

## Women Empowerment in Rangamati- an Empirical Study on Chakma and Marma Community

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### Abstract

**This study aims to presents a brief description of the Women Empowerment in Rangamati. On the basis of data collected through a field survey as well as from the secondary sources. This study examines whether the presence of women in the income generating activities of a community is a means of empowerment. The survey covered a random sample of 100 households from both the two communities: Chakma and Marma. The findings show that the Chakma and Marma women are seemingly empowered socially and economically through their involvement in various sectors from very earlier. But they are not recognized properly due to our social system and at the same time in comparison to Marma, Chakma women are in better position both socially and economically. So, policy should take by the government to patronize these women so that they can get proper education, training, financing for business and policies for overall upbringing the social positions.**

### Keywords

**Chakma women, Marma women, Women empowerment.**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a densely populated country of South East Asia that has a rich tribal presence. There are about 48 tribes living in different parts of the country. Bangladesh has 2 million tribal people, who differ markedly from bengali majority in terms of language, culture, religion and appearance. Approximately 500000 of these tribe members, from 11 distinct tribes call the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) their home (Fell, 2016). Whatever the population they differ in their social organizations, marital customs, rites and rituals, food and other customs from the people of the rest of the country. Most of the tribal people live in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) areas of Bangladesh and speak in Tibeto-Burman tongues. Women belonging to different indigenous groups once who were lagging behind of development are now advancing themselves like almost the same pace with the mainstream womenfolk of the country.

The country's soothing breeze of women empowerment also touches different ethnic groups in three hilly districts, called as Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women to ensure equal right to women and to make them confident enough to claim their rights. The tribal people are extremely self-reliant. They grow their own food; their girls weave their own cloths and generally the women are the major income source of a Chakma family. Marma also used to this culture. Both Chakma and Marma women are very skillful in making beautiful handicrafts. There is a general perception that the women of ethnic minority communities in CHT enjoy more rights than the women of the plane lands do.

This paper presents a brief description of the women empowerment in Rangamati (Chakma & Marma Communities) on the basis of data collected through a field survey and some secondary sources. The survey covered a random sample of 100 households. For this study we have collected data from the Rangamati Sadar thana only. Beside this, only two groups of tribal people were included in the study population.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recently the concept of empowerment has become a much-talked issue in the context of development for disadvantaged women in society (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010). In the development context, the main obstacles for empowering women as follows: violence against women and gender discrimination (Cornwall and Anyidoho, 2010). Many researchers, scholars, academicians, project workers, and other agencies are doing research on the tribal communities of Bangladesh. Sometimes their struggles and challenging life becomes priority in the reports. In many works it has been seen that different projects have been run with their own interests in mind; therefore, there is no development among these people. In that respect, Smith argues that it is very important to understand tribal peoples in terms of their cultural, economic, political, ethical and historical context (Smith Linda Tuhiwai: 1999:25). Mullah, Parveen & Ahsanullah (2007) show in their study that, in our country the socio-economic status of the tribal people are substantially lower than the general people.

Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women to ensure equal right to women and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as: Freely live with a sense of self respect and dignity, have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace, make their own choices and decisions, have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities, have equal social status & equal rights for social and economic justice, get equal opportunity for education, for employment without any gender bias and get safe and comfortable working environment.

In connection with the definitions of empowerment discussed above, women empowerment means giving power and authority to women (Abdin, 2008). But women empowerment is a multidimensional concept (Muni, 2006). The dimensions of women empowerment are related to the rules and regulations in society to legitimize the voice of women in society (Mosedale, 2005). Power also indicates to a collective action of women assuming that something more can be gained as a group through working together (Mosedale, 2005). This is also about creating opportunities for women to have time together along with other women in order to discuss their current situation, finding out the strengths they have and formulating strategies to achieve positive changes. (Mosedale, 2005).

Study on Agricultural Production Practices at Chittagong Hill Tracts (2016) done by, "Manusher Jonno" shows that, the frequency of independent decision-making practice on both household and agricultural activities of women, irrespective of jum and plough, was quite low. Most possibly, the male dominated social structure was mainly responsible for that. On the other hand, overall women's exclusive share of labor in agricultural activities was noticeably higher in Bandarban than Rangamati and Khagrachari.

Women's role in agriculture should be recognized and their agri-entrepreneurship. In our country the socio-economic status of the tribal people are substantially lower than the general people. All the governmental and nongovernmental organizations working for the tribal people could take the significant steps to improve the above-mentioned status of the concerned people. potentials should be encouraged through policy and intervention supports.

Empowerment is closely related to voice, here voice indicates greater decision-making power within the household and that female workers can protest if there are problems in the workplace (Ahmed, 2004). In addition to voice, women's socio-economic empowerment is related to gender equality, the decrease of all kinds of violence against women (Abdin, 2008), their access to adequate income as a way to achieve long term bargaining capacity at home, in community and at the work place (Mosedale, 2005).

This study is based on the theoretical framework of empowerment. It will also look into ethnicity. The concept of empowerment is extremely pertinent to the study as it will be attempting to explore whether the Chakma and Marma 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 (Chopola, 2009).

Mosedale (2005) states that "Women's empowerment as the process by which women redefine and extend what is possible for them to be and do in situations where they have been restricted, compared to men, from being and doing." To enhance women's possibilities to redefine gender roles, it is necessary to transform the structures of society through the reduction of gender inequality. (Abdin, 2008). This means that women must recognize their strategic needs and their social position (Abdin, 2008). Women's strategic needs are defined as a way to enhance the women's bargaining capacity, reduce violence against women and giving them the opportunity to have more influence on decision making (Abdin, 2008).

The economic empowerment of women involves a sustainable source of income through which they can lead a standard life. And this economic empowerment must ensure their bargaining capacity within the family, in community and at work place (UNIFEM, 2005).

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to identify the Women Empowerment in Rangamati- an empirical study on Chakma and Marma community. The specific objectives are:

- To assess the present socio- economic condition of Chakma and Marma women in Rangamati.
- To measure the women empowerment in Chakma and Marma communities in Rangamati.
- To give some recommendations for initiating a diversified change to the society's mindset towards Chakma and Marma women.

### 4. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The researcher considers the Rangamati District as the study area. All the Chakma and Marma women of Rangamati have been considered as study population. The study is done on the basis of primary data. But different sources of secondary data like articles on CHT people, annual reports of different NGO's working in CHT, national and international reports on tribal people etc. are used for the current research.

#### 4.1 Sampling technique

Sample size is 100 women from both two groups. The data have been collected with the help of a structured questionnaire. Respondent have been chosen by using non probability sampling procedure. For this study convenience technique has been used.

#### 4.2 Data collection procedure

The research information has been collected by using survey method through structured questionnaire. To specify the criteria of empowerment researchers only focus on two perspectives –  
i. *Social perspective* and ii. *Economic perspective*.

We have selected 10 focal points in different locations of the study area. Before providing the questionnaire to the participants we meet together for discussing about topic and method selection. As per decided on the focus group discussion the survey were chosen and provided the questionnaire to

collect information with their consent and available time and space from the research participants. Two focus group discussions with Chakma women and Marma women were conducted in the house of a participant.

### 4.3 Tools used

Researchers also apply their common observation during collecting data. Different statistical tools have been using to find out the answer of research questions such as MS-excel, graph, charts and frequency distribution.

## 5. FINDINGS

### 5.1 Introduction

This paper provides information on social and economic characteristics of the household population and the individual survey respondents. This information is essential for interpretation of survey findings and can provide an appropriate indication of the representativeness of the survey.

Caste/Race is one of the fundamental issues of one's identity in any territory. The distribution of the tribal household and household population covered in this survey is shown by caste/race, household characteristics, economic and social involvement, cultural enrichment, educational qualification, health conditions, employment status, marital status, level of income, standard of living, as well as the degree of family decision making capability calculation and observation.

### 5.2 Socio-economic conditions of Chakma and Marma women in Rangamati sadar

Tribal household and population by Out of 100 selected households covering a population of 1055, about 60 percent are Chakma, 40 percent are Marma women lived in the Rangamati. Information on the characteristics of sampled households is also an important issue. The physical characteristics of the households have an important effect on the peoples' environmental exposure to disease and reflect the household's economic conditions.

Description	Chakma			Marma		
	Respondents	Total	Average	Respondents	Total	Average
1. Tribal household and population by race; Household-	50	60	83.33%	28	40	70%
No household-	10		16.67%	12		30%
2. What is their household characteristic;						
Using electricity-	45	60	75%	28	40	70%
Source of drinking water facilities-	48		80%	32		80%
Sanitation facilities-	51		85%	32		80%
3. Household cultivable land and ownership-	31	60	51.67%	20	40	50%
4. Languages;						
Facing problems in education-	12	60	20%	10	40	25%
Facing problems in society-	10		16.67%	5		12.5%
5. Rate of political pressure from community-	15	60	25%	12	40	30%
6. Who is the decision maker in family? (Female portion)	50	60	83.33%	33	40	82.5%
7. Is there any training center for women development in Rangamati Sadar?	Only for Government employee & some specialized NGOs			Only for Government employee & some specialized NGOs		

\*(source: researcher's own study, 2018)

**Table-1:** Socio-Economic Conditions of Chakma & Marma women in Rangamati Sadar. (Respondents are the individual woman)

**Table-1:** Socio-economic Conditions of Chakma & Marma women in Rangamati. (Number of Respondents is the individual person). The possession of durable goods is another indicator of a household's socioeconomic level, although these goods may also provide other benefits.

Here, the survey shows that, the overall social as well as economic conditions of Chakma and Marma women in Rangamati is satisfactory in measure. We found that their household position is also good although they have the lacking of household cultivable land. As the literacy rate is gradually increasing by Government's direct Governance towards the improvements of tribal women the present conditions are at the improving rate.

They are found having a very little problem with the common language to communicate, especially those who live in the town areas. It is found that there are no significant problems in electricity, sanitation and availability of drinking water, though for many areas collection of safe drinking water is very tough but sources are available. There is significant political pressure exit in the communities especially in the rural areas. As summary we observe that women empowerment in Rangamati is at satisfactory level which signs that in maximum cases the family decision is headed by the women. The study also found the unfortunate fact that there are no sufficient training institutions for the training and development of these tribal women.

Age	Chakma				Marma			
	No education	Up to Primary	Up to Secondary	Higher Secondary	No. education	Up to Primary	Up to Secondary	Higher Secondary
0 – 15		83%				78%		
16 – 30			38%				40%	
31 – 45				28%				29%

\*(Source: researcher's own study, 2018)

**Table-2:** Educational background of the Respondents based on Age group

**Table -2** Shows the educational background of the respondents from two communities. Here, we have found that the primary education level gives satisfactory results although they start to go to school later than that of the Bengali child. But the rate is decreasing as it forwards to secondary and higher secondary to the upper level in both the two communities.

Education has become more widespread over time in the study area. This is apparent from the differences in the levels of educational attainment by age groups. A percentage of Chakma and Marma women have never attended school in each younger age group and in the oldest age groups of women are declined.

Category	Chakma	Marma
Employed	55%	52.5%
Unemployed	45%	47.5%

\*(source: researcher's own study, 2018)

**Table-3:** Employment Status of the Respondents

**Table -3** Shows the employment status of the respondents. Here shows that the Chakma women are in the better position than that of the Marma women. In our study area we found that in the town area, maximum family have shifted for their, children's study and employment purposes.

Average income by individual women	Chakma			Marma		
	0 – 3000	3000 – 6000	6000+	0 – 3000	3000 – 6000	6000+
urban side			80%			60%
rural sides		20%		40%		

\*(source: researcher's own study, 2018)

**Table-4:** Income level of the Respondents

**Table-4** shows the income level of the respondents, where found that the percentage of higher income level is belongs to the Chakma women.

**Table-5** shows the occupation categories of Chakma and Marma Women in Rangamati. Here from the study with the top-level job to the lower level job position the percentage of women involvement is in the average position. As the gradual decreasing tendency of literacy rate to the higher level the scope of getting higher level job is also decreasing gradually. We found different sectors of income generation for Chakma and Marma women in Rangamati.

Occupation categories	Chakma	Marma
Agriculture	15%	25%
Day labor	-	3%
Fishing	-	1%
Business	10%	7%
Handloom Production	30%	35%
Service holder	25%	19%
Housewife	20%	10%

\*(source: researcher’s own study, 2018)

**Table-5:** Occupation Characteristics of the Respondents

	Chakma			Marma		
	Improved	No Change	Decreased	Improved	No Change	Decreased
Present conditions in comparison to the previous 10 years.	67%	15%	17%	60%	20%	20%

\*(source: researcher’s own study, 2018)

**Table-6:** Change pattern of Social status from previous 10 years

**Table-6** Shows the change pattern of social status of Chakma and Marma women in Rangamati from previous 10 years to the present time. We found that, there is positive changes occurred although the changes are not so much faster. And it is also showing that, Chakma women are in the better position.

Criteria	Chakma	Marma
Dress	pinon khadi	Thami& Lungi
Food habit	Vegetables & fish	Vegetables & fish
Religion	Buddhist	Buddhist
Festival	Biju is the main traditional festival	Shangrai is the main traditional festival
Culture	maintaining own culture	maintaining their own culture.

\*(source: researcher’s own study, 2018)

**Table-7:** Identical Characteristics of the respondents

**Table -7** shows some identical characteristics of the two respondents’ groups. Their different life styles, different dresses, food habits, cultures are presented here. Which indicates that The Chakma and Marma women are very much careful about their identical culture and traditions.

### 5.3 Recommendations for enhancing the empowerment of tribal women

Social empowerment creates an enabling environment through adopting various policies and programs for the development of women, besides providing them easy and equal access to all the basic minimum services.

There are some recommendations for enhancing the true empowerment of tribal women in CHT based on the studied population (Women of Chakma and Marma Communities live in Rangamati).

1. Due to the geographical condition, the communication system of CHT areas is not smooth. To address this problem and bolster socio-economic development, target-based communication systems among individuals, groups and areas need to be established.
2. Expansion of agricultural and non-agricultural activities will help to bring back the poor people of CHT to the mainstream economic activities. Programs for overall development of CHT will inspire the industrious women to participate in the economic activities.
3. With a view to include the children of the CHT region in the overall socio-economic development agenda of the country, the expansion of primary and technical education has been given priority. Education for girl in CHT, training of income generating activities for the unemployed people, seminar and workshop on poverty reduction, development of environment and agriculture, social development, gender, rural education, health, nutrition, rural economy and management will help to develop women.
4. Establish small and cottage industrial park for the women of CHT particularly for those who are living in the remote areas. These will help the women to become economically self-sufficient. By developing the transportation and communication system in CHT there will be the opportunity to improve marketing of products produced particularly by women. Coordination should ensure among the development activities of Government, NGOs and development partners and strengthen development efforts for women’s advancement.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The demography of Chittagong Hill Tracts has changed noticeably from 1790 to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. CHT hosts eleven different indigenous communities with hundreds different sectors. This includes the Chakma, Marma, Santal, Tripura, Chak, Pankho, Mru, Murung, Lushai, Khayang, Gurkha, Assamese, Bawm, Thnachangya and Khumi. (Wikipedia).

In terms of religious backgrounds, in Rangamati the highest number of indigenous peoples are Buddhist making up 53.83% of the population, followed by Muslim at 39.28%, Hindu at 5.62%, Christian at 1.12% and others 0.15%. (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org.com>).

Despite the bondage of religion, elements of primitiveness are strongly displayed in their rites, rituals and everyday life. Most of the tribal families are matriarchal. The women-folk are more hard-working than the males and they are the main productive forces.

The Chakma people (also called Changma) are the largest ethnic group in Bangladesh. The Chakma language belongs to the Indo-European family of languages and has close link with pali, assames and Bengali. They have perhaps proved to be the most adaptive and innovative of all the indigenous people of Bangladesh. By nature, most Chakma are down-to-earth and socially shy, but nevertheless romantic, although they seldom admit it. They are very skillful in making beautiful handicrafts. Most of the tribal people are generally peace-loving, honest and hospitable.

The word 'Marma' originates from the Burmese word 'Myanma', which means 'Burmese nationals' and is pronounced as Marma by the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Marmas are divided into several clans. Each clan is named after the place from where it migrated. The material culture of Marma society includes many basic tools and weapons of primitive societies. Commonly the house of Marma people are made of bamboo, wild grass and straw.

Tribal women are found more involved in the income generating activities than that of the other women forces of the country. Traditionally the women were involved in local agriculture (Jhum Cultivation) and weaving for maintaining family income, but now it is expanded largely by the expansion of education. Now they are found to do the agri-business activities, fishing, farming, cultivation, teaching, servicing like nursing, medical officer, garments worker and many other official works are done by the tribal women today. They rear their child as well as they facilitate the family needs at the same time.

But they have to face many problems from the communities in case of going outside the home and doing work outside. It is also very surprising to here that, being the major income source of a family, a tribe woman has to face structural violence and ignorance from their male members in many cases. We found that their household position is also good although they have the lacking of household cultivable land. As the literacy rate is gradually increasing by Government's direct Governance towards the improvements of tribal women the present conditions are at the improving rate. There occurred many positive changes in previous 10 years, although the changes were not so much faster. And it is also showing that, Chakma women are in the better position.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Generally, there are many factors which affect the empowerment. This paper only emphasis on two factors –social and economic conditions to measure the empowerment status of the specific groups, although there are also many status representative factors. Current study selects sample size on the basis non probability sample so that the founded result cannot show the represent the aggregate result. Although there are 11 different tribal community lives in CHT but we only studies on 2 groups, Chakma and Marma. The sample size is 100, the number of respondents is not enough to draw any conclusion in general.

## SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Rather than social and economic condition analysis the cultural and religious life of the particular groups can be analyzed in further research. Where the study area of current study is limited on CHT, the scope of studying all over the Bangladesh has been left on the particular group.

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