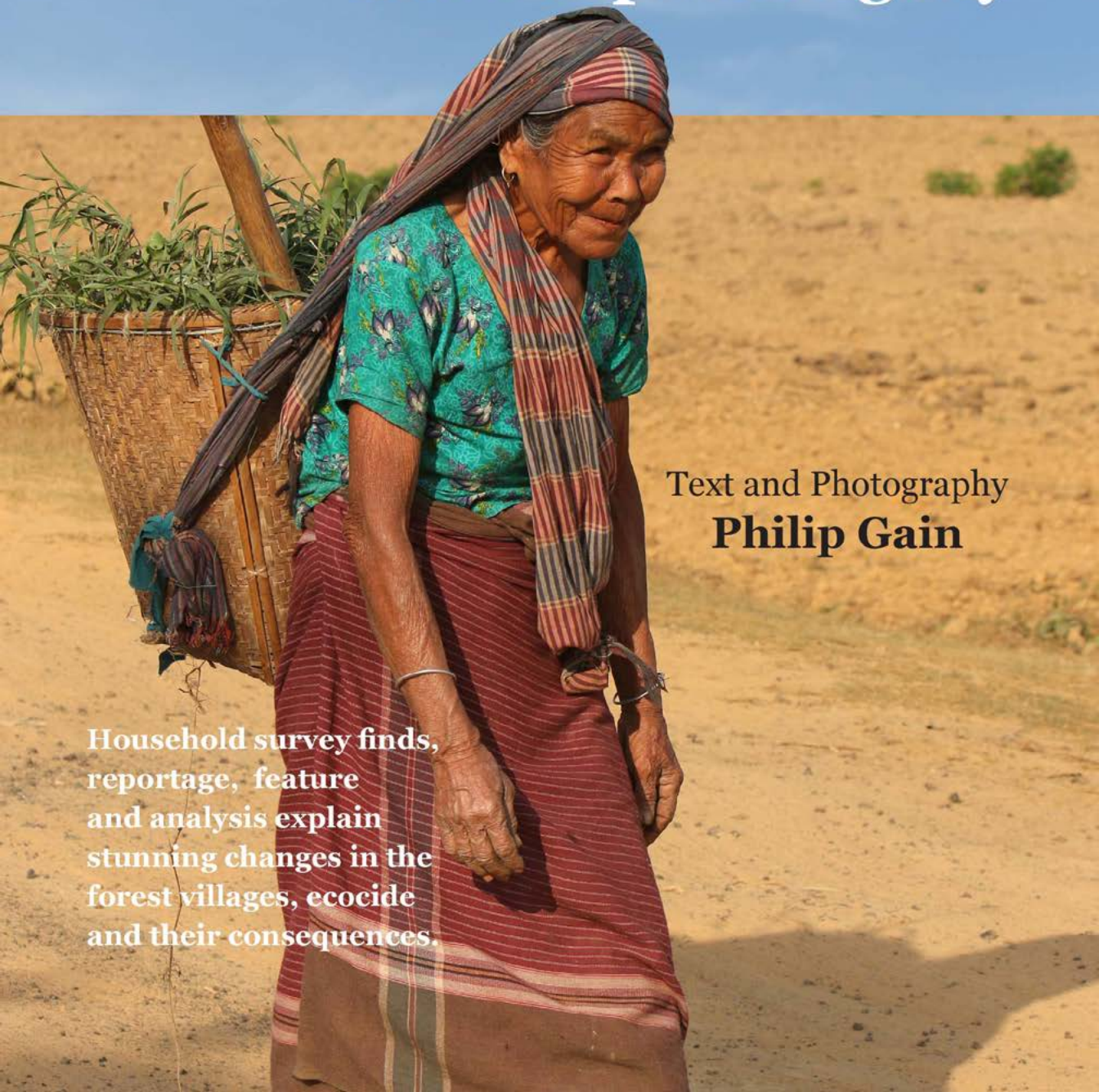


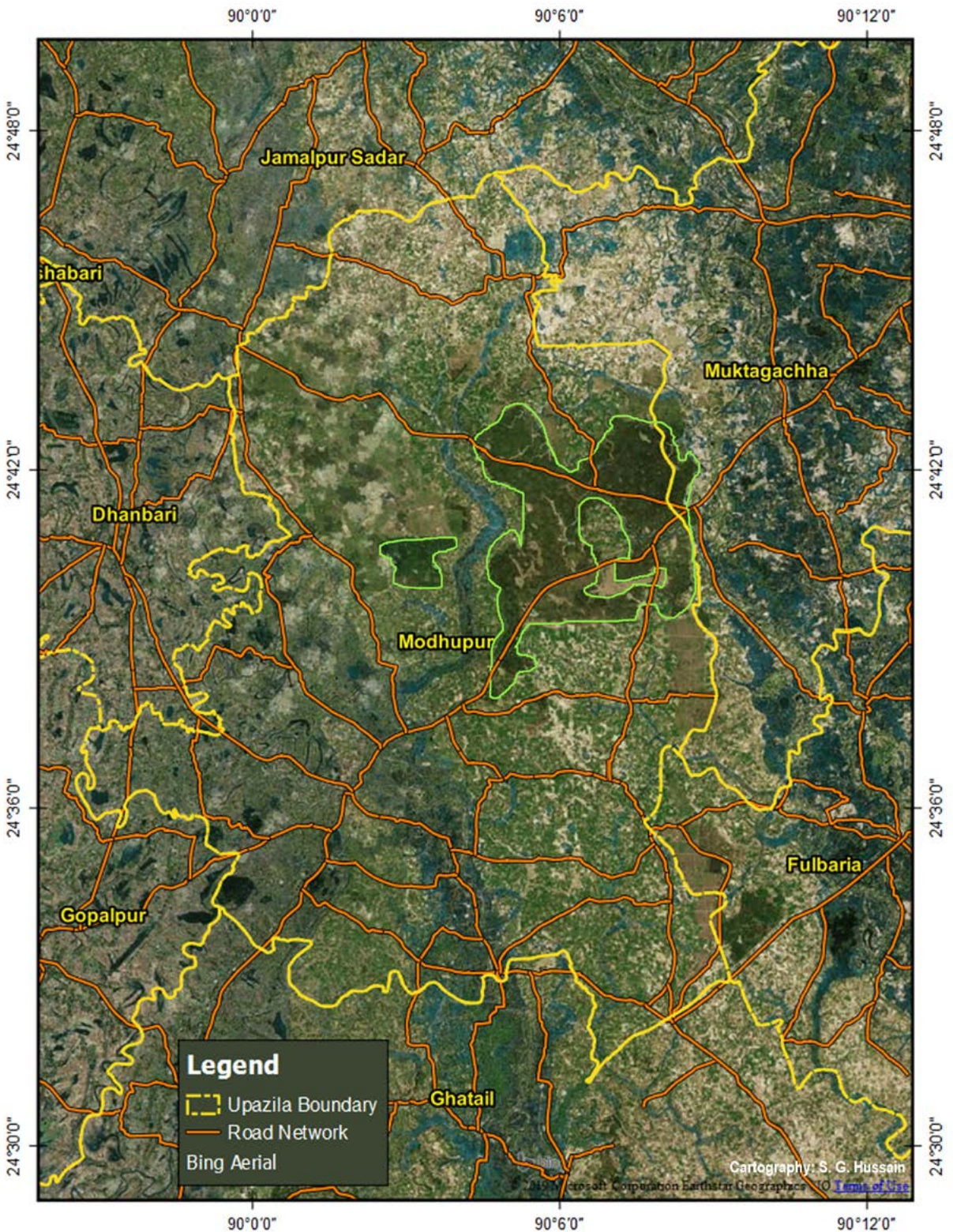
Modhupur

The Vanishing Forest and Her People in Agony

Text and Photography
Philip Gain

Household survey finds,
reportage, feature
and analysis explain
stunning changes in the
forest villages, ecocide
and their consequences.



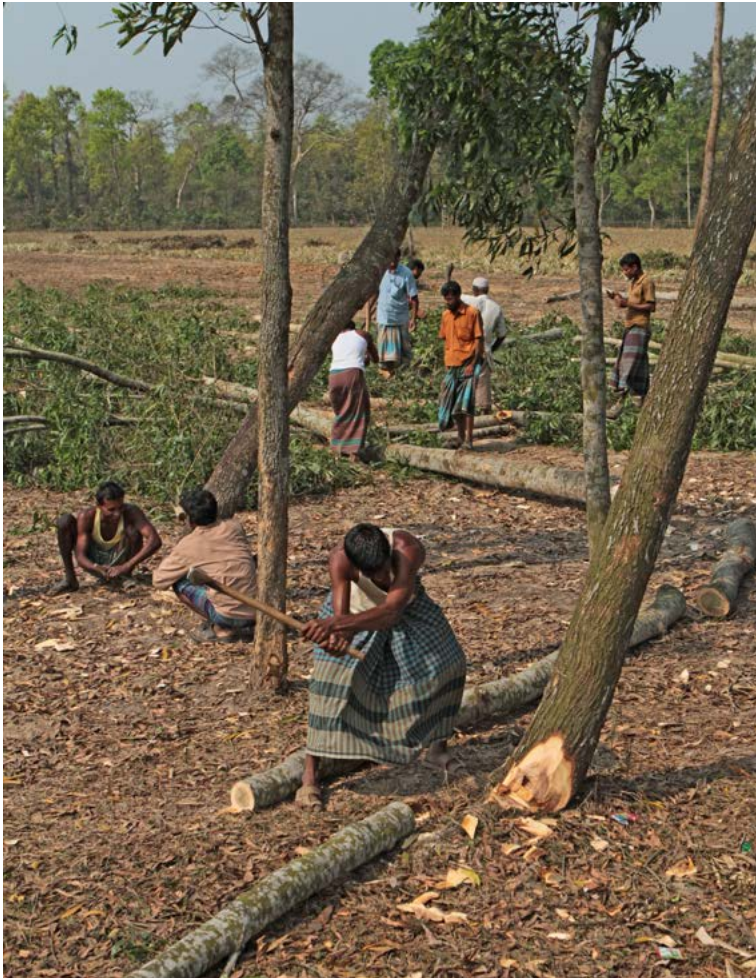


As seen in a recent satellite image, very little of Modhupur sal forest (encircled by green border) survives today.

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Preface

Modhupur *sal* forest, its people and environment have been of deep interest to us in order to study the consequences of changes that have happened particularly from the end of the British rule to date. The changes relate to severe deforestation and its underlying factors, monoculture of exotic species (rubber, acacia and eucalyptus in particular) in place of natural forest patches, migration of Bangalees into the forest villages, spread of Christianity among the Garos who are the first people of the Modhupur forest villages, land tenure, migration of the Garos to cities to work in beauty parlours and to seek other income opportunities, etc.

Understanding the consequences of these changes required us to engage in consistent investigations into rubber plantation since 1987, social forestry or monoculture from the early 1990s, devastation that became inevitable from the beginning of the first rotation of social forestry to date, rapid spread of banana, pineapple, papaya and spice plantations on forest land and private land, etc. At the same time we studied social and cultural life of the Garos in particular. We published a large number of investigative reports and features in national newspapers and magazines. We have also published quite a few books on the devastation that the people of Modhupur forest villages have witnessed. One can refer to books such as *Stolen Forests*, *The Last Forests of Bangladesh*; *Bangladesh: Land, Forest and Forest People*; *Bangladesher Biponno Bon* (Bangla); *Koch of Modhupur*; and *Bon, Bon Binash and Bonobashir Jibon Sangram* (Bangla) published by Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) for detailed information and analysis. Three documentary films—Mandi, Stolen forest and Sylvan Tears (*Aronner Artonad*)—that SEHD has produced are also there to see in motion pictures the devastation on the forest land.

In this book we have included fresh investigative reports and features that were not included in the above-mentioned publications. Fresh analyses have also been included in this book that explain the society and psyche of the Garo and Koch in particular. From all these one can possibly understand the underlying factors that have led to unprecedented changes and ecocide evident everywhere in Modhupur.

But what is most significant part of this book is the report of a household survey of 44 villages in Modhupur carried out in 2017-2018. All households, 11,048 with a population of 47,033, of which 35.39% are Garos and 64.61% Bangalees in these villages have been surveyed. SEHD did a separate survey of all Koch households in Modhupur back in 2012 and found 2,693 Koch people in 23 villages within 44 villages under the current survey.

The findings of the survey have produced baseline data on ethnic composition, religions, land possession and ownership, land use, habitation and housing, education, occupations and demography of what used to be forest villages. In support and defense of our findings we have used photos, satellite images and maps. We had been looking for an opportunity to carry out such a survey, which we got in a multi-year project supported by the European Union and ICCO COOPERATION. We remain thankful and grateful to them. The people of the Modhupur—Garos and Bangalees—welcomed us to carry out the survey. We trained

a group of 31 people, most of them young and Garo (boys and girls), in several sessions. We found them so cool and disciplined. They spent months visiting door to door patiently gathering information from households and attended numerous discussions and validation workshops. We are indebted to them.

One critical and the last section of this book compiles reportage and features that required lots of investigation and field work. Probin Chisim, Rabiullah, Sylvester Tudu and Sanjoy Kairi, SEHD workers, ran in every direction from Forest Court in Tangail, forest offices and remote villages to gather and check information. My other colleagues who have supervised training and field surveyors include Syeda Amirun Nuzhat, project coordinator and Rownok Jahan, research and documentation officer.

The former and present government officials who assisted us with advice, information and interviews are Md. Yunus Ali, former Chief Conservator of Forest (CCF); Ramendranath Biswas, UNO, Modhupur; M.A. Hasan, ACF; Abu Yousuf (ACF apprentice); and many other officials in the Forest Department and office clerks in Forest Court in Tangail. We thank them for their kind support.

Eugin Nokrek, Shulekha Mrong and Ajoy A. Mree, local Garo leaders, have been present in almost all of our training sessions, consultations and the validation workshop. During the survey, they remained in constant touch with us. Whenever there was a hint of trouble and misunderstanding about the survey, they ran there and made it possible for us to complete our mission with the survey. Others in Modhupur who remained very cooperative so that we could achieve our objectives with the survey include Martin Mree, Mebul Daru, Zoynal Abedin, Apurba Mrong, Arabindu Nokrek, Nere Norbert Dalbot, Michael Nokrek, Piu Philomina Mrong, Jastina Nokrek, Abraham Rema, Maloti Nokrek, Utpal Nokrek, and many more. They advised, assisted, amused and entertained us in the field and in their houses. We are grateful to them for their assistance, participation and hospitality.

Organizations such as Jayenshahi Adibashi Samaj Kallyan Shangstha (JASKS), Achik Michik Society (AMS), Abima Cultural Development Forum (ACDF), Caritas Bangladesh, Jalchhatra Catholic Mission and Pirgachha Catholic Mission, that work among the people of Modhupur have assisted us with tips, information and advice. They deserve special thanks.

In the production of the book, Prosad Sarker and Md. Mozharul Haque have tirelessly worked in setting up pages, organizing photos and printing. Babul Kumar Boiragi and Borsha Chiran have assisted the survey team in the field and the production team in the office. Many thanks to them. Rabiullah, Sabrina Miti Gain and Antara Zaima Rahim patiently read the texts of the book and their editorial assistance was very helpful. We are very thankful to Dr. S. G. Hussain, a cartographer for preparing maps used in pages i, 109 and 144.

We trust that the people of Modhupur and elsewhere will find background on Modhupur *sal* forest, analyses and the findings from the household survey useful. The ultimate aim of this publication is that the people and environment of Modhupur forest villages are better protected.

Philip Gain

Abbreviations

ACF	Assistant Conservator of Forest
ADB	Asian Development Bank
BFIDC	Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation
BTRC	Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCF	Chief Conservator of Forest
CS	Cadastral Survey
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DFO	Divisional Forest Officer
EU	European Union
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
FD	Forest Department
FRI	Forest Research Institute
FSP	Forestry Sector Project
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
MoEF	Ministry of Environment and Forest
NGO	Non-government Organization
RoR	Record of Rights
SEHD	Society for Environment and Human Development
TANDP	Thana Afforestation and Nursery Development Project
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer
WHO	World Health Organization

At A Glance: Modhupur Upazila, Its People and Forest

Size of Modhupur upazila: 91,545.131 acres (370.47 sq. km)

Unions of Modhupur (11): Golabari, Mirjabari, Alokdia, Mohishmara, Aronkhola, Sholakuri, Fulbagchala, Beribaid, Kuralia, Kuragachha and Aushnara

Number of Mouzas: 131

Number of villages: 266

Population: 296,729 (2011 census)

Garo population: 17,327 (SEHD survey 2018)

Koch and Barmon population: 3,427 (SEHD survey 2012)

Size of forest land: 45,565.18 acres

Current estimated forest cover: 9,000 acres

Reserved forest: 11,671.21 acres

Forest land announced under sections 4 & 6: 33,893.97 acres

Modhupur National Park: 20,837.23 acres

Rubber plantation in Modhupur forest: 7,800 acres

Social forestry (estimated): 5,000 acres

Four ranges and 10 beats in Modhupur forest: (1) Jatiyo Uddan Sadar Range—Jatiyo Uddan Sadar Beat, Rajbari Beat, Gachhabari Beat, Beribaid Beat and Lohoria Beat (2) Dokhola Range—Dokhola Sadar Beat and Chandpur Beat (3) Aronkhola Range—Aronkhola Sadar Beat (4) Modhupur Range—Charaljani Beat and Mohishmara Beat

Number of Mosques: 624

Number of churches: 55 (government website). 65-70 (independent sources)

Number of Christian missions: two (both are Catholic)

Forest, Garos and Koch in upazilas neighbouring to Modhupur

Forest land in Tangail District: 122,876.90 acres

Forest land in Muktagachha and Fulbaria upazilas in Mymensingh District (bordering Modhupur forest): 14,167.48 acres

Garo population in Muktagachha, Fulbaria and Jamalpur Sadar upazilas: 1,963 (486 households (SEHD inventory 2018)

Koch and Barmon population in Muktagachha and Fulbaria upazilas: 517 (128 HHs) (SEHD inventory 2018)

Sources: Government website (modhupur.tangail.gov.bd/), Forest Department of Bangladesh, SEHD survey 2012 and 2017-2018 and independent sources.

Modhupur

The Vanishing Forest and Her People in Agony

Modhupur, one of 12 upazilas in Tangail district is well known for its *sal* forest and the Garo and Koch people. Modhupur *sal* forest, officially 45,565.18 acres in Tangail, was dense forest under the zamindari of Maharaj of Natore during the British rule. The Garos in particular were used to living in the deep jungle of Modhupur. But today Modhupur *sal* forest remains only in its name. The forest, along with its wildlife, has vanished in most part. Commercial scale banana, pineapple and spice plantations have crept on the forest land. Rubber plantation and social forestry, better say monoculture plantations, beginning in the mid-1980s were intended to do public good but in reality they have caused irreparable damage to the forest and environment.

To put the story of the Modhupur *sal* forest in right context, this book compiles findings of a baseline survey carried out in 2017-2018, reportage, features and photographs from early 1990s. The survey in 44 core forest villages show that the Garos, an exclusive people of the Modhupur *sal* forest from the Mughal times, constitutes 33.47% of the population by 2018. The most appalling of all that has happened with the end of the British colonial rule and end of the zamindari system is that the state has denied the people of the forest villages of their land rights. Now there is nothing more important for the people of the Modhupur forest villages to press for than for the right to land.



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গ্রাম বিকাশ কেন্দ্র
GRAM BIKASH KENDRA



COOPERATION