives used to work before in the city garments factory helped them to get an access. All my of eight female and five male informants got their job through friends or neighbors from their village of origin who were workers during that time in the garments factory.

EPZ factories always ask for experience. As a result, workers gather experience in local factories for a couple of months and then it is easier for them to join in EPZ factories. However, one of the EPZ Managers reported that factory workers do not always have minimum educational qualifications to be able to read the factory notice board, banner or newspaper circular. As a result, EPZ employers sometimes do not put in newspaper advertisements for workers, but only for recruitment at the management level. Thus, they also



employ factory workers through a known person's reference or those who can approach them directly for a job interview.

### **Employers' Preference for *Khyang* Indigenous Worker**

The unmarried *Khyang* indigenous women migrate from their hilly villages to take up factory work. As one of the Garments manager said that *Khyang* Indigenous women are well-known for their hard work, honesty, sincerity, weaving skill, obedience and loyalty. The *Khyang* women's tractability compensate for Bengali women's labour force. This part of the analysis is based on interviews with ten of the employers from the factories. Most employers spoke about indigenous people's hard work, honesty and sincerity. First and foremost, in general indigenous people are well known for their hard work and weaving skills and these qualities help them to get an easy access in garments factories compared to Bengali women. Like many employers, one of the Managing Director of CEPZ factories was explaining their hard work in comparison with the Bengali worker by giving a symbolic example that

“Hilly people know how to climb the tree to collect the jack fruit, but plain land people cannot even open the jack fruit to eat even though they get it at their home. It is obvious that hilly workers are much more industrious than Bengali workers.”

In addition, their availability has sometimes been negative; in a sense that *Khyang* indigenous women are treated as cheap labour because they have fewer choices. On the availability of indigenous workers he also added,

“ It was very hard to get factory workers in CEPZ during 1996-97s. During that time indigenous people started to migrate from village to cities because of the peace accord, *Jhum* cultivation was discouraged by the Government of Bangladesh. At that time, the only choice they had was factory jobs which was a very attractive to them and factory employers used them as cheap labour and they recruited lots of indigenous factory workers.”

Why do the garment managers prefer indigenous workers than the Bengali? Many of the *Khyang* , indigenous women and girls wear their traditional dresses which they make themselves and it is a big difference with Bengalis. Including *Khyang* women usually weave on looms in the open spaces alongside their homesteads and inside the house by using

indigenous looms, constructed locally with wood and bamboo. They make various kinds of cloths for their family members, such as dresses, bed sheets, and other household textiles. They are making these by themselves to avoid having to purchase these items from the market. This weaving skill helps them to understand the garments factory work faster than the Bengali women workers. Competition between employers for skilled workers and their reputation for weaving gave them a stake in ensuring factory work. Most interviewees (*Khyang* women) think that garments work is interesting for them as it has been helping them remembering their traditional weaving practice, even if that is quite different. One of my informants explained it like this:

“Garments work is not very hard for me. This work is very common to me. My mother, *didi* (sister), neighbors can weave cloths, I have seen since my childhood in my family and village. I also can use local indigenous looms which is constructed with wood and bamboo.”

There are a few factories in CEPZ where ninety eight percent of the workers are indigenous people. It seems that indigenous people are majority in a quantitative way but they have to work with the Bengali management. Therefore, they are dominated by the Bengali majority culture. Several factors such as simple village life, little education, less exposure, the desire to earn some money, compel the indigenous workers to be submissive and humble to the admiration of factory employers over Bengali workers.

One of the Managing Director has this to say,

“Since the 80s, factory owners have been recruiting indigenous people because of their good reputation of hard work, simplicity and honesty. They don’t make any workers union. They used to sell forest woods to the Bengali settlers, but settlers used to cheat them, they do not give them money .Also, they are more patient, energetic and can work whole day without taking any rest and protest against the factory owners, don’t raise their voice like Bengali workers. They are very simple and do not cheat people like Bengali people”.

During my field work, several interviewed employers explained about the qualities of indigenous workers. The hilly people always had their self sufficient economy and they had enough resources from the forest to survive and communal living which helped them not to go stealing or to go for other kinds of illegal activities.

They live within their small community where they helped each other for any kinds of needs. Therefore, they do not need to steal or engage in other illegal activities to meet their needs. *Khyang* communal living system is an indicator of honesty to employers and it makes them different from Bengali people. Hence, factory owners are mostly confident about *Khyang* indigenous workers that they do not steal anything from the factory, not even a small piece of cloth. One of the employers was explaining their honesty by citing an incident:

“Once, a female indigenous worker was suspected by the supervisor that she stole a piece of cloth. But, the factory owner was quite confident that she didn’t steal that cloth. Then it was found out that she took a piece of cloth for her menstruation as there was no sanitation facility for the women. We have heard complaints against Bengali workers honesty from lots of garments. But we have not got any complain against indigenous workers yet.”

Religion is another vital reason for recruiting indigenous labour in the factories; Bengali Muslim workers go to the mosque to say their *Jumma* (weekend prayer) prayer and during *Eid* or other Muslim religious festivals, they want festival leave and in that time there is making a lack of worker for the factory. In addition, there are lots of Muslim male and female workers who go for three/four times prayer during the working hours and also want half day off or want to go back home earlier during the month of *Ramadan* (fasting). Thus, factory owners or managers give the recruiting priority the other religions. Indigenous people mostly get this opportunity since they are mostly Buddhist, Christians and Hindus.

However, employers also expressed negative attitudes towards Indigenous workers who come from the deep forest or much more remote places. These workers have to face a tremendous language problem. Indigenous workers take a little bit more time than Bengali workers to pick up the Bengali/ English (They need a little bit of knowledge of English for counting and/or packing) language to work. As a result, Bengali workers are in advantageous position due to their Bengali language. Because of the language barrier, there were some *Khyang* women who could not get a job in CEPZ and so opted for jobs as cheap labour in local garments factories. Indigenous people are also sometime stigmatized by Bengali people for their food habits (eating pork, dog’s and cat’s meat, snakes (even python), snails etc). The

ethnic groups of CHT have different ways of integration into the main stream Bengali culture. The *Chakmas*, *Marmas*, and *Tripuras* have, to some extent, a regular or permanent interaction with Bengali society. There are some groups who are almost isolated and rarely come into contact with the Bengali people and only maintain a restricted relation with Bengalis of specialized occupations like traders, moneylenders and so forth. The *Khyang* , *Khumi*, *Murucha* and some members of other communities, because of their remote location, has retained a large degree of cultural autonomy and still are relatively independent of external influence.

**Summary:**

The greater alienation of the hill people from the Bengali people of the plains is simply the result of a series of socio-political manipulation from the British colonial period, Pakistani period to the independence of Bangladesh. There are several reasons for migration of the *Khyang* indigenous women into the city. The issue of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is common worldwide. In the name of counter -insurgency the indigenous people have often been detained and tortured by the army. Violence against women ( rape, forced marriage, abduction), lack of education facility in the village, scarcity of natural resources through deforestation, land dispossession, poverty are the vital reasons for the migration of indigenous people. In such a complex situation, minority *Khyang* women understandably constitute the most vulnerable group. Despite their socio-economic and political marginalization, *Khyang* indigenous women are trying to migrate into cities. But, here in this thesis I have found through my informants that mostly they have migrated into cities by relying on their 'social capital' i.e. their education. Due to SSC degree failure, lack of education and employment facilities in the villages, poverty, lack of availability of hills for *jhum* cultivation because of deforestation, relatives are in jail because of insurgency are the main causes of migration of my informants. It is not only the above mentioned migration reasons that have led to an increasing number of indigenous women migrating to cities in search of work. But also education constitutes one reason which gives them an imminent power to migrate into cities to have a better life and to cope with the challenges of a new patriarchal city life as compared to the village.

## Chapter Four

### Life in the villages

#### Gendered Division of Labour between the Bengali and the *Khyang*

This study has essentially derived from my desire to hear the voices of *Khyang* indigenous women that remain largely unrepresented and unheard of. Their voices and lifestyle is almost unknown to the Bengali people. Most of the indigenous people's hard hilly life style is completely different in many aspects from the Bengalis. In this chapter I will try to explore, the different *Khyang* (*Laitu* and *Kongtu*) women's hard hilly life style in five different *Khyang* villages in compared to the Bengalis. In the absence of adequate secondary materials pertaining to the topic, I have primarily drawn on data from in- depth intensive interviews with the villagers. This would be followed by a reflection of mostly participant observation during my short field work in five different villages such as *Keplang para*, *Dolbonia para*, *Gunguru Moddhom para* and *Arachori para* in Chittagong Hill Tracts, and *Khyang para* in *Chandroghona*. This chapter can be seen as a background to understanding the village life of *Khyang* indigenous women. As these interpretation would give a better understanding of the changes and challenges of the *Khyang* women's life in the village and the city in comparison to the Bengali women workers' life. The reason to make this socio-cultural comparison between *Khyang* (*Laitu* and *Kongtu* both) indigenous and Bengalis is to understand the *Khyang* 's forms of interaction and negotiation process in their new city life.

#### **The difference between *Kongtu* and *Laitu Khyang* community in observed five villages:**

There are some differences between *Laitu* and *Kongtu Khyang* community people's life styles because of their living location or geography which is also important to know in this section. Because, these two communities' have different economic conditions therefore, in the question of empowerment two kinds of analysis and findings might come out (see chapter eight). Now I am going to explain about the difference between *Laitu* and *Kongtu Khyang* community people on the basis of my informants' from the five villages which I have observed through participant observation and interview of village leaders (*Headman* and

*Karbari*,<sup>17</sup> religious leaders). My informants are from five different *Khyang* villages. The *Keplang para* and *Arachori para* situated on the top of the mountain and *Kongtu Khyang* people live in these villages mostly. My informant *Masum* is from *Keplang para* and *Shorna*, *Jhorna* is from *Arachori para*. *Gunguru Moddhom para* & *Dolbonia para* are low leveled land of the valleys and mostly *Laitu Khyang* people live here in these villages. My informants *Rita*, *Mita*, *Mou*, *Maya* and four boys are from these two *Laitu* villages. *Chandroghona* is a *thana* but the informant live in a small *Kongtu Khyang Para* (where only *Kongtu Khyang* people live) it is not a village like above mentioned villages. It is a suburban area with little urban facilities. *Sonali* and *Rupali*, two sisters are from this *Kongtu para*.

The *Laitu* and *Kongtu* both *Khyang* men and women generally work together in *jhum* cultivation like other indigenous communities. I did not find a great difference of division of labor between *Laitu* and *Kongtu* community in above mentioned informants villages. But, my observation is that in those *Laitu* villages, there is little similarities with Bengali main stream people regarding division of labor. For example: after coming back from *jhum* field *Laitu* women are fully responsible for domestic work i.e. cooking and child rearing and the men usually go for entertainment activities, such as meeting with other villagers to chat in nearby tea shops and drinking rice beer with their friends etc. I observed that low land *Khyang* indigenous women have more unequal gender relation in family and community compared to those *Kongtu Khyang* villages. I observed that the *Kongtu Khyang* men and women are more supportive and co-operative in the *jhum* and domestic work compared to above mentioned *Laitu* community people. May be the reason is their remote hilly location where they almost do not have any connection and communication with the Bengali community. *Kongtu Khyangs* believe that men and women are equal and they have to work

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<sup>17</sup> The CHTs has four-layer administrative system from British colonial period. On Sep 1, 1881, the Bengal government divided the CHT into three circles. These circles were divided into 373 *mouzas* (clusters of villages, or revenue units) and each *mouza* was again divided into *para*, or individual villages. Each circle was placed under a government-appointed chief; each *mouza* was placed under a *dewan* or Headman, who was appointed by chief; each *para* was placed under a *karbari*. The *karbaris* were appointed by the *mouza* headman with the concurrence of the circle chief. The offices of chief and headman were usually hereditary. The *mouza* headman were responsible for collection of taxes and the adjudication of disputes within their *mouzas*. They passed the tax to the circle chief, who passed it to the deputy commissioner (Mohsin, 2003:60)

together. But, the *Laitu Khyang* has a everyday connections and contacts with the Bengalis because of the location of their villages. Unlike the *Kongtu*, they believe that women are mostly responsible for domestic work, even though both of them share *jhum* field work and other work whole day together. This group of *Khyang* community is much more influenced by the Bengali main streams culture than *Kongtu Khyang* community. They cannot celebrate any traditional festival without inviting Bengali neighbors.

According to my informants, the *Laitu Khyang* people are more exploited in everyday life by the Bengalis for selling their *jhum* products and forest wood in the Bengali dominated local market. It seems that their economic condition is not as good like the *Kongtu Khyang*. In the case of my *laitu* informants I found that they do not have sufficient *jhum* land, forest to collect regular wood fuel, vegetable and selling wood to earn cash money. It seems (mostly from my observation) these *Laitu* villages have a high degree of poverty than those *Kongtu* villages. The *Laitu Khyang* women cannot go to the *jhum* and even to school alone as they fear the Bengali neighbor or other Bengali men. These groups of women are much more interested in going to the city to look for jobs as compared to the *Kongtu Khyang* women. Generally, it seems that above mentioned *Kongtu Khyang*'s villages do not have direct problem for Bengalis, but as they stated, they are tortured by the Bangladeshi military and the forest department's administrative. Since they are living on the top of the hill, they are more interested in working in their own community rather than in the garments factories. I observed that their economic condition is more likely better than the *Laitu Khyang*'s. For instance: because of poverty, the *Laitu Khyang* men/women are more interested in the garments job. But the *Kongtu Khyang* people do not want to go for garments job as they feel that if they migrate into the city, their community bond relationships would be weaker and there would be a negative effect on their tradition, culture, economy and production. They believe migration into the city should be to get a better education than for garments job. My observation is that these village's *Kongtu* community look down upon *Laitu* people because these *Kongtu* people think that they are in advanced situation in terms of education, economic condition and other perspective compared to *Laitu Khyang* community. But, there is a big difference between Bengalis and *Khyang* indigenous people's life. Now I am going to explain this difference in coming sections.

### **Cultivation and Household Work Difference between the Bengali and the *Khyang* :**

I observed that the *Khyang* women continue to play a primary and important role in production especially in the subsistence- oriented agricultural communities . Like other indigenous women, the *Khyang* women undertake hard physical work such as cutting fuel wood from forests and woodlands along hill slopes. They mutually work with the *Khyang* men in cutting deep jungle, digging hard soil or hills without any tractor, sowing seed, weeding, watering, harvesting product and carrying into their homes etc. In the *Jhum*, there is no specific division of labor. The *Khyang* husbands and wives work together in all the field activities. In other words, women perform the same tasks as the men. In addition, they provide their husbands with their specialized female labor, for instances preparing rice beer, and processing cotton for cloth weaving threads. But on the other hand, the Bengali Muslim's social norms and values usually do not permit their women to go for outside work or to shop in the market. Generally these kinds of outgoing work by a woman is not appreciated by the Bengali community but it has been changing and mostly in cities this picture is reversed. Hence, they usually do not go for cultivation with their husbands except in special cases but that is highly gendered. They stay at home most of the time and do household work, such as cooking, taking care of children, washing clothes etc.

The *Khyang* women were observed walking barefooted over long distances, carrying heavy loads of chopped wood (which they collect from long distance forests) by *Thrung*<sup>18</sup> on their back. They collect fire wood and dry leaves from the forest for regular cooking. Both men and women use their feet for threshing the paddy, then they take to the village for storage by using their *Thrung*. It is very common that the *Khyang* men and women are carried about 15-20 kg of *jhum* products in *Thrung* on their backs. It is habitual of them to walk long hard hilly distances to collect drinking water from the natural spring a tube-well and to take their daily bath. But the water collection for drinking purpose becomes extremely difficult during the dry season because they may have to go a long way and wait for long hours to fetch sufficient water. On the contrary, Bengali women sometimes also have

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<sup>18</sup> One kind of bamboo made basket. The use of this basket is very intensive in their daily life. Both the males and females carry this basket on their back with a rope that holds the basket with their forehead which can carry approximately 15-20 K.G weight at a time. They use the basket during harvesting, carrying grains and other products, as well as for storing different stuffs at the residence (chopped wood, Vessel of Water) and so on. They use this basket also for daily life's work.



to walk long distances to collect water but most of the way is plain. Moreover, *Khyang* cultivation system (*Jhum* cultivation) can be a good example for understanding why factory employers give them priority for factory job ( briefly will be discussed in next chapter). During *Jhum* cultivation, *Khyang* men and women both have to cultivate their land from dawn to dusk (6 am – 7 pm). All day long, they both pass their time digging the slope of the hill, cutting bushes, planting on the hilly slopes, harvesting etc.

During working time in the *jhum* field indigenous women feel secure to work with other indigenous people. All day long they are working, eating and chatting together with their men. Sometimes one woman works alone all day long on an isolated hill without any fear of being harassed or assaulted by an indigenous man. But, as explained in above that some of the works are mostly not allowed for the Bengali women because they do not feel secured to work with men, not to talk of an unknown man from another family. This sense of insecurity stems from the social and cultural settings which put restrictions on men and women intermingling thereby making men always curious about women. The *Khyang* women think that they are secured enough to work outside. One 25 years old *Khyang* woman explained as followed:

“I have no problem to work alone in the *jhum* , we do work also with men, and if I cannot work alone, who will do my work and we cannot get product in proper time. I do not need anybody’s guard; we have to work by ourselves. Indeed, this is my work, if I do not do this we cannot eat. All the daylong we are working together, I enjoy it, I feel proud for it. We eat together so why should only man work? I am not afraid of indigenous men because they are good and always we are like sisters and brothers! but I am afraid of Bengali men as they are not good, gives a *Kunajor* [Bad look].”

The *Khyang* men and women work together *jhum* cultivation. Both of them work by sharing the same work in the *jhum* and by eating very small quantity of dry food. Women do not have any restriction to go for the *jhum* cultivation. Interestingly, I observed that in *jhum* cultivation almost every man and woman use *Tamak pata* (tobacco leaf) while working. It happens not only in *jhum* field but also in their everyday working life whereas it is a social taboo for Bengali women to smoke cigarettes, *tamak pipe* (Tobacco pipe) publicly. I was fascinated that the sharp *Khunta* (like a knife) which all indigenous men and women hold always into their grip. I felt it is a symbol of power. It is always in their hand as they move in the jungle so it protects them from any kinds of animal’s attack or sudden danger.

Cooking food is not exclusively a female job among *Khyang* community where as the Bengali does. The *Khyang* males also cook during the ceremonies and for the guest entertainment purposes. For instance, during my stay in the village mostly my interpreter's brother cooked for me as they showed respect and special care for a guest. He cooked also some special menu like *Mishtanno* from *Binni rice*, a special *Khyang Pitha* which is not a regular food item. Cooking food by the household head is a means of showing respect to a guest. Besides, the males also assist the females while cooking in everyday life. In fact, I came to know that the *Khyang* male and female share cooking job always. If a woman has to take care of the child or has to go to *Jhum* early in the morning then the men will cook. On the other hand, I observed a totally opposite scenario amongst the Bengali men and women. The Bengali women are responsible for cooking, if a man tries to go to kitchen woman does not allow him to enter into the kitchen. Women think that community people will say bad things about her and believe that she does not show respect towards her husband. Moreover, the men think that cooking by man is absolutely disgraceful and it is a task for women only. If they cook regularly or assist women regularly in the kitchen, it is shameful and they do not share this experience with their neighbor or friends as they do not want to be a laughing stock. Now a days, in city usually educated men have to a certain extent accepted to share this cooking work with women, it is not shameful like amongst Bengali village people.

#### **Money Earning and Economic Decision Making:**

Local markets are places where the *Khyang* and other indigenous communities' women can bargain with the buyers or customers very much smartly and successfully even in Bengali language. They try to speak in Bengali with the Bengali customers which can be seen as big challenge for them. Each market place operates two days per week. Villagers have to wait for this *Hat* day to buy or sell something. There are some permanent shops at the market places and therefore, the market also remains active, on a small scale during the rest of the week. The villagers usually have to walk a long way to reach the market. Besides few small market places, the two large markets are located within 20-30 kilometers away from the villages that I had studied. But, women go to the market place always which is outside of the village by walking and it takes 6 - 7 hours long hilly walk. They go to the market to sell their *jhum* agricultural product or other vegetables which they collect from the jungle or hills. Cotton is the major cash crop for them. The cash obtained from cotton was quite enough to serve their limited cash requirements for specific purposes. But, recent expansion of market transaction has

gradually generated the demand for other consumer goods and subsequently they have begun to market several others of their products. Oil seeds and particularly sesame is also marketed. Fruits have also come into the market of which jungle banana, papaya, watermelon; pumpkin, pineapple etc. are major. On their way from the *jhum* field, women collect jungle flower, bamboo shoot, unknown jungle fruits or vegetables, snails from hilly falls, crabs etc which they preserve to sell during *hat day* (week end shopping place) They also sell bamboo to earn cash. Chilies are a means of earning cash but the lion share of their chili product they consume themselves. The domestic animals are the last things to be brought to the market. Tobacco is also a very common leaf which women have been selling and buying openly in the market and simultaneously they do smoke in the market. On the contrary, there are a very few Bengali women who smoke but they are treated as bad and shameless women in the community. The Bengali women are not allowed to buy or sell products in the market freely like indigenous women as they have a *Purdah* culture and their husbands or fathers do not allow them to move freely. Moreover, it is out of the social custom to sell agricultural product in the market, as it is an absolutely male reserved activity. It is very hard to find Bengali women in the market except in big cities. Indigenous women sell their products as they can freely take their decision to sell their product and also have the right on their own earned money. She decides on what to buy for family members or what spices, fish or meat to buy for daily cooking. The Bengali women because they do not have their own earnings and they are not allowed to do as *Khyang* women do as their husbands or community do not allow them. I observed that the *Khyang* women have bargaining power and they are more empowered than the Bengali women.

### **Dress Difference between the Bengali Muslim women and the *Khyang***

Dress of *Khyang* women is quite similar to other indigenous women (*Bhawm, Marma, Tanchanga Chak, Chakma* etc) in CHT. Their kind of dressing is very different from the Bengali women. *Khyang* women and other indigenous women use only a small blouse (sometimes sleeve less) to cover the upper part of the body and a *Thami* (A small piece of cloth, two hands long ) to cover up the lower part of the body. Sometimes they wear up to knee level *thami* .They think it is not bad to show up their legs and to show up their breast and waist. I found some old women who were barely covered on top. I was told by the villagers that in the dense forest it is likely to find entirely unclothed men and women. Men wear only *Lengti* (a small piece of cloth to cover only their private parts leaving the back side bare) and women also do no more than hide their private parts. *Khyang* women use a small blouse and *thami* for whole day work. They go to *Jhum* field with the same dress and at the end of the day after taking bath they change to another clean dress. Usually, they have a small quantity

of dresses, 2-3 dresses for regular use and one or two only for occasional dresses. These dresses were previously made by themselves by hand loom from cotton they produce in the *jhum* themselves. Now a days they buy these dresses from the local market which is very cheap and affordable. This indigenous traditional dressing cannot be compared to western dresses in terms of design but with regards to exposure of the body it is considered almost the same. Bengali women do not wear these kinds of *thami* and blouse as they feel that it does not cover whole body properly like *Saree* (12 meter long cloth which wrap the whole body can cover whole body) and *Shalwar- Kameez*. Also they believe that this sort of dressing which looks “westernized” will impede their freedom of movement, as this could attract men leading to possible sexual harassment. Although they would like to wear western dresses, they are not able to as a result of the above reasons and also because the Bengali majority culture which is influenced by the Muslim religion frowns upon such dressing. Bengali culture does not permit this kinds of dressing as they think that it is against the *pardah*<sup>19</sup>. They feel shy to wear this kind of dressing. That is why indigenous traditional dresses are negatively stereotyped.

The issue of exposure of certain body parts is also related to breast feeding. *Khyang* women can breast feed their children by showing their breasts in front of men and strangers. It is very common to breast feed their children as a mother in front of an unknown man. I have observed that *Khyang* women can take bath in front of men by showing the upper part of their body. They see the female body as very natural and not something to hide always from man. They also find that *Khyang* man are not always curious to see or touch their body like Bengali men. They feel very much comfortable and safe to take a bath and to work with *Khyang* men or other indigenous men, but not with Bengali men.

### **Little Gender segregation between the Bengali and the *Khyang***

Alongside the road, there are tea shops (in one village may be only one tea shop) which served as a place for discussions. The interior of the place was very ordinary with rough tables and benches made of unpolished wood for the customers to sit on. The shop serves tea and snacks , including biscuits and soft drinks. It sells also a few minor goods of urban –industrial origin, such as soap, chips,

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<sup>19</sup> *pardah* is an *islamic* tradition. As a general rule, *pardah* is a cultural rather than a religious tradition. The term *pardah*, meaning “curtain,” is used to describe the traditional seclusion of women in the Middle East and parts of Southeast Asia. It is particularly linked with Muslim and Hindu society, although in areas where these religions are a heavy influence, sex segregation is observed by people of all creeds. Some people support the concept, while others rigorously opposed to it, they argue that *pardah* is used as a tool for the suppression of women. (<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-purdah.htm>)

biscuits, some cosmetics, *biri* / cigarette ,match boxes etc. The customers are mostly hilly men, occasional Bengali customers. But, hilly women from the village also come to the shop from time to time to buy things or have a chat with villagers. These women do smoke tobacco during chatting and they do participate in the discussion with the men in the shop. They mostly share their whole day activities, joy and sorrow. If they face any problem, they try to ventilate with other villagers or *Karbari* or with friends in the shop. Also sometimes, women they work in the tea shop on behalf of the tea shop owner. On the other hand, my observation and knowledge as an' insider generally 'Bengali women feel shy to have a chat in front of the man in a small village tea shop.

### **Degree of freedom/ freedom of choice between the Bengali and the *Khyang* :**

#### **Selection of mate:**

They do not have any arranged marriages like Bengali people. Without having love affair with a man, they do not marry each other. They want to know each other first, then they think about a permanent relationship i.e. marriage. However, unlike women from the mainstream, *Khyang* women generally have a large degree of freedom to choose their partners. Most marriages are guided by customary laws and are generally not recorded or registered. If any people cannot find any partner then community people help them to get a partner through a local game. They arrange a game by using hilly fruit's seeds (*Gila*) and then they make one bride and groom symbolically by the seed, if they can win in the game with the bride seed they will decide to get her as a loving partner. They can marry a man or woman from other indigenous community but not from Bengali community which is not accepted by the community. Before marriage, they can also have sexual relationship which is not a taboo like Bengali people. But, if they make any physical relationship then they have to marry each other. Otherwise, they have to give punishment money by paying 200 taka for woman and for man 300 taka, they have to buy a pig and which has to be given to *Karbari*. As a punishment they have to feed this pig meat to all community people. It is obvious that the punishment for men and women are almost equal whereas in mainstream Bengali culture only women are being punished for this kinds of incidence mostly socially, sometimes they face very difficult and brutal *fatwa*, they are being killed even, because of pre-marital sexual relationship and pregnancy. The evils of *fatwa*<sup>20</sup> related violence is generally not known within indigenous society in Bangladesh (Halim:2004).

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<sup>20</sup> *Fatwa* is a legal statement in Islam issued by a religious lawyer, on a specific issue. In Bangladesh there are some mal practices of *Fatwa* which usually applies on women as a death penalty if they do anything against Islam or against the social norms and values.

### **Bride Price between the Bengali and the *Khyang* :**

Bride Price is paid in cash. But, they recognize an indirect right of the bride on the bride price. In Bengali culture, man demands dowry from the women's family. But in the indigenous community and in the *Khyang* community, the women's family demand money from the groom. One of the bride's mother explained as followed:

“Since childhood we have been rearing and taking care of this girl. Today she is matured and educated because of her parent's contribution. She will be leaving us and will give labour for her husband and her new family. They will get her for rest of the life, we will be the looser! As a wage labour for rearing up the daughter can't we expect anything from the groom?”

To pay bride price to the bride's mother is a way to show respect towards her family, mother and to the bride. *Khyang* people call it, 'price of the mother's milk'. Among Bengalis dowry giving and dowry violence is a very common practice but dowry is not known to be a traditional custom among indigenous peoples, there are some indigenous people who reported me that some better off families among indigenous community have started demanding dowry for their sons; a clear influence from the Bengali people (Halim, 2004).

After the above mentioned discussion, here, I would like to say that, historically; indigenous cultures have been more egalitarian in structure, with men and women working side by side exercising an equal voice in decision making. Even if the husband is formally the head of the household, decisions are taken jointly. Indigenous women can move freely in the society and are not controlled by their husband, father, brother or male relatives including in their choice of marriage partners, divorce and separation. The division of labour between men and women is complementary, and women's contribution to the family's subsistence economy is recognized. Indigenous women play a central role in the family structure including in organizing and managing the family economy, in raising and educating children and youth, producing the necessary clothing and household items. Within their communities, women are outspoken and play a prominent role in family decision making.

## Summary:

CHT is the only region in the country where the majority of the population is non- Bengali and non-Muslim and therefore indigenous people are the minority in terms of both ethnicity and religion. I have found almost the same picture of indigenous women's life in different five *Khyang* villages. The chief means of the rural indigenous economy is agriculture and forestry, either plough cultivation or *jhum* cultivation. We can see from the village life that *Khyang* indigenous women do not have gendered division of labour in cultivation and household work . They have less gender segregation, dominance, subordination, gender hierarchy, more freedom of movement and choice and decision making power than Bengali women. The male- female interaction is also different than Bengalis and more liberal. Within the indigenous family, it is generally customary laws and traditional values that guide social norms and personal laws (including family law), some of which are more progressive than the norms for Bengali mainstream people, while others are regressive. Indigenous women are, at least until today; relatively better off than their Bengali counterparts (Halim, 2004). Above mentioned, traditionally strong position of *Khyang* indigenous women has been gradually deteriorated due to various reasons. *Khyang* women are encountering severe economic hardship due to the impact of mal-development, displacement from their origin of land (Halim,2004). With the loss of their land, *Khyang* women also lose control over the natural resources that have been their survival resources since birth. Endemic poverty, dislocation and eviction from traditional lands due to state forestry projects have induced many *Khyang* men and women to migrate into cities to work in garments factories and in other sectors, even though the wage rates are unexpected and very low. But, relatively in village life they have gender equity with harsh environment which is generally absent in Bengali culture. These women face this reality at first time in city right after their migration from village to city. In next chapter I will explore the city life of *Khyang* women.

## Chapter Five

### Life in the city

#### Housing and Inter-ethnic Relationships

The availability of jobs in different factories and modern city life attract people to migrate from their villages into the cities. Cities bring diverse groups of workers together. Some sectors of the economy, such as the garment industry, have drawn particular groups of people, such as *Khyang* indigenous workers. After coming to the city, they start to experience a completely new social life as compared to the village, especially, in regards to housing, transportation, social interactions and majority Bengali's culture and practices. Specially, the types of housing in the city play an important role in the formation of new inter-ethnic<sup>21</sup> relationships. In general, single working women in Bangladesh face more housing problems than married working women. A single working woman has a great deal of fear to live alone in the city. If they are not accompanied by male family members, it carries negative taint. Unlike Bengali working men, to live alone in the city independently is not socially desirable for working women. The single working women, who migrate on their own to work and live in the cities, are in some cases negatively exposed in the society. Thus, Oshi (2002, 14:16) claims that migration from rural to urban is mostly dominated by men, and in most cases women migration into the city is decided by the household head or upon marriage (Dannecker, 2002:43). Smith et al. 1984: 22 qtd by Dannecker also express the view that "Asian women have been traditionally associated with marriage migration". However, there are some exceptional single or married women who live in city without male guardian by

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<sup>21</sup> Here interethnic relations is a term to describe both Bengali-indigenous relations between the various ethnic groups from the CHT.



avoiding the frowners. The *Khyang* indigenous working women are among these. They migrate from a semi egalitarian society to a capitalist patriarchal society where they have to face several challenges in their daily city life. Moreover, because of their indigenous identity, they have to face more difficulties than the Bengali working women. Interestingly, they make their own integration strategies into the new city life though they experience ethnic boundary maintenance in public housing where residents are from different ethnic groups. Their ability to fit in and mingle with other ethnic groups may stem from their previous inter-ethnic relationship experience in the village. In addition, the factory wages give them new choosing power in the family and the community, to create new forms of interethnic interactions. In literature, not much has been mentioned about the living conditions and the household characteristics of *Khyang* garment- workers. Thus, to understand the *Khyang* garment's workers' city life situation, there are many factors that need to be taken into consideration such as the quality of housing, patterns of income, savings and health conditions. Firstly, I will describe the *Khyang* Indigenous' quality of housing in terms of some variables i.e. housing rent, housing area, non-dense/ dense housing condition, living pattern, the density of sleeping arrangements, pattern of kitchen, the availability of electricity or natural gas, the supply of clean drinking water and sanitation system. I will also concentrate in more detail on the new living arrangements, the forms of interactions and negotiation processes within households over and above gender relations among *Khyang* indigenous women and majority ethnic groups. In addition, I will explore, why the variations in housing are important in understanding the interethnic relationship.

I have categorized this housing patterns on the basis of my informants living place from total number of eight *Khyang* female workers and five *Khyang* male workers. In the following, I am going to describe these five kinds of housing pattern. From observation there might be more housing categories in the Chittagong city which was not my concern.

**1. Living with Bengalis from different districts in a Shared Room: the Case of *Sonali Khyang***



One storey mess building shared room housing

*Sonali Khyang* is one of the unmarried female informants who lives in a shared room housing with Bengalis. She started living here when she used to work in a local factory and had little income. Now she has been working in an EPZ factory but still she prefers to live here as it is cheaper and she can save more money for her family. I visited her place several times at morning and evening times. She is from a small *Khyang* community in Chandroghona, Chittagong city (*Chandroghona under Kaptai thana, Rangamati Hill district*). Due to failure of SSC (Secondary School Certificate) and unemployment in *Chandroghona*, she moved to Chittagong city mostly for economic reasons ten years ago. Before she came to the city, she had dreams of becoming a nurse in the *Chandroghona* missionary's hospital. But, she became frustrated when she could not achieve the required SSC degree. As the eldest daughter in her family, she was faced with the responsibility of supporting her family economically. Her seven year old youngest sister is in the primary school in *Chandroghona*. *Sonali Khyang* explained that she is an example of many indigenous women in her district who have moved to the big cities. She moved to the city with her neighbor who was a Bengali girlfriend and the neighbor used to work in a local garments factory in the city. Generally, the workers who come to the city, first, have to face various kinds of difficulties in finding accommodation. The *Khyang* informants reported that they had to deal with several

problems to find a housing initially. The landlords are normally very reluctant to rent out rooms to women. They think women would be engaged in “bad activities/business” (prostitution). For example, *Sonali* explained her first experience as followed:

“I am an unmarried indigenous woman. The landlord told me directly that a single woman might be in danger; they can be spoilt anytime if they live without *Purush manush* (male person). Also, he gave a strange look at my indigenous appearance. He was curious how I came into city from the deep jungle of Hill Tracts. He was surprised why I am not going to other migrated indigenous people to live with them. Then I was surprised why he asked such a question, but I didn’t argue with the landlord, why did I have to find other indigenous people to live with them? And, I didn’t try to convince them about my virtuousness as I felt city people and city rules are very strange, especially for indigenous women!”

*Sonali* did not know anybody in the city and had no place to live in the city. Therefore, she started to live with her friend in a Bengali shared housing. She agreed to live there as she had no other alternative and thought that it will at least give her shelter in the city while she manages to find a job. This housing is a one storey mess building where seven to eight people from different ethnic groups, districts, religions and occupations live in the same room. The compounds are mainly located at the back of multi-storey buildings surrounded by a big wall, and it is generally not visible from the outside. It is not even possible to imagine that there could be one storey building with five to ten rooms in a row and where seventy to eighty people live all together.

I found that the landlords could rent out a small room to several (five to ten) people who live together and share the room. This housing quality and patterns resembles an urban slum. Nevertheless, these living areas are safer, more expensive and far better than slum areas. *Sonali’s* room size is approximately 10-8`feet, very small, dark and damp, and this, she shares with five other unmarried women and two married men. They share beds with others (both men and women). In her room, *Sonali* and two other unmarried Bengali women sleep on the floor, and in the same room there is also a small bed where two married men sleep. Their wives live in the village with the children. One small bed and one iron shelf are the only furniture for keeping cloths and kitchen utensils. Connected to this main room, there is another smaller room, and the room rent is 2400/- taka (\$35) all together. *Sonali* and her co-

lets have given out this connected smaller room to five more people (a small family with a child and two grown up sisters) as sub-lets to make the rent cheaper for each individual (approximately 300 – 400 taka (\$6) per head, a month). The utility (electricity, natural gas for cooking, water) bill is separate. The water facility is often problematic as one pump is not enough to serve seventy to eighty people. All the tenants have to sleep and cook in the same room. One small cooking area is in the corner of the small main room. They cut and wash all food items like fish, meat and vegetables using a small quantity of water in a small hole on the floor where there is no drainage. The kitchen with its wet floor, mud and other dirt is used for cooking by all the tenants. The gas stove does not look like the usual cooker since it is covered with soot as a result of continuous usage for cooking. The stove never gets to be washed since it never gets free and it does not belong to anyone. Most of the time people have to be in a queue to cook from morning to evening. The cooking times are scheduled according to their working hours and maintained by a good mutual understanding. The whole building has three toilets and two bathrooms for seventy- eighty people which are little far from their room. The inhabitants in such a compound know each other and share a lot in common. They often share their personal belongings, such as kitchen utensils, wrist watch, and cell phones to make urgent calls, DVD player / CD player / TV to watch interesting programmes or Bengali/ Hindi movie together. Moreover, they also help those who cannot read and write to read their personal letter from back home, and help one another financially by lending out money to those in need.

Nevertheless, this close relationship is not perceived in a positive way by all inhabitants of the housing compound. Some young women were of the view that one should keep a distance from males especially, married men whose wives are in the village and live alone in the city to earn for their family. Unmarried women are also cautious about mixing with every neighbor because they believe that one should not trust unknown neighbors who are from different districts or villages. Most of the female inhabitants of this housing compound expressed their annoyance at the “big brother attitude” of some male neighbors. For example: neighbors’ gossip about young girls’ behavior, if they come home late evening or night. Also, they get the suspicious look from the neighbors if they talk with any man in the streets or outside the gate. The caretaker of the housing also lives in the same compound

(Landlords employ a caretaker to collect money from tenants and to take care of the housing). He often plays the role of the male guardian by controlling the female workers' movements. In the context of Bangladesh, specifically in the villages, all men perceive themselves as responsible for the moral status of all village women. The in charge advises women not to mix with unknown men within the housing campus, and also to cover their heads and bodies to avoid undesired danger from men. He tells the women not to go outside alone in the evening or talk with men in the streets, tea shops or in the markets. He is very strict on the female tenants to protect the image of the housing. If any male relative or visitor comes, he has to wait outside the Iron Gate until the in-charge gives permission for him to come in. Some women support this controlling because they think that this is the only way to avoid getting into trouble with strangers.

In *Sonali's* housing, she is the only indigenous woman of my *Khyang* informants who had to live with different Bengalis. In her room, she had roommates from Islam and Hindu religion, while she is a Seven days Adventist Christian. She has been living with different religious people and different people who are from different districts of Bangladesh (*Noakhali, Faridpur, Barisal, Satkania etc*).

### **Food and Interethnic Relation**

As *Sonali* explains, the Bengalis have a common stereotypical idea about indigenous people, for example "indigenous people are dirty and eat dirty and strange foods". As a result, *Sonali* feels that it is not possible to cook or eat any kinds of hilly food (*Nappi*, bamboo shoot, snails, crab, pork etc). Her food habits are greatly different from the Bengalis. The Bengalis show their disgust and give strange looks when they see bamboo shoot, crab, snails, pork, *Nappi* (Fermented fish) etc. They say that these foods are not *Halal*<sup>22</sup> and hygienic food, and

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<sup>22</sup> The animals must be Zabihah (slaughtered according to Islamic law).The animal should be put down on the ground (or held it if it is small) and its throat should be slit with a very sharp knife to make sure that the 3 main blood vessels are cut. While cutting the throat of the animal (without severing it), the person must pronounce the name of Allah or recite a blessing which contains the name of Allah, such as "Bismillah Allah-u-Akbar". ([www.eat-halal.com/](http://www.eat-halal.com/)" Eat-Halal.com)

if they get the smell of hilly food they give odd look where as hilly foods are the most favorite foods of all hilly people. Moreover, *Sonali* also gives an account of her roommates who do not use her kitchen utensils even if they need it urgently. In this housing compound, the sharing of Bengali food is common but her Bengali neighbors avoid anything to do with her food. Bengalis behave as if her kitchen utensils are untouchable. They think that *Sonali* uses the same cooking pans to cook pork or snails. She realized that because of her different food habit and indigenous identity it became difficult for her to establish good relation or friendship with her neighbors. Therefore, *Sonali* tried to eat Bengali's traditional food instead of her traditional hilly food and she cooks differently for Bengali friends and for herself. Once while she was cooking her traditional hilly food (crab and bamboo shoot) in the cooking area, her room mates surrounded her and asked all sorts of questions about her food and they spit on the floor to show disgust and laughed. Her neighbor also said that "Hilly people eat *Kauta*, *Bang*, *shuor* (Tortoise, frog and pork) and what a fate we have to live with these people who eats all *haram*<sup>23</sup> and unhygienic food."

### **Dress and Interethnic Relation**

*Sonali* seldom can wear *Khyang* traditional clothing (*Thami- Blouse*). She does not feel comfortable in front of Bengalis, not even with her roommates. The *Khyang* women do not use *Orna* to cover up their breast, but the Bengalis do. In the Bengali culture, it is shameful if a woman does not cover up her breasts with *Orna* or *Achol* of the saree. Ethnic stereotypes are often morally condemning by Bengalis. There is a Bengali phrase that "Indigenous women are shameless, promiscuous and nude". *Sonali* shares her room with Bengali men and women, and as a result, it is impossible to wear her traditional dress. She

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<sup>23</sup> The Arabic word *Haram* means unlawful. The following items have been categorically spelled out as being *Haram* by jurists in light of the Holy Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet Mohammad : Meat from swine - pork, ham, gammon, bacon, etc , Blood ,Carnivorous animals ,Almost all reptiles and insects, The bodies of dead animals ,*Halal* animals which are not slaughtered according to the Islamic Law (Animals killed in the name of anyone other than Allah), Wine, Ethyl Alcohol, and Spirits. The above mentioned items are *Haram* and should be avoided by all Muslims. (www.eat-halal.com/" Eat-Halal.com)

also needs to use *Orna* (Bengali dress) with her traditional dress. Mostly, she wears Bengali dress for example *Shalwar –Kameez – Orna*. Occasionally she uses *Saree* on the streets to fit in with the surroundings. In addition, she uses work uniforms in the garment factories which are usually *Shalwar- Kameez*. *Sonali* explained her experience about Bengali dresses:

I like *Shalwar- Kameez* to wear because it is comfortable to work with but don't like to use *Orna* to cover up breast carefully and as a veil always like other Bengali women. I feel very hot if I cover my head with a big piece of cloth but it is funny to me, in hot summer when people sweat , but Bengali women (Muslim- Hindu women both) don't remove their veil to feel comfortable and to enjoy the cool air. They feel *Orna* is their *Abru, Ijjat* (honour & *Purdha*) Sometimes, if my *Orna* is displaced from my breast, I have seen that street boys give a strange attention on my breast which is much uncomfortable for me. I feel *Orna* reminds other people that there are something special hidden things or body parts to cover it up. Bengali women are making their breasts attractive and giving special attention by covering with an extra large piece of cloth on the top of *Kameez*!

However, by wearing Bengali dress and eating Bengali food, *Sonali* tries to create a good image and live at peace with the caretaker of the house, roommates and neighbors. She is afraid that if her roommates or neighbors make any complains about her, the caretaker of the house would throw her out of the house to protect the image of the majority Bengali tenants in the housing. Therefore, *Sonali* feels that she needs to try and fit into the Bengali society and culture in order to avoid ridicule, negative stereotyping and to get access to the available comparatively cheaper room for living. In this way, she wants to establish good relation with her roommates. She always compromise whenever there is any problem with her roommates regarding cooking, cleaning room and food sharing. She is aware of the big difference between the life of her roommates and her. As an ethnic minority woman, she cares a lot about her neighbors and roommates. She is always smiling with everybody to be good and she thinks she needs to be more considerate regarding her reputation. If she fights with her roommates, the landlord might be annoyed and angry with her which would affect her accommodation. *Sonali* is surrounded mostly by Muslim Bengalis.

However, over the years, there have been many slight changes to her indigenous culture in terms of dress, food and language from the Bengali due to the close living proximity. She thinks that due to continual migration to big cities, many cultural, social and economic traits of the indigenous people have been altered in order to adapt to the new environment. It is seen from her case that she has developed some techniques to avoid and

tolerate sanctions from the majority Bengali due to her own survival in the city life where wage gives her power. Though her ethnic identity is a social stigma, her employment in the garments factory has posed a significant challenge to majority peoples' culture and patriarchal domination as she stated that,

I need to earn money. I have my own job and I do whatever I feel like doing, I don't care about anybody because I earn myself. People do not feed me. I pay the room rent regularly so the landlord likes and sees me as a good tenant. But, I do care a little bit about my roommates because I have to live with them. Therefore, I don't eat hilly food. Bengali people can't tolerate the smell of our food so I have changed my food habit, no problem! Also, I do wear *Shalwar Kameez* now which is not bad; I feel it is a little modern. When I go to the village then I will wear *Khyang Thami* and Blouse. I am comfortable with all kinds of dress except *Burkha*. ('*Purdha*' whole body covered dress).

I visited *Sonali* a number of times at her living place. Whenever I visited her, I felt that I was in a Bengali community and hardly found any indigenous traits in her behavior. She speaks very good Bengali and wears Bengali dresses. Therefore, apparently it is hard to distinguish between a Bengali woman and an indigenous woman like *Sonali* except her indigenous appearance. She stated that Bengalis cannot pronounce her *Khyang* name and they express annoyance at calling her *Khyang* name. So she decided to change her *Khyang* name and to a Bengali name.

As an ethnic minority woman, *Sonali* understands that her distinctive cultural patterns are different from the "dominant" Bengali culture in terms of language, race, ancestry, religion and customs. There seem to be various conditions in the housing that do not promote positive relations because of the place of origin and status differences between the interacting groups. *Sonali* explained that her neighbors maintain dense social networks which include distant relatives, friends, same district or fellow villagers and work colleagues living in other areas of Chittagong city.

## **2. Living with Indigenous People in a Shared Room: the Case of *Rita, Mita, Mou, Maya* and *Khyang* Indigenous Boys**



The second category of housing pattern looks almost like the first one. I visited my informants *Rita, Mita, Mou, Maya* several times who all live together. I visited them when they are returning from factory work in the evening. The main difference between this type of housing and the one in *Sonali's* case discussed above is that here, seven to eight indigenous people from the same community (both men and women) live together. They live in one shared room which is surrounded by Bengali neighbors. Unlike *Sonali*, they do not need to mingle much with Bengali neighbors. They maintain a distance relationship with their neighbors. I found that four unmarried *Khyang* women and four young unmarried boys live all together in one room where they have only one small bed. Boys sleep in the bed and girls sleep on the floor. All the girls are close relatives from the same family and come from *Khyang* village. The boys are distant relatives of the girls and are also from the same *Khyang* village.



### **Relationship amongst Indigenous Community People:**

These eight *Khyang* women and men did not come to the city together. They came to the city through a process of chain migration. Firstly, two of the boys came to the city and then the girls came to know about garments work and city life from them, and came to the city one by one. Men and women have been sharing the same room comfortably because they think that they are like siblings and from the same ethnic community. Two of the girls (*Rita* and *Mita*) are older than the four boys. Therefore, these two sisters play a caring role of mothers or big sisters to the others. They share a very small room ( approx. 10-12 feet). They

consider each other's financial problems when they are in needs or during time of unemployment. When *Rita* for example came first to the city, she was unemployed and had no money. Thus, the others paid for her rent on till she got a job. They share the housework and try to keep their room tidy. Coming from the same community, they feel that it is a good co-operation to help newcomers and also give support to those who are employed. In terms of cooking and cleaning, those who are unemployed assist those who are employed since they do not have enough time to cook and do household work due to long hours of work.

### **Relationship among Indigenous and Bengali People:**

As mentioned above, these eight indigenous garments workers room is surrounded by Bengali neighbors and they meet each other especially in the bathroom or toilet corridor and on the road side of grocery shops. However, they hardly mingle with each other. These eight *Khyang* s like to keep segregated from Bengali neighbors. Bengali people do not visit them like *Sonali*. In this housing pattern, Bengalis have a tremendous curiosity about indigenous people. They try to peep into their rooms to talk with them sometimes. But, these *Khyang* s try to avoid the Bengalis. They think that they are living here independently with their own community people. They pay house rent to the landlord, have their own cell phone, TV, DVD and they can read and write Bengali. They have just a few Bengali friends in this housing compound with whom they exchange video cassettes or DVD's to watch Bengali/ Hindi movie. They otherwise do not communicate with the Bengali neighbors or visit to chat in the evening. *Rita* expressed her annoyance and reason for not mixing with the Bengalis as followed:

I earn myself and want to live at my own way. I do not have any interest in other people's personal life. They will ask me so many personal questions if I allow them in my room. They think that I am sexually promiscuous and all indigenous people are sexually promiscuous, live in hilly areas or peripheral zones, lived in isolation, far away from civilized societies etc. But, I live in close proximity to Bengalis but I do not care about them, I do not like to even say hello to them.

These *Khyang* workers pay less rent in comparison to *Sonali*'s housing. They pay 1200 (\$17) taka per month including utilities (electricity, natural gas and water) where as

*Sonali's* room cost \$24. This housing area is less developed, dense, and far from the main city. But they (*Khyang*) think that this housing pattern is better than the first category of housing as they do not need to share their room with Bengali people. Their housing pattern is similar to the first one in terms of income group of people i.e. local garments factory workers and low waged people live here. They live like a *Khyang* family, just as they do back home. They do not face any problem of eating hilly food, wearing *Khyang* dresses, speaking *Khyang* language in their room since there is no Bengali. They do not have any problem in practice their own tradition and culture. These girls seem happy that the landlord and neighbors do not disturb them much because they live with male mates whom neighbors and other Bengalis treat as male guardians. Therefore, landlord cannot control their freedom of movement and do not talk much about the girls reputation.

### 3. Living in a Working Women's Hostel: the Case of *Rupali*



Working Women's Hostel

'*Kormojibi mohila hostel*' (Working Women's Hostel) is a new form of living arrangement which is a result of urbanization processes. It gives better possibilities for women to seek wage employment. In the transformation of household structures and living conditions it is a step towards new social change. I regularly visited (5- 6 times in the evening) and stayed for one night, after taking permission from the supervisor as a guest at the Working Female Hostel where one of the informants; *Rupali* (*Sonali's* younger sister) lives. The hostel which accommodates garments workers and other occupational working women is situated in

a five storey residential building. Inside the building there are five to six big rooms on each floor where only one shared kitchen and three to four baths and toilets in a row are close to the sleeping areas. Altogether, 100- 125 women live in this hostel. Between 5- 6 women shared one of the big rooms, each of them have only one small iron/bamboo shelf furniture and a bed. Everyone has her own kitchen utensils and other personal belongings. I was told by my informants that mostly unmarried women live in this hostel in comparison to the divorcee, married, and destitute women. Interestingly, the majority of the women living in the hostel seem to have a good educational background and better off family background.

The living standard of these kinds of housing is far better than the previously described housing categories. This hostel has a better security system, water, electricity, gas, and toilet and bath facilities according to my informants. The living conditions in the hostel were appreciated by the residents because of the gas, water and sanitation facilities. These women have better monthly income than the women in the other types of housing as they are mostly workers of the EPZ factories. The safe, clean and good living environment was highlighted by a majority of the women as the main reasons why they decided to live in the hostel. The rules and regulations in the hostel are quite strict. Only women can live and enter the hostel, no male visitors are allowed besides family members. There is a permanent guard who controls and monitors the entrance of male visitors and outsiders by using a register book. Visitors need to present their identity and contact details in the register book. Then the guard will call the resident to meet the visitor. If any woman wants to meet their male guest then they use the guest room which is separated from the main hostel building. At 10:00 O'clock at night the gates are closed and the residents are supposed to be in. If somebody is late or need to come back late night then they need to take 'late permission' from the hostel manager who is a woman. The hostel manager is very much responsible and worried about the reputation of both the women and the hostel. Therefore, she tries to control the women but she is also very friendly and always tries to co-operate with the women. There are some women who go to music class and play harmonium at their room during free time. In each room, they have TV, DVD and CD which they share for recreation. On the ground floor, they also have a big games room where they share a common TV and play some indoor games (Carom board, chess, table tennis etc). These kinds of female hostels are comparatively more expensive than

the previously mentioned housing patterns. Most residents spend two-thirds of their income on accommodation, but they feel happy to live here because of the safer, clean and better living conditions. Thus, the garments workers who live in this housing think that they have better income, savings, and expenditure ability than others. That is why, *Rupali* is proud that she can live in this kinds of housing which has made a different life than her elder sister, *Sonali*.

### **Relationships**

The quantity of indigenous women is very few in these kinds of housing but it is not possible to tell who is an indigenous woman and who is not. They use both Bengali and indigenous dress. They have the liberty to enjoy their local clothing in this hostel compound, they have a close relationship with their roommates and neighbors, and they speak also very good Bengali. Here, like the first category of housing, Indigenous and Bengali women both live together. Like others, *Rupali* think that in this housing, there is less mingling problem, and better sharing facilities with Bengali people compared to other types of housing. The reason why *Rupali* thinks this way, is that women here have a better educational and family background. But, indigenous women try to avoid eating their exotic food which is the main problem with the majority Bengalis. The hostel situation is, of course, not unproblematic. The dominance of the majority and negative stereotypes are also present here but it is not as visible as in the other housing conditions. As *Rupali* mentioned,

“I share a very small room and bed with my roommate who is a Bengali Muslim woman from *Gopalganj* (North East district of Bangladesh which is far from CHT). Even though we are from distant places, we are like sisters. We think that we came for a short time. Today, we are here, tomorrow, may be not! Thus, we like to share our food, we put our money together to buy groceries and cook together, eat together. If she gets time she cooks for me and if I get time I cook food for her. Even though she does not like my food and dress, she has been trying to adjust with me. You cannot find these kinds of housing facility in other places. I think this place is one of the best places in my knowledge. I feel proud that I have got chance to live here. I do not like to live in slum housing. If I have enough money why will I choose slum housing? Here, Bengali people do not neglect me like other places as most of the people here have minimum educational qualification [SSC and HSC passed].”

#### 4. Living with people from different ethnic groups: the Case of *Masum*

One of my key informants by name, *Masum Khyang* who helped me as an interpreter in my village research, lives here. I visited his place four times in the morning and evening time. There are some five- six storey buildings mostly owned by Bengali people where only different kinds of indigenous community people (different ethnic communities) live together. But, in each there are floors or blocks a particular ethnic group is concentrated. The main difference here with other types of housing is that people have been sharing their room, kitchen, bath room with different kinds of indigenous community people. Those who live in this kind of housing think that they are more united, powerful indigenous *para* (area, more at the foot note 16) compared those who live in other housing pattern. They also think it is prestigious to live in this kind of housing as they can speak in their own language, practice their own cultures like dressing, and eat hilly food etc. They can form a united front against unwanted rules and norms made by the majority Bengali people. Indigenous women feel safer here. However, it is very competitive to be accommodated in these kinds of housing as it is fully occupied most of the time. And, also as a minority indigenous group, the *Khyang* has less chance to getting a place to live there. I also found lots of female garments workers from other larger indigenous communities, such as *Chakma*, *Tanchanga* and *Marma*. *Masum* lives in this kind of housing with 30-40 *Chakma* people. It was initially perplexing for me to find that indigenous groups were the majority and dominate other minority ethnic groups more intensely than any other ethnic group, and I very quickly became aware of the sharp cognitive and interactional boundaries among different ethnic groups from one incident. During my field work when I visited *Masum* for the first time at his place, the majority indigenous group, *Chakma* leaders became angry because I interviewed a minority *Khyang* man instead of them without seeking their permission. I asked *Masum*, how it feels like to live with lots of indigenous people from CHT? From his answer, I learned that there is intra- indigenous discrimination. He replied as follows:

“I had a very hard time to get a place here. I also didn’t know any *Khyang* people in this big city. Where should I go? I am very lucky that I got a chance to live here.

But, like me, other minority garments workers (women and men) have to adjust with these majority indigenous communities. I do not understand their language fully and do not like their big brother attitude always. They usually do not consult me about any kind of decision making for example, increase in house rent, water supply or taking new tenants. Thus, sometime, I do not feel good staying with them, if I could, I would have left this place earlier, but compared to other *Khyang* garments worker's housing, I am fine in many ways here."



*Masum* was not the only *Khyang* person who reported feeling lost and lonely, experiencing stereotyping and discrimination from the majority indigenous community. Like other small minorities, *Masum* expressed his position in this housing as followed:

"Bengalis call indigenous people *Jongli* (wild) people and very often they call us *Upojati* (indigenous in a bad way) and *Chakma Chakma*, but here it is just opposite. Other indigenous people call me *Khyang* with a negative tone. It is painful for me that as an indigenous man I am being treated like an ethnic minority among other different indigenous communities. *Chakma* people think that they are superior to other indigenous communities, they are all in all among other indigenous communities."

## 5. Living in a single room surrounded by Bengalis: the Case of *Shorna* and *Jhorna*



In this category of housing, my two informants *Shorna* and *Jhorna* share a room together. They are two cousins who came into the city after their father and uncle was kidnapped by the *Shanti Bahini*<sup>24</sup>. I visited them five times in the evening. There are some kinds of Bengali owned multi storey buildings where one or two indigenous people live as tenants in an individual room but are surrounded Bengali tenant neighbors. On six floors among 30-40 Bengalis, there were only two indigenous women. In this kind of housing, they do not share their room with other ethnic groups, but they share a common kitchen, bathrooms and toilets. This kind of housing is much more expensive than other categories. The *Khyang* indigenous women who live here think that the maintenance of this kind of housing is much better, and it is cleaner than other housing patterns which they visited to meet their friends. They left their village with the help of the Bangladeshi military as their father and relatives had close relationship with them. Thus, other indigenous community's peoples think they are *Razakar*<sup>25</sup>. They do not feel safe among the indigenous communities even not among the

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<sup>24</sup> Shanti Bahini ( Peace Force) was the name of the military wing of the PCJSS (the United People's Party of the CHTs). It was formed in 1972 to preserve the rights of the tribal people in south-eastern Bangladesh, and fought for many years against the central government.( [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanti\\_Bahini](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shanti_Bahini))

<sup>25</sup> *Razakar* a paramilitary force formed at Pakistan government initiative to assist it and to resist the freedom fighters during the war of liberation of Bangladesh in 1971.Bengalis show their hatred by uttering this word *razakar*.( [http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/R\\_0159.htm](http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/R_0159.htm))



*Khyangs*. They have found this housing by using the contacts from the military person. They do not mingle with Bengali neighbors but they do think Bengali people are safer than indigenous people. In the following interview fragment, *Jhorna* reported her sense of loneliness in this Bengali dominated environment, though living in a safer housing.

“I work in a garment factory and live in city because I like city facilities. I had to come to the city because we had a problem with *shanti Bahini*. And, I had this dream to go to the city, as I heard that city life is exciting. But, I am an indigenous woman and had always been with indigenous people; I feel bad sometimes to see Bengalis everywhere around me.”

### **Summary:**

This chapter provided empirical evidence regarding the impact of wage and work participation on the living conditions and interethnic interactions (between ethnic minority and majority) of *Khyang* indigenous women in an urban setting. My data also allowed me to explore a number of different dimensions of *Khyang* women’s gendered position. The outcomes of *Khyang* women’s wage or employment cannot easily be seen but it came out from this empirical chapter that *Khyang* indigenous women have challenged and renegotiated the complex interethnic interactions within their housing compounds and households which are inter linked with other key arenas of social interactions. They have accustomed themselves into learning how to quench their inner thirst; they have been suppressed from expressing their wishes all their lives as minorities. As a result, they feel the same pressure when they try to mingle with the mainstream Bengali society. Furthermore, these indigenous people do not feel comfortable enough to want to share their traditional food and dressing in their housing as they feel that their housing and compounds are like an open public place. They feel that it would give their Bengali neighbors or roommates a chance to tease and harass them. It can be explained that these interviewed *Khyang* women have been viewed so far as a “Special” group to me. They have overcome the feeling of low self worth as minority ethnic women. Therefore, they have been able to live in the city by mingling with both majority and minority ethnic groups. These women have been living independently by escaping the traditional responsibilities in the village if they had lived with their family, relatives or husband. They have made new domestic relation with their different ethnic roommates. These women are the

breadwinners, and the traditional cooking and cleaning is not binding since they do it at their own convenience in the new setting through mutual understanding. As mentioned in the theoretical discussion, many scholars agree wage labour empowers women, though not all empirical research has found such positive effects. Women's paid work in the garments factory may represent a further dimension of exploitation by families, communities and employers. Here, I would like to agree with these scholars which coincide with my findings. Uncertainties, getting shelter, insecurity and vulnerability along a number of dimensions have been experienced by indigenous women right after their migration into the city. The above mentioned different living arrangements as well as the household characteristics of the *Khyang* women workers are an important aspect of factory work which should not be neglected since it is a sign of a positive social change. *Khyang* women's participation in the formal work force has increased which has made transformations in household structures and living conditions. The new forms of household, sharing a room and the domestic tasks, can be seen as an institutional response to the social change.

## Chapter Six

### Life at the Work Place



A renowned EPZ factory

Garments workers going out after work

This chapter is about two different kinds of garments factories, such as the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) garments factories and the local garments factories in the *Chittagong* city. In this chapter my intension is to depict the working conditions of my *Khyang* informants' in terms of some common problems, advantages and disadvantages in these factories. I will present two kinds of *Khyang* garments workers perceptions and their employers' perception regarding their working condition in the garments factory. Here, I will portray a picture of the *Khyang* workers' integration perception, and the picture of factory discrimination in terms of *Khyang* informants'. I will take examples from *Sonali*, *Rupali*, *Jhorna*, and *Shorna* who work at EPZ factories and *Rita*, *Mita*, *Mou*, *Maya* who work at local factories, as as well as *Masum* who works at a joint venture EPZ factory. The working conditions in EPZ and local factories where my informants worked at were not uniform, but most of the informants nevertheless mentioned many similar problems. For example, they are not satisfied with the wage range and working hours. The difference between EPZ and local factories' working environment is important to explain in this chapter because *Khyang* workers' daily life, earning, housing/living standard, dressing, status in relation to the wages, savings and expenditures etc. are strongly connected to their professional status i.e. where

they work and which category of garments factory and working position they belong to. Here, I will try to explain how these two different working environments have provided the grounds for different kinds of life styles and status in the city.

### **Wage Difference between the Local and the EPZ Factories:**

As explained previously, all of my informants started their garments career in the local factories right after they came into city. Then, some of them switched to EPZ factories. The Garment work is one of the lowest paid work in the Bangladesh. In 1994 the Government had declared minimum wage to 930 *Taka* (\$17.06) per month but the policy was not implemented yet. The workers received a minimum wage of 700- 800 *Taka* (\$ 11) per months. In local garments factories workers wages range is 03.35/h *Taka* (\$.05) and 700-800 *Taka* (\$11) per month whereas one k.g rice price was 30 *Taka* (\$.48). To buy one k.g. rice they had to work more than 8 hours. However, in the EPZ garments factory's starting wage is 06.50/h *Taka* (\$.10) and 1300-1400 *Taka* (\$22) per month. For example, *Sonali* started her career in a local factory with 800 *Taka* (\$11) per month and worked 8 hours per day. When she switched into the EPZ factory, her wage increased substantially. She worked in the local factory for more than 3 three years but her wage did not increase. In EPZ, her wage increased from 1300 to 2300 *taka* (Taka 11.00/h and 2300 *taka* per month) within two years. Now in EPZ, she has also good overtime payment. *Rupali* started her city life career in the local factory with 700 *taka* (\$10) per month. After one month, she left that job and she joined one of the renowned EPZ garments factories named '*Young One*', she came to know that the EPZ factories do provide better facilities. For example, currently she receives better wages, lunch, better hourly regulations and overtime pay. When she started her job in the EPZ factory, her wage was 1300 *taka* (\$18). She has been working in this factory for two years, and the wage has increased *taka* 1300 to 2300 *taka* (\$18 to \$33). *Jhorna* and *Shorna*, the two sisters, who are working in EPZ factory, explained that they also are getting the same range of wages which is better than their previous local factory salary. The EPZ and the local garments factories wages do not commensurate with their hard labour as the Bangladesh Government's minimum starting wages scale is 2,400 *taka* (\$34) per month except bonus and overtime. However, salary difference 700 *taka* to 1300 *taka* (\$11 to \$22) and with bonus difference after two years

1300-2300 *taka* (\$18-\$33) between two kinds of factories in a month could make a large positive difference regarding their living standard. Nevertheless all my informants state that though the EPZ salary range is a little better than the local factory, the EPZ wage range is also poor to maintain healthy housing and to give support for the family's daily necessity. They always feel insecure that the price of the everyday groceries and goods has been increasing day by day.

### **Overtime and ILO Rules Violations:**

In the local garments factories' working hour regulations is extremely poor. According to the ILO Convention (C001), work time is limited in the industry, to a maximum of eight hours per day and 48 hours per week. My all informants do not know that overtime hours should be just two hours per day according to the ILO convention. Regarding overtime, this ILO rule is mostly maintained by the EPZ but not by the local factories, though there are some exceptions.

Informants *Rita* and *Mita* work in the local factory, and they state that they are forced to do overtime duty without being paid. They feel exhausted working long hours, but they are bound to work overtime against their will. Otherwise, *Mita* stated that the supervisors used to beat her by shaking the body and used to bully her by using very bad slangs (“*gaye dhakka dito, Shuorer Baccha [bloody swine], Kuttar Baccha[son of a bitch] bole gali dito*”). On the contrary, in the other local factories where *Mou* and *Maya* work, they have to work overtime but there they are paid. Their local factories pay 3.35 *taka* (\$.05) per hour according to their basic salary. They can earn overtime money up to 500 *taka* (\$8) extra per month. *Rita*, *Mita*, *Mou* and *Maya* stated that most of the local garments factory workers start working at 8 am and finish at 9:00 - 10:00 pm. The EPZ workers also start at 8:00 am but they finish at 4:00 p m. *Jhorna* and *Shorna* happily expressed that they do not have to do overtime in their foreign (*Bideshi*) garment factories. Without doing overtime work *Sonali*, *Rupali*, *Jhorna* and *Shorna* are getting almost same wages in the EPZ as local garment factory workers who work overtime. As a result, they feel their status is higher than the local factory workers. *Sonali* expressed, “I have both working experiences. In local factory life would be exhausting”.

## **The Imposed Working Time**

By violating the rule of the ILO there are some local garment factories which impose on workers to work on weekly government holiday (Friday) until 4:00 PM and work seven days a week. The workers dare not refuse as they have a fear of being fired any time or being verbally or physical abused. *Rita, Mita, Mou, Maya* and their four male roommates who are working in the local factory reported that overtime work is being imposed on them. They cannot enjoy their weekend and rest. On the contrary, the EPZ foreign factory workers *Sonali, Rupali, Shorna* and *Jhorna* expressed that they do not have to work on weekend. But, *Masum* who works in a joint venture factory is sometimes bound to work on the weekend if the employers require him to do it. *Masum* stated that factory supervisors mostly behave very rude with workers if they refuse to work. He also added that the factory supervisors comparatively behave better towards indigenous workers than the Bengali. Indigenous workers usually do not refuse to work as they are hard workers and as a minority they are always afraid to raise their voice. But Bengali workers raise their voice to protest not to work during holiday. All my interviewed informants expressed that the excessive hours of working time can have negative effects on health, safety, and family balance.

## **Delayed Wage Payments:**

The EPZ foreign factories pay the wage on the first or second date of the month. The local factories are supposed to the same, but there are numbers of local garment factories which are irregular with payments. In some cases, the local factory makes 3-4 months delays for monthly payment. As a consequence, the workers experience hardship in daily life. *Sonali* reported that the local factory used to give the payment at the middle of month like the 10<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> in the month. Sometimes it is delayed more than two- three months. The local factory employers stated that the reason of the delayed payment is that sometimes the factory gets a delayed payment from the buyers or the orders are delayed.

If the employees get their wage in the middle of the month then they need to borrow money from their friends or neighbors as many of their expenses are due in the beginning of the month, such as the house rent or debts at the grocery store. For the indigenous workers, it is hard to borrow money from Bengali neighbors or friends. Moreover, they buy retail groceries from the road side grocery shops without paying money by promising that they would pay the unpaid bills after getting their monthly salary. One of my informants said that shop keepers sometimes try to take advantage of their economic crisis when they ask for payment for due bills, as they find indigenous woman to be more attractive than the Bengali women. From her statement, I believe that some kind of sexual harassment might be taking place, although she was not explicit about it.

### **Harassments and Abuse:**

Similarly to the study of Rodger and Berik (2006), I found that harassment and verbal abuse of workers are more prevalent in the local factories than the EPZ. The verbal abuse, monetary fines, and the penalties for failure to achieve production targets are the common harassment problems in both kinds of factories. Similarly the study of Zohir (2001, 2003) and by Rodger and Berik (2006), my male and female informants both workers stated that they are being physically and verbally abused. Abuse was also documented in surveys of garment workers conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) in 1990 and 1997. The informants who worked in the local factories mostly reported that they are abused verbally and physically for inability to meet hourly productivity targets. The supervisor and the production manager mostly use filthy words, and behave indecently. Since the *Khyang* workers are poor and are not very well educated, they do not dare to protest against them. *Sonali* state that “I felt bad when they abused me physically and use slang words. She has a long working experience both in the local and the EPZ factories. It seems that the EPZ is a little better concerning physical abuse but their verbal abuse is equal to local factories. For example *Rupali* explained that “If someone cannot go to work (absentee), then they use filthy words (“*galagali kore*”), “I am in the packing section. It is better than the Line (the weaving line)”. She also added that they misbehave mostly in the ‘Line’ not in the packing section. (“Line’ *e beshi galagali kore, packing e kore na*”) The four sisters *Rita, Mita, Mou and Maya*

also mentioned that the supervisors are very rude to them in local factories. Sometimes they beat them if they are late or if they make any mistakes. *Masum* mentioned that “Indigenous workers are less verbally abused (*paharider galagali kom dei*)”. As they explain, they are attentive and more laborious than the Bengali workers”. *Maya* explained that the management and supervisor’s language and treatment is simply the worst. She says that very often they are called *chemree*, *chemra...*, *haramjadee*. They are bullied by the name of using birth canal or vaginal delivery related slang which has such a bad sound that it is not possible to utter. She said, “I wish I could leave the job at once! But what a fate...I have been continuing and it’s more than a year now!”

### **Unaffordable Factory Transportation:**



Factory transportation bus

There are some local and EPZ factories which provide factory buses as a daily transportation service. *Rupali* stated that she has to pay 50 taka (\$.85) per month as transportation fees from her wage. She feels it is expensive for her. Therefore, she walks to work instead of riding the bus. All the interviewed informants walk to the work place to save the transportation money. To reach work on time and to get back home safely at night, most of the workers try to live nearby. There are some workers who need to use the factory bus, these are mostly workers who live a little far from the work place. They catch the bus around 6:30-7:00 am. If they delayed at the work place then they are asked by their supervisor and they are bullied or given a red mark in the attendance sheet. If the worker is delayed at work three days on a row, then they deduct one day wage from their monthly salary which is a very common practice in most of the factories. Female workers often complain that after finishing overtime



and night work it is dangerous for them to get home. Attacking, kidnapping, hijacking, eve teasing, sexual harassment by *Bokhate chele* (street hooligans<sup>26</sup>) are common problems for women in Bangladesh. It is not safe to come back home after 8:00 PM as a young, single woman. Factory management do not take any responsibility to transport their female workers safely home.

### **Lack of Toilet and Health Facilities:**

The workers need permission to use the toilet in both the EPZ and the local factories. The toilet facilities are generally inadequate in the local factories but the EPZ gives better facilities. The maintenances of the EPZ factory toilets are better than the local factories. Each worker has to seek permission from the floor supervisor to get the toilet key. This rule outlines often, how many times and who used the toilet. For example *Shorna* experienced that one worker is allowed to use the toilet twice a day in the local factory. She also added that she feels shy to take the permission from a male supervisor to use the toilet. Therefore, she used to try to control her urge to attend the toilet as long as possible. The result is that *Shorna* has bladder trouble like lots of other female workers. Nevertheless, the supervisors do not allow two workers to go to bathroom at a time, as they complain that workers waste their time by chatting with each other in the bathroom corridor. The interviewed female workers complained that they face trouble during their monthly menstruation, and have to face an awkward situation if there is sudden irregular menstruation because in the toilet there is no provision to keep sanitary napkin for female workers.

Health hazards in the working environment are a more common problem in local factories than in the EPZ. In the EPZ factory (foreign & joint venture) workers have their own medical facilities inside the factory territory. On the contrary, in local factories it is not common to have emergency medical care for workers. Though, the EPZ has its own medical care centre it is also unable to give proper treatment to their workers. *Shorna* mentioned that

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<sup>26</sup> Street hooligans- Locally they are called by *Bokhate Chele* (spoiled boys) in Bangladesh, it is very common that street boys make 'back sound', sing mostly Hindi film songs, make whistles to attract beautiful women specially when they pass by the road. They try to disturb always day or night. There are some daring street hooligans those who kidnap, harassed sexually and hijack women.

she has been working in an EPZ factory and she has been suffering from ear pain for a long time and cannot hear properly. The EPZ factory doctor always gives her paracetamol without checking her ear condition properly. My own observation is that factory workers health is very poor in general. Most of the workers look like they have only bones in their body and their eyes are red from working too long hours.

### **Lunch and Canteen Facility:**

Both local and the EPZ factories provide lunch breaks but the lunch break and quality of food provided vary between these factories. The EPZ factories usually provide better lunch facilities than the local factories. In most of the local factories canteens are often missing, workers use the roof of the building, the balcony or the staircase during lunch break. The workers start working very early in the morning when most of the restaurants and shops are closed. Buying their snacks or rice and curry for lunch is not possible before going to work. In any case, the workers cannot afford to buy snacks for regular lunch. Therefore, they have to bring lunch from home. For example, when *Rupali* started working in the local factory first, she used to carry her lunch from home, as factory food was not well cooked and the canteen was not clean enough. But, now she is satisfied with the EPZ factory canteen and food as they provide better quality food for lunch. She does not need to worry about making lunch anymore. She expressed that she is relieved from making lunch before starting work. On the other hand, *Rita* and *Mita* explained that their factory has lunch facility but the food quality is not good. Therefore, they do not have lunch there. They have to cook before they go to work which demands extra work and cuts short their leisure time. They need to get up at five or six o'clock in the morning to prepare lunch. In their factory, lunch costs 11 *taka* (\$.11) per meal costs and monthly they have to pay 300 (\$6) *taka* from their wage even though they do not eat the factory lunch. Water at the local factory is also not safe. *Mou* is very scared to drink water at her factory, because she heard from her friend that there are some local factories which only have unsafe drinking water. She also said that there was an incident when some factory workers became sick and finally died in the *Bohoddar hat* (the name of a place in Chittagong city) factory by drinking water which was highly polluted. Moreover, *Sonali* complained about lack of space in the canteen during lunch break when she used to

work in a local factory. She expressed her annoyance, “lunch break is only the breathing hour after a long time hard work. But, we did not have any opportunity to enjoy the lunch by talking and sitting with co-workers comfortably as we always had to eat in a rush to make room for others who are queuing outside the canteen.” Now she is working in an EPZ factory and she does not complain, She remarked that “it is possible for the factory owner to provide better quality food if they want and feel the pain of a hungry worker!”

All of my informants try to eat heavy breakfast in the morning, they eat rice and curry which they prepare to carry along for their lunch. They eat the same menu also in at lunch, because they do not have time to cook different curries for breakfast and lunch separately. There is also a practical reason to eat rice at breakfast. The informants stated that the workers of both the EPZ and local factories do not get tea break before lunch break, thus they work five hours without any tea break from 8:00 o’clock to 1:00 o’clock. The workers who need to do overtime work from 4:00 PM until 9:00- 10:00 PM, they also do not get tea break. It seems that workers working time is 8:00 o’clock to 4:00 PM and they are getting only lunch break. After 4:00 PM some of them go back to home but there are some of those who need to do overtime from 4:00- 10:00 PM. They also do not get the tea break from the factory. At the time when the other workers go home (at 4:00 PM) those who stay behind take a quick tea break , but at that time they have to buy food at their own expenses from a roadside tea stall. On the contrary, factory management stated that if the Company Management requires operating the factory more than 10 hours then the management (with few exceptions) will allow a tea break and even provide light refreshments. Factory management also added that a number of companies supply snacks (*Tiffin*) to its employees when work is more than eight hours.

### **Labour Union:**

Generally the indigenous workers are not aware of the work of the labour union. All of my informants both male and female reported that they do not know anything about the presence of workers union in their factories. They have no idea about the rights to health insurance, protection against accidents, survivors insurance, and maternity protection. I asked them in detail about their knowledge of local trade unions and other labor rights organizations.

I even gave the concrete example of one specific case, the collapse of the *Spectrum* factory<sup>27</sup> in Dhaka which killed and injured garment workers. I explain the union leader's fight to develop a long-term plan to improve working conditions. The answers I got from them indicates that they were not aware of the garment workers movement. But some of them have heard about the current tragic incidents. I wondered why none of them were informed about the present situation in Dhaka EPZ (DEPZ). During the field work there was a massive garment workers protest happening in DEPZ which gained national TV and news paper headlines. The entire nation was curious to know about the workers movement and violence in DEPZ, but my indigenous informants replied that they were not aware of this violent situation in DEPZ and they have not heard anything of it. For example *Mita* and *Mou* said that they did not hear about that incident as they do not have time. Moreover, the whole day they are busy with factory work and they cannot talk to each other, they have no time to read the newspaper and even cannot afford the newspaper. Therefore, they are far from these kinds of discussions about current issues in the country. Regarding the current situation of DEPZ, *Rupali* said that the CEPZ workers were fine; therefore, they did not pay attention to know about DEPZ. *Masum* added that he was interested to know about workers activities and to organize an association, but he is afraid that if factory management came to know about it, he might lose his job. He also does not have any idea how to become involved in a labour union and what would be his benefit from the organization. The study Rodgers and Berik (2006) explained in their research that there is a weak enforcement of trade union rights and anti-discrimination legislation. They also mentioned that Bangladesh had among the weakest union rights in Asia in the mid-1990s. The Export Processing Zones continue to advertise the absence of union activity as a way to attract foreign direct investment (Export Promotion Bureau 2007 qtd by Rodgers & Berik: 2006). A very small percentage of workers (mostly male) belong to unions. The common practice was to pay higher wages to workers who raise

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<sup>27</sup> Twenty-three people were dead and approximately 350 others trapped, under debris after a nine-story factory building in Bangladesh collapsed early morning 11 April, 2005. 89 people were pulled out alive from underneath the rubble of the building, located in the industrial town of Savar, about 30 km northwest of Dhaka. The building housed *Spectrum Sweater Industries Ltd. and Shahriar Fabrics*. At the time of the collapse, approximately 00:45 a.m. some 450 workers were reportedly working the night shift on three floors of the building, according to *The Daily Star* "[http://www.cleanclothes.org/news/spectrum\\_disaster.htm](http://www.cleanclothes.org/news/spectrum_disaster.htm)" [http://www.cleanclothes.org/news/spectrum\\_disaster.htm](http://www.cleanclothes.org/news/spectrum_disaster.htm))

the voice against low wages. As a result, the union leader's voices are stopped and ordinary workers cannot achieve their rights (Kabeer, 2004 qtd by Rodger & Berik).

### **Holiday or Leave:**

According to country's law, festivals like *Eid* for Muslims, *Durga Puja* for Hindus, *Maghi Purnima* for Buddhist, Christmas for Christians, *Noboborsho*<sup>28</sup> would make up a total of 10 leave days per year. But one of the EPZ factory officials ( Manager HR) mentioned that their factory has been giving a total of 14 days festival leave. The EPZ factories provide better festival, sick or casual leave for the workers than the local factories. But, both categories of factory workers face problems when they ask for leave. The mother of *Rita*, *Mita* and *Mou* was very upset that her daughters visited her in the village only twice a year. It was once in *Durga Puja vacation* and another time in *Noboborsho* as it is expensive for them to travel frequently and they do not get leave from the factory.

*Sonali* visits her parents after every 3-4 months as she lives in *Chandroghona* which takes couple of hours journey by bus. The travel costs (back and forth) more than 100 taka. She goes back to the city in the same day or after passing the weekend as she needs to join in work next day. *Masum* goes back to the village once in a year because it takes almost two days to reach his remote hilly village of *Keplang Para* which is found under the *Rowangchori thana*, *Bandarban* district. That is why he does not go to the village as he cannot stay there more than a day. By the time he reaches home, his leave expires. Moreover, he thinks about "present bonus" of his factory. If he can be present 30 days in the month then he will get 300 taka as "present bonus". He said that there is a discrepancy about leave. If they grant a leave by giving permission but they cut the wage, which means they give leave without pay. As a result, he does not take any leave to visit his village unless it is urgent like the death of relatives. During my field work when I requested him to take me to his village he was in a dilemma because he wanted to go with me but he was concerned that management might not give him leave with pay. Then I spoke to the manager directly and requested leave for him

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<sup>28</sup> Eid-Ul-azha and Eid-ul-Fitar –Yearly Religious festival for Muslim people, *Durga Puja* yearly festival for Hindu religion people, *Maghi Purnima* –Yearly religious festival for Buddhist people, *Noboborsho*- Bengali New Year

with pay. I assured him that the manager promised me and if they do not give him the payment I will give him that money. He did not trust the management at all but he was convinced by my offer and then he took me to his village. *Maya* said that it is hard to get the sick leave. If it is not a serious illness, factory authority do not permit the sick leave. *Maya* had a high temperature once, but she had to work with dizziness. She asked for a sick leave and the supervisor of her factory told her to have the *Napa* tablet (common medicine for fever like paracetamol) and to continue the work. *Maya* became sicker after that as she could not take rest during her sickness. Mentally, she was very upset as she did not get the sympathy or sick leave for her sickness from the authority. She felt her low wage and position are responsible for this. She felt that she should join an EPZ factory because she heard that the EPZ factories give better facilities in all aspects than the local factories. The problem of sick leave is one which has also got attention in the press lately. In *Dhaka*, a local factory worker died because she did not get sick leave. Factory authorities forced the worker to work at the night shift although she was ill. When her condition deteriorated, she was taken home and she died an hour later (The *Daily Star*<sup>29</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 2008)

#### **Entrance and Exit Procedure:“Locked Gates Prevented Workers Escaping Death”**

None of the factories have an open entrance. Every factory has a strong high Iron Gate or collapsible gate where there is a fulltime *Darwan* (Security Guard) whom one has to pass. The *Darwan* closes the gate and locks the gate as soon as the workers are in. If a visitor goes there to meet any personnel of the factory or any workers, the *Darwan* always asks the purpose of the visit, with whom they want to meet and then he discusses over the telephone for the management consent. If entry is permitted then the *Darwan* registers the visitors by their name, address, telephone number, signature, entry time and then he allows the visitor to get in. Sometimes the management level personnel come down to examine the visitor, questioning about the purpose of the visit and with whom they want to meet. Before entering into the visitors waiting room or inside the factory the *Darwan* provides a visitors card which is laminated with the name and number of the factory. The Visitor’s card need to be visible around the neck during the visit and it has to be returned to the *Darwan* before leaving the

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<sup>29</sup> Bangladeshi daily newspaper published in English.

factory. The interviewed informants said that they felt that it is like a jail and they are the prisoners. The managers explained that they lock the gate for the workers safety as there are lots of *Chandabaj* (hooligans those who demand money illegally) or 'bad people' in Bangladesh who might come to disturb the factory workers and management. They also added that there are some workers who might want to go out without finishing their work for smoking and chatting with roadside friends. The workers have a fear that they cannot leave even if there is a fire in the factory. Many factories have no emergency exits or fire extinguishers. Often bundles of garments and fabrics are dumped in staircases as well. Due to the narrow entrances and exits, it is difficult for workers to leave the building immediately and it is more serious when the main gate is locked. For example, in 25 November, 2000 a fire in the *Chowdhury Knitwear* garment factory located in the capital city of Dhaka killed 48 workers and injured more than 150. The workers could not escape as the gates were locked. Similarly, in June 1996 a fire accident killed 11 workers (The Independent<sup>30</sup>, June 1994) The factory *Darwan* could not find the keys during the fire to unlock the gate immediately. The blaze was the worst factory fire in the Bangladesh history. The Survivors, the neighbors and the fire fighters said workers were prevented from escaping death because the only exit gate was locked. In the 23 February, 2006 KTS Textile Industries, *Chittagong* fire killed 61 dead and approximately 100 were injured, as the main gate was locked. According to the country's Fire Service and Civil Defense Department, factories do not have wide enough staircases for the number of workers they employ. According to the law, the 18 percent of garment workers should be trained in fire safety (ibid). I was informed from both the Local and the EPZ factory workers that the factory does not provide any kinds safety training programs for them.

### **Interactions between Male and female Workers**

The fact is that men and women work together inside the factories. But, this situation is not acceptable to many people in Bangladesh. The general societal impression is that men cannot avoid direct contact and flirting if they are in close proximity of the opposite sex. These notions about men's attitudes are deeply embedded in Bangladesh society. Even in *Khyang* society such believe is common. To control gossip inside and outside of the factories and to

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<sup>30</sup> Daily English news paper

avoid putting a women's morality and reputation in danger, the management does not allow man-women workers to talk with each other during working hours not even in the stairway.

**Summary:**

Factory facilities are varied between the EPZ and the local garments such as wage scale, working environment, worker's recruitment, and transportation. Garments factories facilities also differ in terms of lunch facility, accommodation, working hours, overtime, and Bengali-indigenous worker and employers' relationships. The analyses of my interviews indicate that the EPZ factories offer better working conditions in some aspects in comparison to the local garments factories. However, there is also a difference between 100% foreign EPZ factory and the joint venture factory. The working condition in a 100% foreign factory is more likely to be better than the joint venture factory. On the other hand, the local factory maintenance is not as good as the EPZ and the joint venture factories. Most of the EPZ factories are centrally air conditioned and working floors are clean, they do provide well maintained and clean canteen etc. However, none of the factories seem to much care about workers' health, overtime wage and working environments in general. Both the EPZ and the local garments factories workers are underpaid and this remains an unaddressed workers' problem. Nevertheless, the factories have highly controlled working environment, in terms of rules and regulations, recruitment, in fact from entrance to exit they have to face strict rules and hierarchies. Therefore, factory workers are not satisfied with their occupational identity. Moreover, they feel that their working life is monotonous, of no pleasure and is a "machined life". The working conditions, as described above, have shown that various patterns of subordination and liberation accompany women's access to work. Workers report being slapped and hit, docked a day's wages for arriving late, needing permission to use the toilet, total denial of freedom of association and right to organize, and workers do not have job security. There are Labour laws but owners do not follow these. Despite all of these constraints, *Khyang* women are taking the risk and challenging their traditional norms and values to make a better future through formal sector employment.



## Chapter Seven

### Interactions and Relationships at the Work Place

The present section is an attempt to describe the relationships and the social boundaries at work-places among the *Khyang*, the other indigenous communities and the Bengalis. The *Khyang* garment workers' life in the factory is similar to other indigenous communities. They are always negatively stereotyped from Bengali community. In this chapter, my focus will firstly be on how the *Khyang* indigenous workers integrate with their own community in the city. Moreover, I will try to explore whether the *Khyang* indigenous workers are discriminated by the majority indigenous community's workers or not. Here, I will also examine gender relation, that is, how Bengali males harass or go after indigenous women, as well as indigenous men's discourse about Bengali women. The different kinds of relationship amongst indigenous workers and factory managements on the basis of their majority and minority ethnic group membership respectively, will also be discussed.

#### Relationships between the *Khyang* and workers from different Ethnic Communities

During the field work, I visited seven garments factories; two local, one joint venture, and four foreign authorized garments factories. In general, I found that the indigenous workers are friendly with each other. But, they are more comfortable with people from the same ethnic community. Thus, the friendships usually develop with people from the same village or nearby villages. However, there are exceptions of people who maintained friendship with people from other indigenous communities.

The individual worker first tries to obtain a job through personal contacts with a person from same ethnic community worker in a particular factory, but this person might not be a relative. For instance, my nine key informants managed to find their jobs through the contact of other *Khyang* workers who were already employed in garments factories. They came from the village to the city with the help of other *Khyang* friends or relatives. In general, indigenous workers try to make friendship from their indigenous community. For example, *Sonali- Rupali, Masum, Rita- Mita, Mou-Maya, Shorna- Jhorna* live in different

villages of CHT, work in different factories in city, different sections, but they got their garments job through each other's co-operation. Even if they have different living standards of housing in the city, they are living in far distance areas but they use keep in touch with each other on a regular basis. The reason behind this relationship is that they belong to the same religious community (the Seventh- Day Adventists Church or the Buddhist temple).

Therefore, if they are in a problem or economic crisis, they seek help from each other.

Sometimes, they send money home through a *Khyang* friend because they feel that they would be more trustworthy. One may be tempted to call *Khyang* people ethnocentric, because they stick to their own groups; there are constant interethnic interactions in the marketplace, and the rice and grocery retail shops nearer to the housing or street side. I had the opportunity to observe a marketplace which was only for indigenous people where they can buy different kinds of hilly foods such as *Nappy*, *Bashcrowl*, snail, crab, pork, some exotic jungle fruits and vegetables, and *jhum* rice. The hilly foods and groceries are expensive in city market place compared to their village shop but my *Khyang* informants were proud and happily reported that their favorite and traditional foods are also available in the city. But, *Sonali* reported that she did not like to do her shopping from that market because there was no *Khyang* shop.

Therefore, she thinks that when she bargains for the product price she does not get the same respect which she would get easily from a *Khyang* shop-keeper. She thinks that the *Khyang* s are the most insulated and trivial minority. But, this does not mean that *Khyang* s have little or no interaction with Bengali and other indigenous communities.

However, there is daily contact and interaction between all ethnic groups though there is often concentration of a particular ethnic group on a certain floor or in a particular block of the housing. For instance, *Masum* was the only one *Khyang* in his multi-storied building where rest of the neighbors were *Chakma*, *Marma* and *Tanchanga* in different floors. *Rita*, *Mou*, *Maya*, *Mita* and four *Khyang* boys live in a room, which is only surrounded by the Bengali neighbors. *Sonali*, *Jhorna*, *Shorna* were also the only *Khyang* woman in their housing with the Bengali neighbors. Moreover, all of them developed reciprocal helping relationships with neighbors or different ethnic group's roommates. They help each other to provide or get assistance with household matters, to attend to a visitor and to receive their post from the postman in case of their absence. *Masum* and *Rupali* explained that the *Chakma* or

other majority residents have intense relationships with fellow *Chakma* or other majority indigenous communities. There is virtually almost no intended interaction between the majority and minority indigenous community's residents. They also state that they miss always their own people from their own ethnic group at working place. It is obvious that when they see that their co-worker or neighbors have their own community people and pass a good time with them, they feel lonely in their free moments. Therefore, they try to find other *Khyang* workers from the other parts of the Chittagong city.

The *Khyang* community is divided into two sub communities *Laitu Khyang* and the *Kongtu Khyang* (more at chapter four) . In terms of total *Khyang* population, the *Kongtu Khyangs* are the majority and the *Laitu Khyangs* are the minority. Villagers, leaders of the community, primary school teachers and my informants mentioned that *Kongtu Khyangs* are more advanced in terms of education compared to the *Laitu Khyangs*, and there are some differences between their life styles. The *Kongtu Khyangs* live on top of the mountain. On the contrary the *Laitu Khyangs* live in plain land. Moreover, most of the *Khyangs* are Buddhists but significant portions of the *Khyang* s are converted to the Seventh Day Adventists through Christian Missionaries. Therefore, there is a big difference between the Buddhist *Khyangs* and the Christian *Khyangs* because of their different food habits, beliefs and rituals. For example, the Seventh Day Adventist *Khyang* s are not allowed to eat pork meat, drink rice beer/ wine and eat fish without scales (*Boal*, *Shing*). It means that they do not eat anything which they consider unclean<sup>31</sup>. On the contrary, the Buddhist *Khyang* s are allowed to eat all of those foods. Nevertheless, surprisingly, the *Khyangs* from both religions do not have problem to mingle with each other neither in the city nor in the villages. In fact, they have been living together peacefully . *Rita*, *Mou*, *Maya* and *Mita*, for example share their room with four boys whom they came to know closely in the city first. These four boys are not from the same village and same religion like the four sisters.

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<sup>31</sup> The reason is that Boar/ pig, *Boal* and *Shing* fish eats dirty stuffs and anything including human excreta. Abstention from eating pork/ *Boal*/ *shing* fish is a measure to safeguard health that is why it is prohibited in their religion to eat

I observed that there are different religious practices in one household, for example *Masum's* parents and youngest brother are Buddhists, *Masum* is converted Christian and they live together in the same house. His parents and brother eat different kinds of foods which is prohibited for *Masum*. However, *Masum* and his family eat in a same sitting. They do not face any problem because of their different food habit. *Masum* said, "I eat my food, they eat their food, why I will mind?" There seem to be no intra-*Khyangs* conflict as there are collaborative and harmonious relationship between the Buddhist *Khyangs* and the Christian *Khyangs*. All my informants reported that they have never heard any clash or conflict between the *Laitu* and the *Kongtu Khyang* .

In city life, I have found that the *Khyang* workers do not often make differentiation between the *Laitu* and the *Kongtu Khyang* rather they compare who earns better, who works in a better garments factory and who can afford better housing etc. However, I found that there is a slight tendency of silent domination and avoidance among my nine key informants which has to do with the level of development of their area of origin. For instance *Sonali* and *Rupali* were proud as they were from *Chandroghona*, which was a developed area in comparison to the other *Khyang* villages. *Sonali* and *Rupali* said that they had most of the modern facilities back home (electricity, transportation etc), their life was better than other *Khyang* workers, they are not from a remote village like *Masum*, *Rita*, *Mou* and so on. Therefore, they think that they are superior to other *Khyang* workers.

I also observed that workers from different indigenous communities have lunch all together in the factory canteen in a row. *Chakma*, *Marma*, *Tripura* and *Tanchangas* are the majority workers group in all the garments factories that I observed. The factory manager states that, the majority indigenous communities' worker do not mix freely with other minority ethnic groups ( *Bawm*, *Khyang* , *Pangkhua*, *Mru*, *Khumi* and so on). They think that they have enough friends from their community . All my key informants and the religious leaders of the *Khyang* community mentioned that the literacy rate of *Chakma*, *Marma* and *Tripura* is higher than the other minority ethnic groups in CHT. These groups of people feel proud that there are lots of high positioned traders, service-people and professionals such as doctors, engineers, both men and women holding private and government jobs and many

university graduates in the society compared to other indigenous communities. I spoke to several *Chakmas* and other majority indigenous group workers. I found that *Chakma* workers feel proud about their ethnic identity; they said they are not unhappy with the Bengali community like other ethnic minorities. The President of the *Khyang Kallan Samiti*, *Arun Laibrashaw* was explaining in a sad voice that their population size is very small and their literacy rate is also low. He mentioned they have only two MBBS doctors, thirty-seven undergraduates and two graduate degree holders *Khyang* within their whole *Khyang* community. He also added that today *Chakma* community is educationally advanced because of “Quota System” in the public universities. There is no “Quota System” for *Khyang* students in University of Chittagong and University of Dhaka, (renowned public universities in Bangladesh). Therefore, in the factory the dominance of majority indigenous communities over minority communities is almost the same as in the hills. The *Khyang* workers expressed also the same thing like their *Samiti* (Organization) president. The majority indigenous communities are mostly in a better position in many sectors of the garments factory. These majority indigenous communities do feel proud and advanced, because they are more educated and getting better wages and salary. Thus, they look down at other ethnic minority workers. Ethnic minority workers also show submissiveness to their supervisors or managers who are from majority ethnic communities because of hierarchy and representation of the majority indigenous communities as well. It is very prominent that indigenous workers from larger ethnic communities come from better off social class compared to ethnic minorities. Thus, the majority indigenous community workers maintain class hierarchies. Solidarity and interactions among the majority and minority indigenous communities are low. These two groups develop few personal relationships with each other. However, as indigenous workers there is a possibility to get favor if they face any kinds of problems during working hour from majority indigenous supervisor or high level of management. *Masum* mentioned that he is lucky enough; he works under a *Chakma* boss who is very considerate with him because of his indigenous identity. Moreover, outside of the factory the indigenous communities are perceived by the Bengali as a homogenous indigenous group of garments worker. I found that to the Bengali people workers from majority and minority indigenous are same.

## **Relationships among the Bengali and the different Indigenous Workers**

My observation is that the Bengalis are usually cannot make distinction between the *Chakma* and other ethnic communities. They simply consider an individual indigenous worker as *Chakma*. This is largely due to the fact that the languages spoken by *Chakma* and other ethnic groups are very similar and for the most part mutually intelligible. Their physical appearance is almost similar. The Bengali hardly make differentiations in indigenous worker name, such as indigenous worker from *Khumi, Khyang, Pangkhua, Bawm, Lushai* and so on. The *Chakmas* are the largest group among indigenous community in CHT and more exposed than other communities because they have more advanced education. Therefore, the Bengali people mostly know about *Chakma* people and the Bengalis also know a little about *Marma* and *Tripura* because of their wide range societal participation and presence as majority indigenous groups. Therefore, if Bengali workers make any kinds of social interaction then automatically they make it with *Chakma, Marma* or *Tripura*. These majority groups' of people are in the top position in the garments factory or in other institutions. The Bengali workers make a communication or working relationship with majority ethnic community as they need to obey their boss.

During my field work, I observed that the Bengali workers usually do not mix with the indigenous workers (both majority and minority ethnic groups) during lunch breaks or on their way back home. It is rarely seen that the indigenous and the Bengali workers chat in the streets after finishing their work or having a social gathering during holidays or in their leisure time with their family or individually. The indigenous and the Bengali workers have a communication which is very limited and formal only at the work place inside of the garments factory. The Bengali workers think that they are from a better social background; they have minimum education, they can speak better Bengali, they are from sub-urban or village where they have modern facilities. In fact, in Bangladesh, there is a great deal of differences between city, plain land villages, and CHT villages in terms of modern facilities. In CHT villages there are some remote villages where people have never ever seen electricity, *pacca* roads, tube-well water, *pacca* building, motor vehicles and other regular modern facilities of the city. These kinds of indigenous peoples are treated as being very backward, the Bengalis call them

*gaia* (rustic) and use other slang words to characterize them. In general Bengalis think all CHT people are backward and out of the civilization. Moreover, their different accent is one more reason to avoid indigenous friendship, the Bengali workers do laugh at the back of indigenous workers when they speak Bengali as they cannot pronounce Bengali phonetics perfectly. On the other hand, stereotyping is made also from the side of the indigenous people vis a vis the majority Bengali. The *Khyang* indigenous women think that they dress more smartly than the Bengali Muslim women workers as they look down upon *Burkha* or *Hejab*. I have heard such comparisons made among indigenous people as they were proudly discussing their advantages in relation to the Bengalis. Their skin complexion is very fair in comparison to the general Bengalis, and the physical gesture look like Chinese people. On the contrary, the Bengali people's complexion and physical appearance is little darker compared to the indigenous people. As a result, the indigenous people in some aspects feel superior and they do not like to mix with the Bengali workers. They feel that they are beautiful women and handsome men. The Bengali male workers are not safe to mix with indigenous women. For instance, the Bengali workers and the Bengali passersby make '*back sound*' by uttering some *Chakma* words or sentences when they see any indigenous woman in the street, for example *Mui Tera Kuch pang* (I love you) or *Muite Lalum* (I want to marry you). Therefore, if indigenous woman need to communicate with any Bengali male worker after the work, they ask other indigenous male/ female friend or colleague to accompany her so that the man cannot get any opportunity to approach her.

My male *Khyang* informants' expressed that indigenous male workers usually do not show interest in the Bengali female workers because they feel that mostly they are not beautiful. In addition, the Bengali women workers use *purdah* as Muslim women which they do not like. The Indigenous people's culture is more liberal in many ways than the Muslim people where they do not need to convert their religion. They know that Islam does not permit a Muslim woman to marry a man of another religion without first converting the man to the Islam. The logic is Islam like any other religion wants the number of its followers to grow. In the present social order (generally) children automatically get the religious status of the father - thus the need for the non-Muslim male to convert first to Islam before marrying a Muslim female. Otherwise, in the eyes of Islam, there has been no marriage and thus the offspring

from such a "*haram*" (unlawful) relationship is considered to be born out of wedlock and thus not legitimate. As an individual and an adult man has the right to accept or reject norms, customs, religious beliefs, social compulsions. But, for the child when they grow up and begins to get into the society (school/friends/community) how will they handle the volleys of questions and in many occasions the "stigma". They think it would be a big problem first of all as an indigenous child, secondly if the child's father is not converted Muslim. Therefore, they think it is too complicated for an indigenous man to marry or make love affair with a Bengali Muslim woman. However, there are very few exceptions as well. But, they expressed if the Bengali woman is a Christian, Buddhist or Hindu then they do not mind and they can think about a relationship. In that case Hindu Bengali women would be the last priority because there is a problem again with food habit. The Hindu people are not allowed to eat beef meat but the indigenous people are allowed to eat beef by religion. The Christian and the Buddhist Bengali women would be the first priority because they feel that the Christians and the Buddhists have religious and cultural similarities with indigenous community in terms of food habit and worship styles. However, the indigenous male workers think that they can keep a working relation with the Bengali Muslim women inside the factory but not outside of the factory gate. Moreover, the indigenous men are not interested to marry a woman who works at garments factory whether her identity is Bengali or from the same indigenous community. Most of the Bengali workers that I came to know who was working in the garments factories state that they have indigenous friends and co-workers at work place, but they are not close friends. It is clear from my own observations that few efforts are made to meet with indigenous friends outside of the work place, aside from random meetings in the housing and factories. The Bengali workers do not want to mix with male indigenous workers because they look down upon their ethnic identity and they think that indigenous male workers are *Bekub, shada-shida* (foolish, simple) and not *shobbho* (not Civilized). The indigenous people drink, *Mod, Tari* (Local beer) which is very negatively perceived in the main stream Bengali society because of Muslim culture. On the other hand, male indigenous workers also do not make friendship with the male Bengali workers. The *Khyang* male workers said that they have a negative impression about the Bengali boys that they are not honest, they want to flirt with indigenous woman if they get any chance. The Bengali male workers think about the



indigenous women as they are fair enough, good looking and it would be possible to convert in the Muslim religion because they are *meye manush* (Women).

### **The Relationships between indigenous Factory Management and Indigenous workers**

According to the discussion I have had with my key informants as well as with indigenous workers whom I met during the first period of my field work indigenous workers think that the relationship between indigenous management and indigenous worker is much more friendly, less fearful and comfortable than the Bengali management. They feel that there is a common understanding, which they can feel from the indigenous management. The indigenous managements' attitude is supportive though there is a hierarchy. Indigenous workers and management level officers speak their indigenous language if they are from the same community. The Indigenous employers sometimes ask about their situation in village, from which village they are and how their family is doing back home. These kinds of exchanges make them relieved from various mental agony and they get inspiration to work in an unfriendly work place as they feel that if an incident occur they would get the support from their indigenous employer.

The indigenous management knows the name of indigenous workers personally and they can remember which ethnic community and district or village they do belong. If the indigenous employers represent the majority ethnic community then they give privilege to their own group during workers recruitment, which all my informants reported. Sometimes, if they find any minority ethnic worker from a remote village of CHT then they help them to adapt as a recent migrant to an urban, industrial social setting whereas a Bengali employer does not understand these feelings of an indigenous worker.

### **Relations between Indigenous workers and Bengali Factory Managements:**

According to my informants indigenous workers are always afraid of the Bengali managements and they do not dare to talk to them because they think the Bengali managements are not friendly with them. Therefore, they do not promote close relationships with the indigenous workers and the Bengali managements and they try to keep their distance

from Bengali bosses (High officials). They have a fear of hierarchy and also because the Bengali main stream culture is fully different than theirs. *Masum* described from his factory job experiences that if the majority ethnic community (Bengalis or *Chakmas*) workers make any mistake the Bengali employer mostly do not go for instant action. On the contrary, the Bengali employers do not think twice to take any rapid action or terminate from their job as they know minority ethnic workers do not have the power to protest like majority ethnic community.

Indigenous workers always face difficulties when they mention their name in their own language and community. Bengali employers and workers do not understand or pronounce their name well as a result they are told and bound to change their name and be called by a Bengali name. One of the Bengali supervisors told me that the indigenous names are very hard to pronounce. For example *Kiwaosa Khyang* , *Oangkeya Ching Khyang* . Therefore, he suggests workers use a Bengali name. As indigenous workers, they do receive rough behavior from the Bengali supervisor, managers, and the Bengali co-workers. According to *Masum*, the Bengali employers' behaviors with ethnic workers vary from majority to minority ethnic workers. For an example *Chakma* and *Marma* workers are proud of their ethnic identity. They are not undermined or badly treated like other ethnic minorities.

The Bengali employers treat them as a *Jonglee* (Jungle man), *Geo bhut* (rustic) those who did not see the light (electricity) and do not understand Bengali properly! For example, the very first day when I asked permission from one of the factory manager to get an access to indigenous workers he replied in a sarcastic way that “whatever criteria *jonglee* people you want I will supply all of those because in our factory, we have various kinds of *pahaira* (hilly people in a derogatory Bengali word). There are some more *jonglee* people who live together before their marriage (in a derogatory way) and so on”. And after that he was laughing with his other Bengali colleagues and the meaning of that taunting laugh was that he was right and they feel superior to “*jonglee* people”.

One of the HR officer mentioned that in the local factory the indigenous workers are recruited less often as the Bengali people think that they are not good in Bengali language

speaking and writing. Therefore, they take more time to learn the work and Bengali language in comparison to the Bengali worker. There are some hilly people who come from a remote village, they are more weaker in Bengali speaking, listening and writing compared to the plain land hilly people. In local factory, indigenous workers are less recruited because of these language barriers. On the contrary indigenous workers are not very interested to work in local factories because of fewer indigenous workers. They do not feel as secure as they do in EPZ factories where there are huge amount of indigenous workers.

### **Summary:**

I have throughout this section discussed the stereotyped relationships and interaction among the *Khyang*, the different indigenous communities and the Bengali workers in multiethnic housing and at their working place. One might assume that the *Khyang* garments workers, who are working and living together in a small housing and factory compound over a long period of time in a multiethnic environment, would generate friendships and eliminate hostility with Bengali and other indigenous communities. However, my empirical study shows a different scenario, which is far from this assumption. By discussing the housing and factory working condition and interethnic interactions I have explained how each ethnic group are different and keep away from other groups because of their own ethnic identity. Not only that the majority Bengali people also make social demarcations by mentioning their origin of hometown. They feel more bonded if they find any roommate or co-worker from the same district. There seem to be various conditions in housing and garments factories that do not help to decrease the frustrations of ethnic minorities. The reason might be the highly hierarchic organizational structure in the factories, highly unequal wage difference between workers and high ranked managements. There might be more reasons; because of the status differences between the interacting groups in housing and factory, the big structural difference between the city and different districts in Bangladesh and villages where workers originally come from. There are some more hidden social inequalities, which maintain the distance from one group to another. It also came out from my empirical data that in the housing and working place, strict cognitive and social boundaries have been established among Bengali, *Khyangs* and other indigenous community workers and factory managements. Therefore, the silent

underlying hostility and rivalry among these ethnic groups always exist though invisibly. Despite a regular frequency in amount of interethnic interaction, it became hard to establish positive relations between Bengali and other indigenous communities. One reason for this might be that the contact is highly task and needs oriented and for a short moment, also not very intimate.

## Chapter Eight

### Wage and Empowerment

Empowerment may be defined as the process through which women and men in disadvantaged positions increase their access to knowledge, agency, resources, and decision making power and raise their awareness of participation in their communities, in order to reach a level of control over their own environment. In doing so, they gain the ability to achieve their highest personal and collective aspirations and goals. The enthusiasm to understand women's empowerment and their engagement in wage labour could be neglected to understand structural factors which influence through agency and resource. In this section, I would like to explore, how the *Khyang* women garments workers use their factory wages in their daily life. I will focus my explanation on whether they are able to save money for future or contribute to the family. In addition, I will also try to explore, whether *Khyang* women wages transfer as power to choose in various aspects such as marriage partners, renegotiating with Bengali culture etc. Moreover, I try to describe how the *Khyang* women factory wage and work are being regarded by the family and the local community.

#### Education, Future Plans and Factory Wages:

The *Khyang* women's factory wage and future plans are varied in accordance to their educational background or level of education. To begin with, my first category of informants were SSC pass student. This group of successful SSC graduates dream of a better life and career in the future. They are confident enough to make success their future plan. Taking my informant *Rupali* who passed her SSC exam as an example, she is very proud of herself because of her SSC pass degree. SSC degree is valued in EPZ Company, and thus, it took a short time for her to get a job in EPZ. Her wage is better than that of the other informants who could not pass their SSC exam. When asked how she enjoys her wage, *Rupali* expressed;

I earn myself and spend by myself. No need to ask anybody. I can buy nice cloths, toiletries and cosmetics as I wish. I don't send money back home, so I enjoy my whole income in my own way. I do save my money for my marriage so that I don't need to take money from my parents. Now, I am in city and I can

take my own decision. I would like to marry my own choice of man but I will take the consent of my parents.

According to *Rupali*'s statement, she does not contribute money to home as she wants to maintain a better living standard in the city. Her ambition is to build up her career first. She went to the capital city, *Dhaka* to search for a job in a Non-Government Organization (NGO), but she did not qualify for that job but she hopes to get it next time in the future. As she said, now her target is to earn more and save more money to build up a better career instead of sending money to the parents. During my fieldwork visit to *Rupali*'s village (*Chandraghona*), I asked her mother about *Rupali*, she replied with disappointment by saying that;

My daughter doesn't contribute any money and doesn't take care of her old parents. We are not concerned about her, our older daughter *Sonali* always takes care of us, since *Rupali* does not support us, we are also not concerned about her. She hardly sends money or visits us. She is not like *Sonali*.

The second group of *Khyang* women informants is those who could not pass the SSC level. They were not qualified to choose other jobs except for jobs in the garments factory as they explained that they are not qualified enough to get any better jobs than the garment factory job. For example, *Rupali*'s elder sister *Sonali*, belongs to this category of informants. She could not pass the SSC level, and she is not hopeful like her younger sister to get a good job in the future. But, she plays a very vital role back home. As an elder daughter, she is always concerned about her old parents and four younger sisters. *Sonali* tries to save 100-200 (\$2-3) *taka* every month for family members back home. Her parents bought a cow with her savings, and they are very happy for her contribution. As she said, she told her parents to buy a cow from her money which would be an asset for future. Her parents also explained that they do not take any decision in the family without her consent. She makes the budget for her family so that the money would not be misused.

Two other informants *Shorna* and *Jhorna* also belong to this group. They could not finish level VII-VIII. According to them, they send their wages to their villages, and their single mother has been surviving with their wages as their father and uncle (primary earner in their family) are in the prison. They try to send money to get bail from the prison. Regarding their garments job and wages they explained as followed:

Garments job is very hard and we do cry sometimes to go back to village, we don't like city life. But we have to work in the garments and earn money for village family's condition.

There are four more informants in this group; *Rita, Mita, Mou,* and *Maya* also could not finish their after VIII. These informants also do not dream for a better job, and are therefore not ambitious like *Rupali*. They have come to the city to earn money for their family mostly. They know that they didn't have any work experiences. They do not have good educational qualifications to go further or to improve their potentialities in other sectors.

Finally, my male informants (*Masum* and the four boys living with four sisters) all want to go back to the village to start small business with their savings and want to marry from the village. Their educational background varies. *Masum* and the other four boys have finished level VII- VIII grade and their plans are a little different from the other female informants. They also contribute money to the home but they try to save a major amount of money to do small business or to run small tea stall back home in future. Their future plan is to make profit from these small businesses. They do not think that they would want to marry a woman in the city. This group thinks that they would get a better woman back home if they can start a business. During my village visit, I met four *Khyang* boys who had left garments job in Chittagong City after two years and were now living in the village. After coming back, they started a small business. Beside the small business, some of them bought lots of tree plants and grew near their working place in CHT. Now, their trees are valuable and they are waiting for a huge amount of profit in future. They think that working in the garments factory make them loose some of their social prestige as garments job is not very well regarded by *Khyang* community neither for men, nor for women, but it is possible to recover one's social status if one can be self employed in the village.

### **Wages in Two Different Factories and expenditure:**

Most of the local factories' informants explained that their wages range determines their living and saving expenses. Some of them said that they have to spend 400-600 *taka* (\$6-9) for monthly housing rent. This money includes gas, water and electricity cost, and 400-500 *taka* (\$6-8) monthly for food or daily groceries. The rest of the money, they spend on other

things such as cell phones, wrist watches which is very important to them as they have to be punctual always in the factory, shoes, transportation, cloths, some toiletries like shampoo, tooth paste, good quality soap, and talcum powder. As they said, those who are working at the local factory can save 100-200 taka (\$1-3) a month. This group of informants hardly can go home due to the high expenses of transportations, as is the case of *Mita, Rita, Mou,* and *Maya*.

But there is another group i.e those who are working in the EPZ. Their factory wages range almost the double of the local factories wage. After monthly expenses, they can save 500-600 *taka* (\$6-8) every month. *Sonali, Rupali* and *Masum* belongs to this group. This group of informants mostly sends money to the village family or spends on dresses.

### **Wage and Power to Choose a Marriage Partner**

The interviews with the unmarried *Khyang* garment workers revealed that the formal sector employment has made them change their marriage strategies. All my informants said that a delay of marriage is in their interest. Working as single women, they have freedom and a greater chance to express their opinions and to negotiate their age of marriage and marriage partners. All my informants express the view that their new factory wage has increased their preference and power to choose a marriage partner. However, majority of the women stated that they would seek the consents of their parents or guardians before they marry. The opportunity to work outside of the home has increased their aspiration in many ways, for example the hope to get further education in the future which will secure them a better job. Most of my male and female informants stated that they are the only working members of their families. Though they are not satisfied with their current job life, almost everybody expressed the satisfaction of not being idle or a burden to the family but working hard to improve their life for a better future.

Their struggles began at a very early age. Therefore, they think they have gained some economic autonomy through their work which might give them economic power after marriage. As a result, delayed marriage is not perceived negatively by my informants. The narratives of the young and single *Khyang* informants reveals that they are dreaming of a



better future though they are in “delayed marriage” situation. Most of them do not think they are getting old and passing the average marriage age. By working in a factory these *Khyang* informants think they earn a certain degree of freedom from their families and make social networks which have a great deal of positive influence on their lives. In terms of their life strategies and life prospects of informants, it is hard to make any concluding remark but it is obvious that the forms of selecting a mate has been changed and these *Khyang* indigenous women informants have more power in choices regarding their marriage and future prospects. The opportunity to work in the garments factory and their wage has given them significant positive negotiation power to choose marriage partners and most of all given them economic autonomy.

### **Beyond the Positive Aspects of Garments Work**

Although being older than single women in the village, majority of the women whom I interviewed did not show any desire of getting married yet. They explained that garments work makes it is difficult to find a marriage partner in the city and also in the villages. Not only the *Khyang* women but also the *Khyang* men are facing delayed marriage difficulties. Moreover, they do not like the garments worker’s life as a profession and they feel that they are not regarded in the village or in the city. Therefore, they cannot think that they will marry a man/ woman from the same profession. My *Khyang* female informants also explained that a lot of garments men flirt with girls and tease them at the work place. They try to pinch the girls, touch their hands, and press their breasts if they get any chance. They do it when the electricity goes off. My informant *Rupali* mentioned that lots of workers blink their eyes (*chockh tip*) and try to make eye contacts with her in the factory corridor, outside of the gate and even at work place. Other informants also reported the different kinds of flirting patterns by male workers. Therefore, none of my female informants showed any interest in marrying a factory worker. For example *Rupali* explains as followed:

I am myself a garments worker but I don’t want to marry a garment worker because I know they are not good men to marry. They flirt with lots of girls openly in the factory. I would prefer to marry a man from another profession instead of the garments sector. But if the man is better posted like supervisor or manager, and gets a good salary then I will think about him.

On the other hand, in my exploration of why male workers do not want to marry their co- female workers, *Masum* who is a *Khyang* male garments worker said that he himself is a garments worker, and he does not find any bad woman in the factory. But, he is not interested in marrying any woman who works in the garments factory because, garments workers are not only disregarded in the *Khyang* community, but also, they are not accepted elsewhere in Bangladesh. He states that he has heard that there are some female workers who try to make friendly relationships with the high officials of the garments to get some extra benefits. He states that the foreign buyers rent beautiful female garments workers for part time recreation or prostitution. He himself does not know anyone personally who does these things. I asked my other female informants about *Masum* allegations but they replied that they live all together in a female hostel or in a common place but they do not know anybody who fits *Masum*'s description. But, they also have heard about it, although they do not try to verify whether it is right or wrong. They do not suspect their roommates to be prostitutes as it would be impossible to live all together by sharing room or bed. But, they said there might be a possibility that such women exist. They felt very sad that they are stigmatized in the city and the village.

### **Renegotiating and Conflict with the Bengali Main Stream Culture**

During my interviews with my female informants, I asked the *Khyang* women whether they would marry a Bengali Muslim man, because they often have a good job / position. *Sonali, Rupali, Jhorna, Shorna, Rita, Mita, Mou and Maya* all replied in almost the same way that they would never marry any Bengali Muslim man, as they think that the Bengali Muslim men made the propaganda that the garments women workers are not good. Moreover, they also state that they will not be accepted by their indigenous community if they ever get married to a Bengali Muslim man. But, if the Bengali man is a Christian, Buddhist or Hindu, then it would be accepted but not very easy always. The hidden reason is the hatred and conflict between the indigenous people and the new plain-land Bengali settlers. In general, the Bengali community people negatively stereotype the indigenous women, they use derogatory terms for each other (Guhathakurata, 2001:7). Therefore, indigenous community does not accept marriage with the Bengalis. *Rupali* reported that one other reason why she

will not marry a Bengali Muslim man is because she thinks that “the Muslim culture is strongly patriarchal and advocates for the submission of the woman to her husband, women constant stay at home and stresses the maintenance of *purdah*”. Amin, et al (1998: 196) explained that the tradition of *purdah* is perceived as a set of rules to control sexuality by minimizing interactions between persons of the opposite sex. *Sonali* said that she came to know from her Bengali roommate how Bengali Muslim husbands dominate their wives and make them bound to maintain *purdah* specially in public places which is unknown in an indigenous community. She said, “I do not want this kinds of husband, I want to wear whatever dresses I like.” Most of the Bengali workers use *purdah* to protect themselves from teasing from men and to avoid contact with men. All my female *Khyang* informants do not like these kinds of *purdah* which comes as an obligation from the Bengali family and husband. They think Bengali women’s culture is *purdah culture* which is an obstacle to their freedom. Even the Bengali Hindu women workers also cover their head to avoid men on street. *Shorna* thinks that *purdah* is a means of avoiding physical contact with a man. She also thinks that using *Orna/veil/scarf/burkha* to cover their heads, faces and body is simply funny and cumbersome. They also believe that these extra cloths are very uncomfortable when walking. Moreover, *Jhorna* mentioned that women do not look good when they try to cover the naturally visible parts of the body. *Shorna* expressed her views regarding *purdah* thus,

“Why don’t Bengali boys use *purdah*? If they cover their eyes then women do not need to use *purdah* because boys are making problems for girls. In that case, boys should use *purdah*”.

In the interview they were expressing all these views in a rather sarcastic way to me. Moreover, they think that the indigenous culture is a much more modern culture than the Bengali Muslim culture, and they proudly praised indigenous boys for not being like the Bengali boys. They do not run after girls, and do not tease/flirt girls like the Bengalis do. They wonder why the Bengali boys behave like that to mingle with girls. Most of the *Khyang* female informants said that they have a very friendly, open and nice relationship with their indigenous male co-workers or villagers. Indigenous boys never tease or try to flirt with any

indigenous woman. I also asked my female informants whether they would marry any *Khyang* man who lives in the village. *Sonali* replied,

“It would be nice if the man is from the city because I am accustomed to city life now, it would be hard to live with a village man after passing eight years in the city with modern facilities!”

She also added that in the village, men do not like women who work in garments factories. In that case, she does not want to marry those men who do not care about her hard life and hard earned honest income, she does not want to marry them.

*Rupali* explained that she would not marry a village indigenous man as most of them have no good level of education. She said as followed:

“In village men are not educated, I have passed SSC but I know there are very few successful SSC pass *Khyang* men in the village. Moreover, those village men do not earn more than me. They wouldn't be able to buy a nice cloth which I can afford myself now!”

But, my other female informants did not show this much negative attitude about marrying a *Khyang* man in the village. Mostly, they replied that they will listen to their parents or relatives, if they choose a man from village or city, they will accept it. They said that they are still young age (18-21), as a result, they think that their parents will be the best to take the right decision. As young girls, they might take a wrong decision to choose their life partners. But, they also added that it would be better if the partner is from the city than the village. It would be easier to understand each other and have a happy conjugal life together. In the case of *Sonali*, the decision to enter into garments work was triggered by the experience of scarcity of a marriage partner and failure of SSC in *Chandroghona*. Now, after coming to the city she became much more ambitious and has not found any suitable man for herself since the last eight years she has been in the city. The migration and labor force participation of the *Khyang* women have an important impact on traditional marriage. In a society in which marriage is more of a familial than personal decision, entry into the garment work enables young women the opportunity of delaying marriage and childbearing. This is evident from the age of *Sonali* as now she is 32 years old and *Rupali*, 26 years old. But, according to my

informants, girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are much more likely to become married when they are leading traditional lifestyles in villages or other urban areas.

### **Empowerment in the Family and the Local Community**

Here, I hope to depict how the *Khyang* individual women workers' contributions have been evaluated, and the difficulties in terms of how they are perceived in their villages, families and communities. My informants are from five different villages. I have divided these five villages into two communities. First is the *Khyang* indigenous community known as *Kongtu Khyang*. This community is situated on top of the mountain, and they are mostly converted Christian (*Seven days Adventist*) from Buddhism. The other group is the *Laitu Khyang* who live in the plain land and are mostly Buddhist. Thus, the analysis of *Khyang* women workers and their wages in terms of how they are regarded in their communities is according to their different communities. I have already presented the mode of livelihood of the *Khyang* living in Chittagong Hill Tracts in previous chapter (chapter four). Here, I will recapitulate my basic arguments regarding their socio-economic system.

### **Economic Difference between *Laitu* and *Kongtu* and Uses of Garments Wages**

The flow of factory wages in *Laitu* and *Kongtu* communities is conditioned by the two different natural environments and their economic conditions. The social life of *Khyang* garments women workers in two communities compress factory wages with their acceptance action and the social milieu that incorporate/ co-operate with factory wages. Therefore, to develop an understanding of factory wages and acceptance/ status in the *Khyang* communities, it is important to shed different lights on the two communities' forms of economy.

#### **Economic Differences:**

The *Laitu Khyang* women's garments wages when sent home to family members back home in the village is mostly used for everyday consumption such as grocery shopping and festival shopping (cloths, special food). The village family cannot use factory wages money for money recirculation flow, as they cannot buy pigs because of their native Muslim Bengali neighborhood. As the *Laitu Khyang* women informants explained, they are not allowed to rear

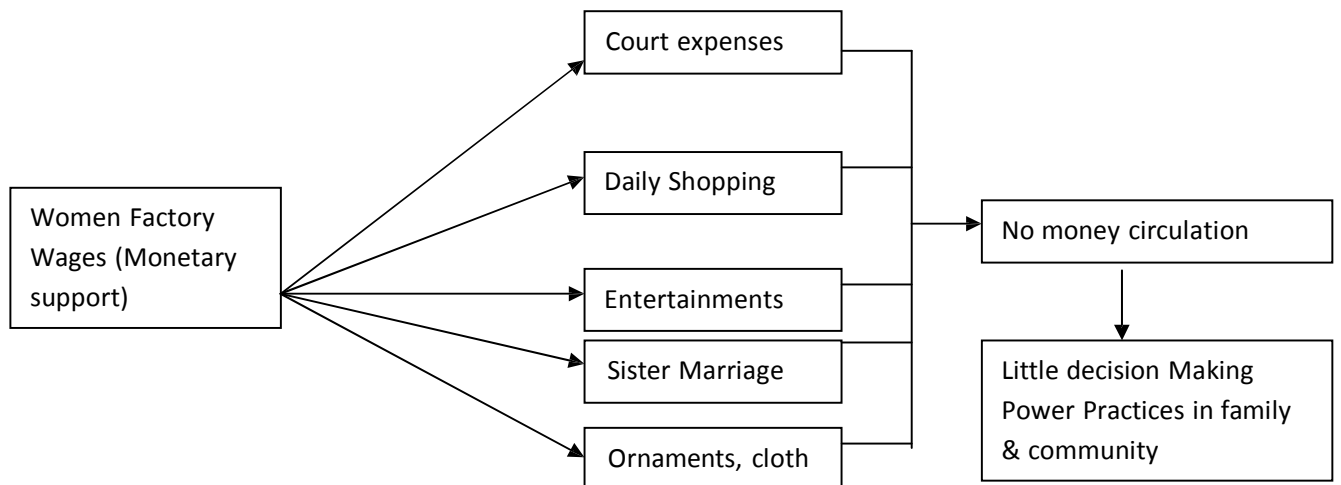
pigs in their locality as the Bengalis will segregate them. The reason given by the native Bengalis is that pork is *haram* and it smells very bad. But on the other hand, the *Kongtu Khyang* can use factory wages to buy pigs. They treat Pigs as a principle saving source for future. But the *Laitu* community has to live in a Bengali neighborhood by negotiating with some of their food habits and social practices. The *Kongtu Khyang* community has rights to rear pigs and chicken. They consume these domestic animals during their ritual ceremonies and exchange with other non cash commodities. So, factory wages in the *Kongtu Khyang* community have been investment purposes such as buying and rearing of pigs, cattle and chicken where *Laitu Khyang* cannot. The *Kongtu Khyang* informants explained that they hunt, trap and collect edible vegetables from the forest which contributes to their subsistence. The *Laitu*'s forest is captured by the Bangladeshi Government forest department and they thus have to buy daily cooking materials from the Bengali local market. The *Kongtu Khyang* community's cash is particularly significant for ceremonial purposes, payment of bride price and to a limited extent buying of some consumer goods from market and money recirculation. The cash is primarily attained through selling cash crops and factory wages. But, the *Laitu* spend their factory wage as Bangladeshis spend their cash on everyday needs.

### **Contribution, Welfare and Evaluation of Factory Wages:**

To understand *Khyang* Women's factory wages and acceptance in their village community, I would discuss the factory wages have been making two different meaning in different situations. Firstly, (figure:1) in the *Laitu* community, *Khyang* women contribute their factory wages in different ways for the welfare maximizing of their village family members. It is seen that these women can save 100- 200 taka (\$1- 3) per month and they cannot go to village every month. They visit the village sometimes after 6-7 months as they do not have leave from the factory and traveling back home is also expensive (transportation cost approx. \$2). Sometimes, they try to send their savings money by friends or through other villagers who may go to the city by chance. Usually, their parents or siblings get about 500- 600 taka (\$ 8- 10) at a time. They spend this money mostly on daily grocery shopping, entertainments (they borrow rechargeable battery to watch movies in video as they do not have electricity in the village), buy clothes from the local market which is cheap and comes from Myanmar. In these villages, they cannot weave their traditional dresses due to lack of cotton production as they

do not have *Jhum* field (Grabbed land by the Government Forest Department and the local Bengali people). The garment workers send their factory wages sometimes to support the payment of bride price or marriage ceremonial expenses for their siblings. I also found that the money sent home contributes to the payment of court expenses. For example *Rita* and *Mita* have been contributing a significant part of their factory wages to get bail for their jailed father. In the *Laitu* community, their contribution (cash flow) cannot be regenerated as they are not allowed to rear pigs because of the Bengali Muslim neighborhood. They also cannot buy cattle as it is a lot more expensive than the pigs. They have only chicken and ducks which they keep to entertain their guests and celebrate religious festivals. Their factory wages are used for everyday needs which they feel that is not satisfactory. My informants believe that their small contribution does not help the family members to reduce poverty or to make a better life. These women seem to be regarded as important people in the family or in the community. The discussion thus far is illustrated in the figure below,

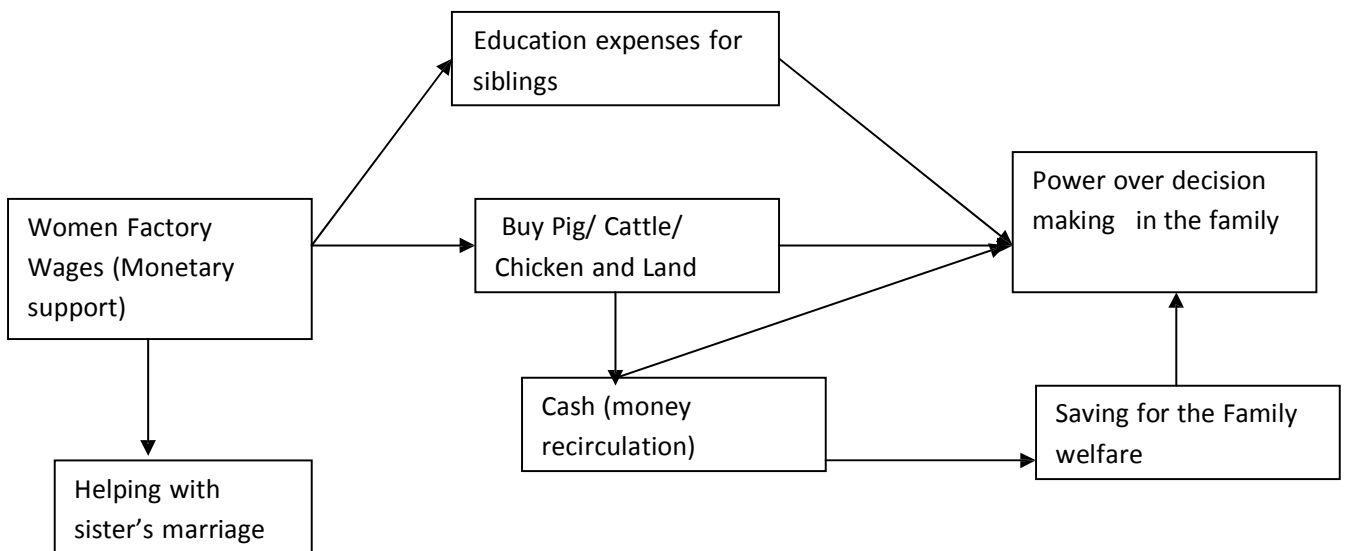
Figure: 1 The *Laitu Khyang Community*



On the contrary, in the *Kongtu Khyang* community (figure:2) I found that the wage is also mostly used for the same purposes like the *Laitu* community. But, they have *jhum* field and forest to collect their everyday food and fuel wood. In these villages, people are not dependent on the cash money to buy everyday groceries from the shop. For example, like other informants in the *Kongtu* community, *Sonali* use to send money for her youngest sister's education and to buy livestock (Cattle, Pigs, chicken etc). Her family bought a Pig from the

saving money which has reproduced twelve pigs. They would get cash money (3000- 5000 *taka* /\$50-80 each) from the pigs they rear after a year. In this way, she made a significant role in her family and in the community. For her great contribution family members seem to be obliged to her and she can play a vital role in family decision making. According to her family, for example, decisions about sending their sibling to school, renovating the house, siblings' marriage, buying cattle or pigs and so on are greatly influenced by her.

Figure: 2 The *Kongtu Khyang* Community



**Factory Wages and Acceptance Conflict: the case of Village Heads**

The *Karbari* or *Headman* is the village or community head who represents the village community, and the community members treat them as leaders and listen to their opinions. I felt as village and community leaders, their opinion (*Karbari*) regarding the *Khyang* women garments job in the city and factory wages contribution in family and community is very important. Their opinions will be a great insight into how the women factory jobs and wages in the city are perceived by the villagers. About this issue the *Karbari* of the *Dolbonia para* who participated in a focus group discussion with other elders replied as follows:



“It is very risky for our women (*Khyang*) to work in garments factory. Who will give them safety if city boys tease them, rape them or even kidnap them on their way back? *Khyang* women are beautiful and mostly it is the young unmarried girls who go for garments job. They are far away from their parents, relatives and villagers. Nobody knows what they are doing and how they have been living in city? If they could live with their parents they could even give a helping hand in the *Jhum* cultivation and help the family. If they work in the village agricultural field (As a *Borga* farmer, they get 70 taka per day, all together in a month  $70 \times 30 = 2100$  taka in the village and in city factory job gives only 1300 to 1600 taka. So then why should they go to city for factory job? Moreover, it is very hard to communicate with them in the city. Sometimes it takes three days to reach the city. Without mobile phones, it is not possible to communicate with them, and we do not have that facility. In garments job they don't get leave to visit the village.”

Regarding relationship with the Bengali boys and their culture in city he added that:

“There is a big question in terms of virginity regarding women garments worker. They do not get good housing for living, they have to share room with different kinds of people, men and women live together from different districts of Bangladesh. They have to live with Bengalis by negotiating their culture and food habit. Living style is not healthy and safe for women. They mostly live in slum patterned houses. In the eyes of society, these women are not good. They live all alone in the city. Even these women if they leave the garments job, society people would not accept them as good women. Nobody wants to marry them as boys do not trust them and boys want to trace their life history and always raise questions about their virginity. We have also heard that there are some women garments workers who are involved in prostitution! How can I trust that my village factory worker girls are not prostitutes? It is known that garments women are bad as they have to go for night duty and they come back home late night, is it good, how can I call them good girls?”

The other elderly villagers present at the FGD supporting in his argument that the *Khyang* factory workers are stigmatized in their village. He also did not support factory wages contribution for family welfare. Moreover, he said that in the *Laitu* community, *Buddhists* are the majority who has been mingling with the Bengali Muslim community. For every day connection with the Muslim Bengali community, they (*Laitu* community) are used to be influenced with a patriarchal culture. From the same community, four factory boys have returned from the city but then boys are not stigmatized like women garments workers. Regarding male garments workers *Karbari* said,

“Boys can go anywhere and they can live anywhere, people do not ask about their virginity because of their boyhood.”

On the contrary, there are different views regarding women factory job and their wage contribution in *Arachhori para*, *Kongtu* community, and head man of this community explained as followed:

“It is better if husband and wife could work together in the same factory. If unmarried woman go alone to work in the city there is nobody to help them during time of danger as Bangladeshi boys are not good, they disturb beautiful young indigenous women. I do not want to say that our *Khyang* women are bad but there is a negative perception about garments factory work for Muslim women in Bangladesh as they come out from the *purdha* but our *Khyang* women have their personal freedom and independence to choose to migrate to work in garments factories in order to reduce economic dependency on their households. They have been migrating because of the deforestation and destruction of natural reserves in the CHT. Because of poverty and lack of education opportunities in the village, they have chosen garments job to support their poor families. What’s wrong with it? ”

Here, the *Kongtu Khyang Headman* is worried about the safety of the *Khyang* women, but he did not regard them as a stigmatized group of people in the community as in their community they feel that men and women are equal and can do the same work.

### **Factory Wages and Acceptance Conflict: the case of Relatives and Family Members**

I observed that because of the poverty and lack of choice in the Laitu community, relatives and family members support their women to go for city factory job and they use factory wages for family needs and court summons. For example in *Dolbonia para*, the mother of *Rita* and *Mita* explain about her daughters’ factory job that:

“My daughters have been working in garments factory, society doesn’t look upon them positively but her father is in the jail because of Bangladeshi settlers and Indigenous people conflict. Society doesn’t come to give a single coin to release him from the jail. My daughter she doesn’t earn enough but whatever she can she wants to contribute for her family, parents and siblings.”

Their relative explained the garment factory job and wages as an opportunity and freedom beyond the patriarchy barrier. A cousin of *Rita* and *Mita* said as follows:

“My cousin’s sister has been living in the city and working in garments factory, I am happy because she lives in the city where there are lots of opportunities, and city life is comfortable and exciting! I wish I could live in city so that I do not have to hear men’s voices in the family all the time.”

Family members see women factory job and their wages as hard earned money that help them to dream for a better life. The youngest sister of *Rita* and *Mita* had this to say:

“Why will my sister be a bad girl? She works hard dawn to dusk and save some money for us. During her holiday she came with a new red frock for me and also some candy, chips, biscuits and a lot of other things for me. These kinds of food I have never ever tasted in the village. I didn’t see city, have no idea about city life, but I can feel that city is a lucrative place to live. I wish I could accompany my sister to big Chittagong city.

#### **Factory Wages and Acceptance Conflict: the case of the villagers**

The villagers do not appreciate the relationship between the indigenous people and the Bengalis because of the cultural and language difference. They were also of the view that the resettlement policy is responsible for their women migrating to the city as Bengali settlers grabbed indigenous people’s properties and lands. On the question of how the villagers regard the *Khyang* garments women workers in the city, they said:

Why should indigenous and native Bengalis mingle? These Bengali people have grabbed our lands; our relatives are in the jail because of Bengali people. They come to kidnap our daughters, harass our women on the way and they call us uncivilized. Why should our village women work with Bengali people in city?

#### **Summary:**

The analysis of this chapter suggests that women garment work and wage have different significance in these two communities. The importance of women wages and its potential implications in these two communities are defined by the difference in cash flows, religion, inter-ethnic and inter- religious marriage, relationship with main stream Bengali people and Government interference for reserve forest. Those who had been propelled by positive circumstances of these factors are regarded in decision making practices in their

family. Although their mate selection choosing power has increased to some extent it has delayed their marriage opportunities and made it difficult for them to choose partners which might add another social stigma besides the negative perception of their garments job.

## Chapter Nine

### Conclusion

This thesis set out to find the reasons for indigenous labour migration, the nature of inter-ethnic relations and the kind of empowerment of *Khyang* indigenous garments workers experience when they have moved to the city. The causes of *Khyang* indigenous women's migration from Chittagong Hill Tracts to the Chittagong city to take jobs in garments factory, their living conditions in the new city environment, working conditions in the garments factories (EPZ and local), the process of inter-ethnic interactions and relationships at the working and living place were the main concerns of this study. The extent to which their decision making power has been changed in the family due to paid factory work and how they are regarded by their family and village community form part of the focus of the thesis.

From my informants several push and pull factors were identified as the causes of migration of indigenous people from villages to cities. However, the main push factors of migration for most indigenous people are the government resettlement policy, political oppression, counter-insurgency, displacements from the place of origin and deforestation. These factors cause indigenous people to lose their own lands which in turn bring about poverty and several other related problems for them. All of my informants who had come to the city had failed their SSC examination except one. Of more specific push factors leading to my informants move, I can mention lack of secondary schools in the villages, lack of cultivable land which is the cause of poverty, no earning member in the family, aspiration to get a NGO/nursing or better job, availability of job opportunities in the city were the reasons behind my informants' migration. Not only push factors were in operation. The desire to earn money; better job, education and city facilities are some vital pull-factors behind their migration. They have dreams and aspiration of saving money from factory jobs to pursue further studies in future. However, after spending their daily expenses on housing, transportation, food, clothes etc, their dreams for further education becomes practically impossible.

City life, new forms of living arrangements and new social life in the city gave an opportunity for my informants to be independent. The factory wages gave them the power to integrate into

a new city life where they are able to mingle with different ethnic groups who would usually maintain ethnic boundary in every spheres of life. These *Khyang* women have challenged the new forms of complex inter-ethnic interactions (between ethnic minority and majority) which is an outcome of their wage or participation in the formal work force. Through their factory jobs they are challenging stereotypes at their living and work place which I think poses a great challenge against Bengali mainstream society. They have renegotiated with Bengalis and majority indigenous communities' dominating culture because of their wage labour. Moreover, they also have gained certain new choosing power over mainstream Bengali male dominating culture, in the family, the community and in the same household where they have made new domestic relations with different ethnic groups. They have overcome the feeling of low self worth as minority ethnic women.

In the Bengali society, there has not been a social environment that is conducive to large- scale female migration. There is a lack of social legitimacy of female migration and factory work which discourages women to leave their community and villages. Therefore, women are afraid of being ostracized, labeled as promiscuous and risking their marriage ability or tarnishing family and own community reputations. Women's migration (hill to urban areas), if not accompanied by male family members, still carries strong stigma (Oishi,2002:16).It was not common and socially acceptable for Bengali and indigenous women to leave their community on their own and live in the city independently only to earn. It came out clearly from this thesis that these *Khyang* women have taken the challenge to live independently as a result of power which comes from their factory job.

This thesis articulated that my *Khyang* women informant's access to wage labour may improve their existing position and increase their chances, for better marriages, building capacity to raise their voice in family decision making and encourage questioning of unequal practices/ ethnic discrimination, and a greater sense of self reliance and bargaining power. As My *Khyang* informants confirmed Kabeer's claim that the Bengali women who are working in the factories of Bangladesh were aspired to take up such employment because it moved them from their position at the margins of labour market to a more central, better paid and more visible place in the economy (Kabeer:2000).The result of this thesis confirms Sen qtd in

Cecile Jackson and Ruth Pearson (1998) that my informants *Khyang* indigenous women utilize their wage to contribute to the income of the household in which they are daughters or wives, thus enhancing their bargaining power. Their earnings are finally sent back home to their families thereby gaining the respect of their family members. Thus, their decision making power in the family is increased. In spite of these little contributions to their families my informants are not accepted in the larger village communities.

However, despite the wage earning and the subsequent empowerment of women, there are several negative aspects of my city migration and city life. They had to face some uncertainties to get a shelter as indigenous women. Coupled with this was the problem of insecurity and vulnerability. They are faced with bad working and living conditions. It came out from this study that in general none of the factories (EPZ and local both) seem to care much about their worker's health, overtime, low wage, ILO rules and working environments for the workers. Workers do not have job security and the working environment is also risky.

Despite these obstacles, these *Khyang* women are challenging conventions through their formal sector employment which affects gender identities and power relations within marriages and families. It came out clearly that garment workers are stigmatized in their places of origin or villages because of their low wage, insecure living and bad working and housing conditions. Entry into garments work enables young women the opportunity of delaying marriage and childbearing but it is much difficult to select a marriage partner due to their negative profession image. There is also the problem of delayed or absence of marriage as most men are not interested in female factory workers. City life made these *Khyang* women ambitious and choosy in selecting their mates as well. The women after coming to the city become enlightened and therefore do not wish to marry village men who they think are not exposed. *Khyang* male factory workers do not face problems if they want to marry in the village but it is a big problem for *Khyang* women to find someone to marry.

In real sense my informants do not benefit from the wage labour much since their little earnings are sent back home to their families thereby empowering their family. Most of my informants expressed their disappointments at the city as the city was below their expectation, they did not get what they expected. Most of them thought the village was better for them and

expressed the desire to go back to village after saving a good amount of money as they do not want to lose their indigenous heritage and culture .They think the city only can give some sources to earn money and some modern citizen facilities and also it is a place where they lose their indigenous tradition and culture.

As a result of different language, accents, religion, food and dress cultures negative stereotypes by the majority ethnic groups against the minority *Khyang* indigenous community exists. This may be minimized if cross cultural communication in city life, working places and housing is improved. If wage, working and living conditions can improve for factory workers then it would be possible to increase the social acceptance for *Khyang* indigenous women which would be a big challenge against the Bengali male dominance society and majority Bengali mainstream culture.



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