

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

Abstract:

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

Place and duration of the Study: The fieldwork was carried at the Alikadam in Bandarban district of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh between May 2022 to June 2022.

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

Findings: A total of 13 traditional myths are found among the Murang on safeguarding traditional culture, heritage, tradition, livelihoods and biodiversity. The interrelationship between myths and development thoughts is ambiguous. These myths are too little related to the conventional development thought and interventions. Myths denote the thought of coexisting with environment, biodiversity, food preservation, global warming, indigenous knowledge, forest preservation, social solidarity, resource distribution, health, hygiene, water resource management, and normative social behaviors. These thoughts are akin to sustainable development goals and are transmitted from generation to generation. The community unmake the thought of infrastructure development and make their own development thought.

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

Introduction

One of the traditional Murang myths about cosmology provides them the wisdom of practicing sustainable development thought in their daily life. The Murang people do not cut trees and bamboos randomly from their community forest. They want to preserve the plants and biodiversity of their forest so that they get congenial environment, fresh air, foods, water, housing resources, fuelwood for them and the future generations. They only cut the trees which have become dead dry for making house and everyday use as fuelwood.

However, Bangladesh is regarded as one of the countries with the widest cultural diversity. There are fifty small ethnic groups living throughout the country in addition to the majority Bengali population (MOCA, 2019). The Chittagong Hill Tracts (hereafter as CHT) in Bangladesh comprises 11 small ethnic groups, including Murang, also known as Mru, Mro, who reside in the Bandarban district. There are 52,463 Murang people live across the country and among them 50.98% are male and 49.02% are female (BBS, 2023). The 80% of Murang people are literate in their Murang alphabet (Siegel, 2023), but only about 45% literate in Bengali (Rashid, 2022). The Murang, once residing in the Arakan Mountains, now reside mainly in high hills around the Sangu and Matamuhri rivers of the Bandarban. Their unique culture is influenced by geographical location and border restrictions (Saifee, 2013). Traditional myths provide a source of uniqueness, influencing their economy, politics, religion, kinship, environment, and welfare. These myths also contribute to pleasing the gods.

In the CHT, the NGOs and GOs have implemented development projects within the Murang community, e.g., a rural development project by the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and the Asian Development Bank. The average poverty rate in the country is about 30%; whereas the poverty rate in the CHT is 65%. The average income of this region is 26% less than the average income of Tk. 84,000. In the CHT, about 72% of the people depend on agriculture for their livelihood (MOHFW, 2018). It can be said that many development projects in CHT have failed due to supportive infrastructure, lack of supportive trade policy and lack of land rights. Moreover, measures were not taken to increase land fertility and capacity building of traditional institutions (Khisa & Mohiuddin, 2015). Thus, the development projects are ambivalent in the CHT, which needs to be understood within the cultural context the particular community.

There has been a positive relation among traditional ecological knowledge, sustainable practices, land and resource management, climate change adaptation, and disaster risk reduction strategies (Magni, 2017). For example, the Munda ethnic group of Sundarbans practice water management strategies through their social practices and indigenous ecological knowledge (Perucca, 2010). The post-2015 sustainability agenda emphasizes the importance of examining the connection between sustainable development and indigenous knowledge, which is distinct from western knowledge (Magni, 2017). But, academic literature on traditional knowledge is extremely limited in the CHT of Bangladesh (Perucca, 2010).

This context, encourage to study the ethnic traditional knowledge, e.g., wisdom of myths and its practices in achieving sustainable development. As every society has some myths which are embedded in history and provide real knowledge about the society, explaining and arguing the rationality of knowledge about the present situation of the world from the sources of the past and at the same time of the past (Ceglarska, 2018). This study examines how myths related to development are influenced by Murang people's life experiences, needs, and socio-cultural contexts. It examines how traditional myths shape Murang development thought, highlighting their cultural background, traditional behaviors, and customs. The study aims to understand how these myths shape the perception of development, highlighting the unmaking of conventional development.

Research Objectives

The study aimed to investigate following three particular objectives:

1. To explore traditional myths related to development in the Murang community.

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

Literature Review

Previous studies have mainly focused on land rights and socioeconomic status, but have not explored the role of myth in development thought among the Murang people. K. S. Saifee (2013) mentioned that Bandarban, a district in the CHT, has a unique situation for small ethnic groups due to its distance and mountainous terrain. The Murang group, largely uneducated and living in poverty due to their geographical location and socio-economic conditions, has struggled to maintain their identity and adapt to changing environments, leading to the loss of their culture. Implementing a bottom-up approach to development programs could help these groups achieve their desired development paths. The study reveals that Murang culture's 'superstitions' hinder their development, including education. However, the roots of these beliefs remain unexplored. Understanding traditional myths are crucial for understanding Murang development thoughts and cultural context.

A research (MOHFW, 2017) shows that ethnic minorities are the poorest and most marginalized people in the country. While the average poverty rate in the country is about 30 percent, the poverty rate in the CHT is 75 percent. The average income of this region is 21 percent less than the average income of Tk. 84,000. In the CHT, about 82% of the people depend on agriculture for their livelihood. One-third of the people in this area depend on *Jhum* cultivation. The initiative identifies economically poor people based on occupation and income, but does not identify their culture, which is determined by traditional myths and daily life. The project lacks scope to combine myth and cultural perspective with development.

Another study of Haque (2018) examined the perceptions of small ethnic groups in the CHT regarding the Bangladesh Army's role in sustainable development. Traditional development interventions aim to modernize societies, with the First World adopting a top-down model. Ethnic groups are considered **underdeveloped**. The state implements projects focusing on poverty alleviation, health, education, gender inequality, safe water, sanitation, industrial innovation, infrastructure development, sustainable cities, hill forest protection, improved life, peace, justice, and sustainable institutions to achieve sustainable development goals (Haque, 2018). In this research, a new outline of development for them will be identified by understanding their development concepts through the analysis of myths of Murang.

Khisa and Mohiuddin (2015) studied the decline of *Jhum* cultivation in the CHT region due to the construction of Kaptai Dam and ongoing migration. The study criticizes government initiatives to improve socio-economic conditions in CHT, highlighting the lack of measures for land fertility, soil conservation, and cultural processes. It also criticizes development projects involving *Jhum* cultivation, which is a major livelihood for small ethnic groups. The lack of infrastructure, supportive services, and land rights uncertainty further exacerbates the issue. But livelihoods through traditional *Jhum* cultivation methods are shrinking today for a variety of reasons that affect their cultural context and can be traced back to myths, development programs and the community's perception of development.

Another paper of Roy and Chakma (2015), discusses the undervaluation of ethnic groups in Bangladesh's cultural heritage, ecology, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It highlights the lack of implementation of the CHT Peace Accord 1997, which aimed to protect indigenous people and their cultural practices. Despite diversified languages, beliefs, and ethnic groups, they remain unidentified due to ignorance, discrimination, and extreme nationalist thought. The article

recommends recognizing culture as the fourth pillar of SDG and emphasizing indigenous people's culture and identity to promote indigenous development. The study focuses on Bangladesh's constitution and the 1997 CHT Peace Accord, excluding the extent of specific ethnic groups like the Murang.

The above-mentioned studies have primarily focused on land rights, human rights, and the vulnerability of ethnic cultures. Nevertheless, the Murang community has faced challenges in development projects due to perceptions of them as primitive and uncivilized. This study aims to address this gap by examining the relationship between traditional myths and development in the cultural context of Murang society. This new perspective can help reconcile conventional development with people's perception of development in the context of myth, ultimately improving state policies and cultural institutions for the development of small ethnic cultures across Bangladesh.

Methodology

This was a qualitative study to grasp the unique culture and tradition of the Murang. This ethnic community reside at the Alikadam in the Bandarban district of Bangladesh, depend on high hills for their livelihood and reside. Doing fieldwork in the long distanced and top hills of the Alikadam was a big challenge and the community was also very disinterest and suspicious of the outsiders. Thus, a formal survey-based methods were not appropriate to apply.

However, ethnographic fieldwork approach was instrumental in understanding the culture, heritage, and experiences of the Murang. It provided insight into their ways of life, knowledge systems, social organizations, and religious practices. Ethnographic study also helped to articulate the ethnic people perception of culture and development. It was for fieldwork, as it helped to build rapport and trust with the participants, providing a credible and authentic account of the society. The study used verbatim quotations and detailed descriptions of events to capture the voices of the Murang community, allowing for a deeper understanding of their daily lives.

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

Findings

Traditional myths of the Murang

In this section, a total of traditional myths have been described concisely by depicting good length of the original stories from the Murang people. The names of the myths used here are given by the researcher, since some Murang people could tell the story instead of telling the story name.

1. Sacred Tree

In ancient times, Krimtui, a man cursed by an evil eye, became ill as a result of cutting down the Aswatha tree for wood. The tree was plagued by deities, and anyone who used it for firewood were

killed. To rescue Krimtui, the *Vaidya* (folk healer) conducted numerous worships for the tree. Despite several attempts of worships, krimtui's disease continued. *Vaidya* Ringman advised leaving white pigeons in the river near the Krimtui's *Jhum* (hill for cultivation), but Krimtui did not recover. Another *Vaidya* recommended donating goat's blood to the Tuinamo River. Krimtui's condition worsened, and a *Vaidya* alleged that enemies used cremation coals to kill him. However, Krimtui died one day.

2. Creation of Earth

Before the creation of the earth, there was no soil in the universe. An old woman and her grandson, Klangcha, lived on a rock called the universe. Klangcha hunted a wild animal, Pakcharuya, and was instructed to cover the ocean with soil to create the earth by her grandmother. Pakcharuya stole soil from the island, but a whale snatched it, preventing the land from being created. Grandmother said, if the soil is brought by stealing, the land will never be created. Thus, go yourself and tell your plan to the ruler of the island. Klangcha informed the king about a plan to create a universe with three parts for water and one part for land. Seeds of conflict, disease, criticism, robbery, and adultery were planted in various locations, with the king appreciative of the plan.

Klangcha ordered reed to grow, but it predicted birth only on plains and river banks. *Barakh* (a type of bamboo) predicted flat land, while *Dolu* (a type of bamboo) emphasized its inability to grow quickly. The forest grew, attracting various animals and reptiles. Bulbuli, a bird, learned night and day creation techniques from tigers and bears. Klangcha was fascinated by Bulbuli's activities and thanked him for creating day and night on earth. Klangcha learned how to build a house from his grandmother. Grandmother also taught him about farming techniques and the importance of preserving food year-round. Klangcha's grandmother promised him a life partner called Masiwa, and both Klangcha and Masiwa would be the original parents of all human beings.

3. Curse of Killing Birds

At the beginning of human life, the earth was a heaven, and heaven was like a hell. A woman married a man of heaven and got three children. One day, the woman's older son died, and her brother from the earth went to see the dead body of nephew in the heaven. He became surprise to find the dead body in heaven, because nobody dies in the earth. One day, the woman's brother killed a sacred Tikrukukui bird and falsely told his sister that a family member died. When her sister arrived in the earth, she found a body of a large Tikrukukui bird, and then she cursed that people of earth would die from today, and people of heaven would never die. This led the Murang people to believe that people have to die on earth, but the people of heaven are deathless.

4. Sun Heat Weakening

The Murang people believe in a god of the sky, who cares for the sun and moon with a demon named Wimokma Mo. The sun and the moon obey Wimokma Mo. If the sun did not listen to the demon, the sun would get punish by the demon. The sun was eclipsed for when Wimokma Mo holds the sun captive. Then people used to set fire to an animal's skull to pray for the sun's release. Wimokma Mo eats human flesh offered by the people and released the sun and returned to the sky.

The sun was once a female and the moon was a male at the time. The moon was violent, leading to a lack of water and causing many to die without water. People informed the Lord Thurai about the sun's oppression, then the god became angry. The god defeated the sun, and washed the sun by banyan glue to decrease energy. Therefore, the male sun turned into a moon. In essence, this story narrates the Murang beliefs regarding lack of water, sky and the Sun.

5. The Deity of Jhum

Kampala was the only daughter and loved deeply by her parents. Her brother Krongtong died from an unknown disease, and another brother became ill. After that her father Menkong arranged cow killings for his brother's recovery. The traditional *Vaidya* and healers were unable to make him cure. The father dreamt that if they separate his son and daughter then their son will recover. Then, the father left his daughter Kampala in a jungle and prayed to the Deity of *Jhum* hill to look after his daughter for one year. The Deity, took care of the daughter as disguised of an old man. Kampala grew up with the deity, despite of some fear in the forest.

After one year, the father and his son went to the forest to find their daughter and take her back. Although the daughter could not recognize them, the old man allowed to take her, and the father took his daughter to his house. The daughter was crying constantly, thus the deity appeared disguised as the old man. The daughter was happy to see the old man, but the brother Kampau dishonored him. Thus, that old man took the daughter to the forest at one night. The parents and brother searched the forest, worshipped the *Vaidya*, but nothing worked. The *Vaidya* advised them not to disturb the Deity to get their daughter back, therefore they left the hope and started living without her.

6. Restricted Hill

Taipao's *Jhum*, ripe crop and threatened by pig, monkey, and other birds, is a source of trouble for her family. Taipao stays home to maintain household chores and weaves looms for her daughter's wedding. In a big trouble, they prepared the Rengkrom hill for *Jhum* cultivation, but the villagers warned them not to go there, fearing snakes would kill them disguised. A monk also lives on the hill, and it was forbidden to cultivate *Jhum* there. Taipao's stubborn husband, however, refuses to listen to the villagers' suggestions and plans to make snakes leave the hill with the help of a *Vaidya*.

Rengkrom hill was never used for *Jhum* cultivation due to fear of family members dying. However, Khonchang believed it would produce many crops, leading to dissatisfaction from the villagers. Khongchang began cultivating *Jhum* on the hill, but his family members became affected by cholera, leading to the king snake becoming hostile and taking revenge. Rengkrom died, and Taipau, one of his daughters, and his son started living again. This experience was a learning experience for the Rengkrom family and Taipau, who was shocked by the loss of her husband and son.

7. Pond and Dragon

The Tarochoyo clan, a distinct clan from another Murang clans, lived at a village called Bokapara. Despite facing various challenges and natural disasters, they did not learn from their past experiences. One day, a young woman lost a weaving tool and asked a boy to retrieve it, but suddenly the boy disappeared. Similarly, cows, goats, ducks, and hens were lost in the village recently. The villagers decided to investigate and discovered a large hole in the jungle, containing various bones and skeleton parts. They suspected a snake was eating these animals and children. The village's inhabitants decided to investigate the cause of these losses.

A group of people decided to hunt a large snake using a fishing hook and rope. They found a large snake in a hole, but couldn't pull its body. Instead, they cut half of the snake's body and distributed it to every family in the village. They also organized a cow-killing festival at night to celebrate the victory and the villagers' enjoyment of the experience. The villagers danced and had fun during the festival.

A family named Matongcho did not cook the flesh of a snake, believing it called them to return its head. The next day, they threw the snake's head into a hole, causing the village to flood. The Murang people believe the lake is connected to the sea and that the snake that killed the villagers was a sacred dragon, carrying the earth's weight. They are cautious about hunting snakes, believing that if they kill a dragon that carries the earth's weight, an earthquake will occur. Therefore, they refrain from killing snakes, believing that if they did not kill the dragon, they would not have been killed.

8. Garland Beads Tree

A young boy in a village lost his parents and worked alone. One day, villagers hunted a deer and distributed the meat to all villagers. The boy was delighted to see the meat in his house but could not cook it due to his lack of a wife. He went to the hill for cultivation and found a young girl who took care of the house and cooked food for him. The boy was surprised by the new look of his house and began to wonder who had made it. One day, he caught the deer girl and offered her a marriage proposal. The girl agreed, and they married and started a happy life together.

The man and his wife became parents. The deer girl, upset by their unnecessarily loud calls, turned into a deer and went to the forest. The man and his daughters searched for their mother but could not find her. One day, villagers hunted a deer and distributed its meat to the villagers. One daughter had a dream where her mother told her not to eat deer meat and to keep its bones hidden. Another daughter ate deer meat, while the other kept the bones under the soil. A tree of garland beads grew, which became their deer girl mother. The daughter told her father about the story, but he was angry and cut the tree, which started to fly. The Mro people believe it was their sin, and the tree does not grow in the hill forest.

9. Curse of Dishonesty

A conjugal couple lived at a village near a fountain, but were miserly and unfriendly to the villagers. They cooked pig and cock for neighbors but never invited them to their house. The couple ignored their old guardian's advice to help the villagers, and their wife scolded them for not being friendly. They played Rina Plung and sang when someone died in the village. Despite attempts to understand, they did not listen, leading to curses from the villagers. The couple's miserliness and selfishness led to their villagers' disapproval.

An old father died in their house and learned a mantra to become a demon after death. The villagers guarded the dead body, but when it coughed and threatened to kill everyone, the dead body attacked her son and her wife, eventually consuming a young boy. The villagers fled the village, knowing the old man would turn into a demon. The demon chased a woman into the forest, but she was killed by the demon. The villagers used mantras to weaken the demon, and the demon became weak in the daytime. The villagers killed the demon, and the villagers began living happily in the village again. However, dishonest family members were killed, highlighting the dangers of a demon's power.

10. Rina Plung

Rina Plung is a traditional flute of Mro, meaning the flute of the Cholera. It is played by villagers when someone is affected by cholera or other diseases for a long time. A cholera epidemic in a village led to people dying. Despite various attempts, including worship, no changes were made. One night, an old man had a dream where a priest taught him to play a flute to get cholera recovery. The priest told him to play the flute seven times, but the priest disappeared in the dream. The old man shared his dream with the villagers, who agreed and created a flute based on his description. The flute played seven times, bringing people who were about to die from illness and cholera to life, and the villagers were delighted to see the scenery.

11. Impurity and Rebirth

The Murang people believe in rebirth after a seven-day death, where the body is burned and reborn as a child. The body is then showered with hot water from the sacred Naingsa tree, and the person begins to follow the life cycle again. This belief was the general goal of the Murang life. One incident occurred when a householder died suddenly, and a new girl, who was timid, was brought into the household. The new wife worked alone in the house, a little sick, for seven days, causing the house to become a chaotic environment.

A dead householder entered the house, resembling a burned body. The wife, fearing the burned body, rushed to the man with a broom, making him invisible. The family members returned upset, but it was too late to explain the incident. Murang people believe people do not get rebirth since that day and that a broom symbolizes the highest profanity. Beaten by the broom, someone becomes impure, and ghosts and demons also fear the broom.

12. Ancestral Elephant

In ancient times, a couple lived in a village near *Jhum* with their children. During summer, the animals were thirsty for water, and the couple left their children at the *Jhum* house for work. They could not find water anywhere, and their parents did not keep it for them. They searched for water in various places, but the *Jhum's* size made it difficult for them to hear their calls and see the water source.

The Sailakotum river in the area was forbidden by the villagers due to its black magical power, which could turn anyone into an elephant. Children, unaware of this, drank the river's water and bathed in it. However, their noses and ears turned into elephants. Their parents returned to the *Jhum* house, but the child elephants refused to stay at home. They were given banana trees as food, but they could not keep them at home. The child elephants went to the forest forever. The Murang people believe elephants are the species of the Klangto clan, and therefore, the Klangto group does not eat elephant meat.

13. God of the Air

A village in the forest cultivates *Jhum* for its living, using traps to catch wild animals that harm crops. A skilled trap-setter, respected by the village, was unable to marry his daughter due to her poor circumstances. He could only pay a hundred rupees to her parents, leaving him with no hope of marriage. One day, he found a large pig destroying his crops, and he spent several days hunting it in the forest.

A young man found an old woman's house with no relatives and torn cloth. He asked her about a big pig he had been searching for, but she refused. The man helped her with household chores. One day, he discovered the old lady had many pigs, and a pig destroyed her crops. He showed the pig's foot size, which the lady said was not available. After comparing the foot sizes of each pig, the young man found a pig with a large foot size, which could grow a large tree in its body.

The young man kills a pig, and the old lady cries and bites its mouth. The pig's body turns into light, and the young man returns to his village. The villagers find the pig's body and have a feast. The old lady becomes weak from mourning, and the Murang people believe the old body is the deity of the air.

Myth and Conventional Development

This section details the connection between traditional myths and conventional development, as well as other non-conventional development-related thoughts.

1. Myth and Environment

Traditional myths reveal their role in ecosystems, in this regard, one of the participants of the research, Riong Mro (32) said,

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

2. Food Preservation

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

We have saved all kinds of crops for cultivation in Jhum, we will sow seeds in Jhum. Again, we get our year-round food from Jhum. I save the rice.

Due to a shortage of paddy in Jhum, we bought it for two months last year. But we do it because our ancestor Klangcha did it, or we will die of starvation all year long.

3. Excessive Sun Heat

The Murang people believe that excessive sun heat harms their health and environment. One of the participants Menna Mro (70) said,

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

4. Earth and Biodiversity

The Murang believe the earth, soil, flora, fauna, and humans are interconnected. Kritai Mro (52) was describing the significance,

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

5. Indigenous Knowledge

The Murang People share their indigenous knowledge and experiences. One of the respondents Lairui Mro (42) opined,

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

6. Reserved Forest and Hills

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

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

7. Social Solidarity and Helping

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

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

8. Balanced Distribution

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

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

9. Health, Illness, Purity and Impurity

Traditional myth of Rina Plung, a traditional flute, is used to combat cholera. Bauring Mro (34) was depicting the matter,

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

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

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

10. Water Resources

They have myths that they had enough water resources, but resources are decreasing in numbers. Senlok Mro (30) was narrating about water crisis,

The old water sources, rivers and streams, have been decreasing due to rising temperatures, tree cutting, and pollution from brick fields. As a result, fresh water is not being obtained from these sources. People are resorting to fetching polluted water from nearby sources, which is a significant issue in their community.

Development Thoughts

The Murang people's unmaking and making development thoughts discussed as narratives, revealing their development thoughts as follows.

1. Disinterest in Chemical Fertilizer

Jhum farming, a practice dating back 25 years, has been utilizing chemical fertilizers, which they believe began to improve soil quality. Menlong Mro (45) said about why they are disinterested in,

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

2. Thinking against Manmade Forest

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

The owner gives the condition that the jungle should be cut and cleaned. It does not matter if you cultivate Jhum in it. But I will give you timber plants, and you will plant them. But we know that when a timber tree is planted in a Juhm, the Jhum becomes infertile. You know, helicopters have been used to scatter timber saplings in the British era. Ancestor Klangcha said without cultivation we would die.

3. Brickfield an Unwanted Guest

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

The river water is not good now. There is a lot of waste in the river. If I go to take a bath in the river then I get affected by a skin problem. There is a brickfield that has been set up and pollutes all water. One day, some government administrative officers had come here to stop the brickfield.

But then the brickfield started again, it was polluting the water too much. We want our hills and forests back.

4. Paved Road is a Dilemma

The Bangladesh army made these roads for mass transportation, but the Murang people still do not understand their usefulness or how to capitalize on them. Kauplau Mro (37) said,

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

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

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

5. Development has Different Layers

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

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

On the other hand, Chamri Mro (27),

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

6. Natural Trees are Declining

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

It is used to be available, but now there are no more trees and no medicine available. There are currently no large trees and the trees are being cut down so the trees are being finished. I will give you 800 takas. Then you cut down the tree. Trees are needed for various purposes. I do not understand. Am I wrong?

7. “The Jhum will be Lost”

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

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

8. The Bangladesh Army

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

This road was set up by the army, about fifteen to eighteen years ago. I don’t know whether the road is good or bad for us. I can’t tell anything. This pitched road brought extreme heat in this area. If you go to our village there are a lot of trees and a small forest, there is no heat like this road.

9. Crop Production is Decreasing

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

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

10. Fruits Garden is Increasing

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

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

11. No Safe Drinking Water

Natural water sources are polluted by brickfields, chemicals, and waste, leading to various diseases and skin diseases. Pongrey Mro (32) said,

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

12. Lack of Sanitation

The participants lack knowledge and infrastructural support for sanitation, lack hygienic toilets for community or family use, and are not educated about the necessity. Pongrey Mro (32) said about,

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

13. No Outreaching for Health

The Murang lacks access to public health-based programs and services. Himiching, a 32-year-old woman who had been anemic for a long time, said,

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

14. Lack of Education Programs

The Murang population has no access to elementary, secondary, and higher education. Only a few students live at charity hostel for education, but few families can afford the yearly charge of 15,000 Taka for accommodation and food. Menla, a 26-year-old BA student said,

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

Discussion

1. Patterns and Scope of Traditional Myths

Mythology is classic narratives that share numerous narrative characteristics with different kinds of tales (Todorov, 1981). It is always to be kept in mind the intermediary role that an anthropologist or ethnographer plays since it cannot be avoided (Boskovic, 2002). Anthropologists study myths, examining key themes about civilization and culture, including creation, cultural heroes, and animals, to understand their origins (Hasty et al., 2022).

The Murang community has a diverse range of myths, including protecting forests, preserving biodiversity, preserving land, maintaining unity, maintaining health and sanitation, and adhering to social rules.

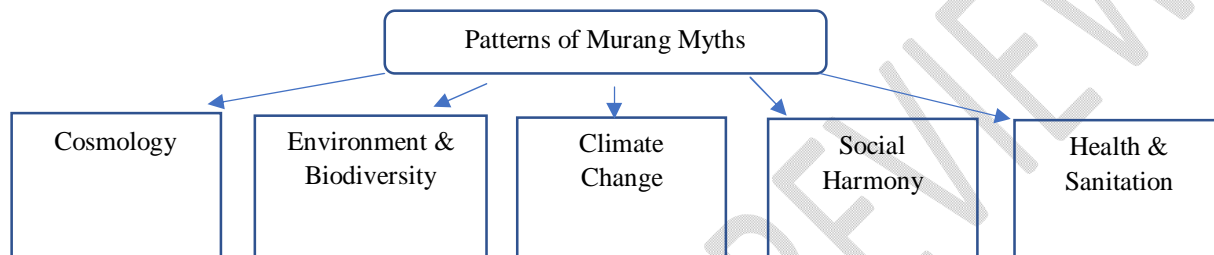


Figure:1; Types of Traditional Myths of the Murang

One of the salient features of the Murang myth is that these possess a holistic worldview, offering a holistic perspective on life, society, nature, and the economy, considering all aspects of the tale. This holistic perspective emphasize that mind, body, individuals, society, and environment interpenetrate and define one another, making it a valuable theory for understanding the complex subject matter of human nature (Schultz & Lavenda, 2013). Moreover, their myths symbolize their current situation and ongoing problems, such as poverty, deficient education, and diseases like skin diseases and malaria.

Relation between Myth and Conventional Development

The Murang's development ideology is based on traditional myths, focusing on *Jhum*-based food, deep forests, housing, wood, water, and land. These beliefs are influenced by their specific livelihoods and living patterns in hilly and forest lands. Development policy and practice appear to have been periodically regenerated and reformulated with new ideas and thinking (Pokharel, 2013).

The traditional myths are not connected to the conventional developments and interventions; e.g., paved roads, building, billboards, and setting up brick fields. They lived a wealthy life before settlers arrived, using indigenous medicines for treatment. Their myths focus on preserving resources, maintaining social harmony, and equitable wealth distribution. People were found to be friendly to the forest and biodiversity, wanting to keep it alive. The myth 'Curse of Killing Bird' teaches that killing a bird could turn the earth into a hell, demonstrating their connection to the forest and biodiversity.

Unmaking the Development Thought: Development for Whom?

Bangladesh state's development projects in the area focus on building roads and bridges on hills, with military checkpoints and camps for monitoring. GO and NGOs raise awareness about issues like coronavirus, village courts, preventing malaria, fruits gardening, community mobilization, seed

preservation, and crop selling points. However, these programs' banner, festoons, placard, and bill boards are primarily written in Bangla, making it difficult for the community who cannot read Bangla to understand the messages. They often lack understanding of the benefits of roads and do not use vehicles for transporting their crops. Regular outreach programs also hinder their access to awareness-raising messages.

Making of Development Thought: Original Affluence and SDGs

The 'original affluent society' hypothesis suggests hunter-gatherer lives provided material comfort and security, allowing them to live affluently by satisfying their material needs relatively easily, as presented by Marshall Sahlins in 1966 (Sahlins, 2017). As the Murang people live in extreme poverty, they cannot manage basic needs of life nowadays (Rahman, 2023). They focus on three meals daily, wood-bamboo for housing, and hills farming, akin to the ancient hunter-gatherer society of the Sahlins; and related to the SDGs goal for eradicating poverty (UN, 2023).

Jhum land is shrinking due to factors like Bengali settlers, roads, industries, and tourism, causing loss of traditional land ownership, fertility, and forest resources. This resulted decreased food productivity, and affecting the food security (Nahar et al., 2020). Rivers and fountains are suffering from reduced water flow and shallowness, leading to a severe water shortage. Due to lack of purchasing power, they occasionally depend on livestock and poultry for meat. However, the SDGs aim to eradicate hunger and malnutrition on focusing sustainable agriculture (UNDP, 2023).

The Murang heavily depend on natural water sources; e.g., streams, Chhara, Jhiri, Khal, rivers, etc. (NGOF, 2016), especially in remote areas. Tube wells in villages are often nonoperational due to shallow pipes, and having access to clean drinking water is a big worry (UNICEF, 2019). They believe that safe drinking water and other water sources are critical for their survival and is advocating for the installation of deep tube wells to provide the necessary water. However, the SDG goal 6 aims for universal access to clean water, requiring pollution reduction, waste reduction, and infrastructure investment (UNDP, 2023).

Although SDG 6 focus on improving sanitation, and hygiene (UNDP, 2023), the community suffers from diarrhea and skin diseases due to inadequate sanitation practices, including toilets, latrines, clean water, and dish cleaning. That negatively impacts socioeconomic status, job loss, medical costs, and health (Mahmud et al., 2020). Despite NGOs' billboards, people are unaware of sanitation due to inconsistent outreach programs. Younger generations demand full-fledged outreach programs and latrine infrastructure for remote villages or least they could be professionally trained.

The community faces social inequalities based on age, sex, gender, religion, and leadership. Their society, predominantly male-dominated, faces widespread discrimination, with women working in home and *Jhum*. There is a clear pay gap between men and women in CHT (ADB, 2011). The gender equality is emphasized in SDG 5 (UNDP, 2023), but gender awareness programs are less outreaching the community. They witness *Jhum* land shrinkage due to settlers' ownership, and lack Social Safety Net program support. Despite Bengali leaders seeking their votes, they face discrimination in benefits like VGD, VGF, old age allowance, and solar panels. And SDG 10 targets to empower lower-income earners and promote economic inclusion via fiscal, wage, and social protection policies (UNDP, 2023).

People are suffering from pollution and loss of natural balance due to industrial development, government infrastructure, and tourist attractions. The region's natural beauty is being destroyed, and they prefer their previous state of forests and hills. Despite new infrastructure, they lack electricity in the hills and only a few households afforded solar panels. The state and NGOs are less active to provide solar panels without cost, although SDG goal 9 emphasizes equitable access to infrastructure for all (UNDP, 2023).

The education status of the Murang is lower than other communities due to living in remote hills, lack of access to education, and involvement in *Jhum*. They desire free hostels in Alikadam, more primary and secondary schools, and education that includes Bangla and Murang language and culture, believing it is crucial for personal development. The area has 28 government primary schools, all near major roads or at Alikadam Upazila, and four high schools at the Alikadam Upazila town (National Portal, 2023). However, the SDG 4 focuses on inclusive, quality education for all, aiming for free primary and secondary school, equal access to vocational training, and universal higher education (UNDP, 2023).

As per SDG goal 16, social peace, stability, human rights, and effective governance, addressing global division, promoting rule of law, and strengthening global governance institutions are necessary (UNDP, 2023). The local community enjoys peace and social harmony, but outsiders seize resources like land, forest, wood, and bamboo, leading to poverty and peril. They lack proper justice, such as receiving wood for housing and hills for *Jhum*, and are denied VGD or VGF cards, destroying their mental peace and causing them to live a life of deprivation.

Finally, the SDG goal 15 emphasizes immediate action to preserve natural habitats, biodiversity, global food and water security, and mitigate climate change (UNDP, 2023). The community, relying on land and forests for traditional *Jhum* cultivation, faces food insecurity and biodiversity decline due to settlers' occupying land, necessitating the preservation of natural hills, forests, water resources, and biodiversity for survival.

Conclusion

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

Moreover, the health and sanitation should be regularly addressed through outreach programs and community training. Government housing projects should follow traditional house designs, with tube wells set according to ground water levels and sanitary latrines provided to every house. Social Safety Net programs should be provided regardless of ethnic minority or conflict. Solar panels should be provided to all ethnic households at low cost or free, especially for poor households, as electricity is difficult to reach in forests and hills.

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

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Declaration

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

UNDER PEER REVIEW

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