

THE KHASIS OF BANGLADESH

A socio-economic survey of the Khasi people



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SEHD

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A socio-economic survey of the Khasi people of Bangladesh. Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) conducted the survey in cooperation with Greater Sylhet Indigenous Peoples' Forum (GSIPF)



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Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) is a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing public understanding on issues concerning environment, development, ethnicity, multilateral development banks (MDBs), globalization, and human rights. Founded in 1993, the organization has significantly researched and reported on forests, ethnic communities, human rights and contemporary environmental issues in Bangladesh. It has published a number of books, survey reports, monographs, other materials and produced documentary films. **The Khasis of Bangladesh** is a socio-economic survey report on the matrilineal Khasi people who are concentrated in the Northeast of the country.

Price: Tk.150 US\$5

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Preface

The Khasis are a matrilineal indigenous people of Bangladesh, concentrated in 11 Upazilas in the Northeast of the country. They are unique with their betel-leaf-centered economy and social norms. They are a quite known people in their part of the country particularly for their betel leaf (pan) cultivation. However, like most other ethnic communities, baseline information about the Khasis is hard to find. Confusion starts with the size of their population. Different sources mention different figures about their number and some are obviously misleading. Clear information about their socio-economic condition is also difficult to find. It is generally perceived that the government census and other government documents containing information about the ethnic communities are flawed. However, efforts to generate objective information are very limited.

It is in this context that the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) designed this survey in cooperation with the Greater Sylhet Indigenous Peoples Forum (GSIPF), a coalition of the ethnic communities [Khasis, Monipuris, Tripuris, Hajongs and tea communities]. Both SEHD and GSIPF are committed to increasing public understanding and visibility of the indigenous communities of Bangladesh. One effective way to increase such visibility is to generate baseline information and human communication among communities.

The SEHD survey on the Khasis is the third of its kind. SEHD finds such surveys extremely valuable to generate and offer concrete data and insights about a people or an issue. However, this survey was a difficult choice for SEHD. First, the 85 punjis or Khasi villages were found scattered throughout a vast area. Besides, 100% punjis could not be surveyed. As the survey was coming to a close, we also came to know about a people called Lyngams in Kalmakanda Upazila in Netrokona District, who associate themselves with the Khasi identity. Although household survey of the Lyngams could not be performed, a report made out of a field visit, provides useful information about them. Despite many limiting factors, the survey offers useful baseline information and insights about the Khasi people, their geography and their socio-economic status.

This survey has been possible with assistance from different individuals and donors. Christian Aid provided significant support. Support from Cordaid and Misereor is also worth mentioning. Those (most of the Khasi youth) who visited the punjis and gathered household data, are the ones who engaged themselves in the most challenging part of the survey. They and the adviser to the survey, Pidison Pradhan Shuchiang, deserve special thanks for their contribution. Tabulation of the report was also a painstaking job. In writing the report, assistance from Dr. Thomas Costa and Anindita Dutta was very helpful. We, remember Brother Jarlath D' Souza's help with gratitude. Prof. Raquib Ahmed indebted us by preparing a map of the Khasi habitation.

Philip Gain
Director

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