

Paradigm of Better-life: Re-conceptualizing Development among the Pahari of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh

Nasir Uddin*

Introduction

Development is popularly perceived as economic development taking consideration into account various numerical parameters such as per capita income and national Gross Domestic Products (GDP) etc. Some liberal, and radical, economists (for example, Sen, 1980) refer to development relating to certain degree of historical, geo-political and socio-cultural aspects of the society. Anthropology also entertains a lively debate on measuring development from formalist and substantivist approaches. Formalists (Dalton, 1969; Smith, 1983; Salisbury 1983) believe in the universal model of development largely similar to the development theory of classical economists and, on the contrary, substantivists (Polanyi, 1944; Polanyi, et. al. 1958) argue that development is indeed contextual and locally specified. According to the later school, development is a relative phenomenon which is locally defined and re-defined amidst everyday experiences of the people concerned. This paper is figured out within the framework of substantivist approach of development with the specific reference to the inhabitants of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, known as Pahari¹ (hill-people), of Bangladesh.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (hereafter CHT), a distinguishing geo-ecological territory located in the southeastern part of Bangladesh, is surrounded by three international borders of India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. Historical evidences

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¹ The people, except Bengalis, living in the CHT are generally addressed with various terminologies, such as "Pahari" (hill-men), "adivasi" (aboriginals or early people of the region), "tribal people", "ethnic group", and "indigenous people" etc. There are considerable debates about these terminologies. In order to avoid this terminological dispute, I use "Pahari" to denote the established perception in Bangladesh regarding the CHT people. Besides, the people living in the CHT also tend to identify themselves as Pahari.

(Buchanan 1798 [Schendel, 1992]; Lewin 1869; Hutchinson 1909 etc) have shown that the Pahari people were the earliest who migrated to the CHT from the neighboring regions of Indian and Myanmar. However, from the intrusion of British (1860), Pakistan (1947) and Bangladesh (1971), the Pahari people gradually became marginalized in terms of economic development, and socio-political positioning in Bangladesh (Uddin, 2005). As per official record, eleven² ethnic groups, excluding Bengalis, with significant cultural diversity inhabit the region who are collectively known as Pahari. The Pahari are minority in terms of demography, religion, and ethnicity within the state boundary of Bangladesh. The interethnic relations between Bengalis and the Pahari through the practice of unequal power and positions over the years pushed them to the margin of the state (Karim 1998). On the other hand, a few Pahari ethnic groups—namely the Khumi, the Mru, the Kheyang, the Lushai, the Pankhua and the Chak³—have become more marginalized due to the emergence of Pahari elites from among numerically majority Pahari ethnic groups—the Chakma, the Marma, the Tripura, the Tanchangya, and the Bawm. Most members of later groups live in urban areas of the CHT, are educated, involved in diverse professions³ other than *jhum-chash* (swedden cultivation), and engaged in regional politics as well as affiliated to the central political parties of Bangladesh (Uddin, 2008b). These groups of Pahari people are now far from their traditional and customary way of life albeit they maintain a few conventional social rituals. They enjoy an urban life, most political, administrative posts of the CHT and the leadership of Pahari people. On the other hand, the rest groups of Pahari people still lead their lives in the remote areas of the CHT and largely depend on the tradition *jhum-chash* as their means of livelihood. This paper is about one of those Pahari ethnic groups—the Khumi—who live far from the Bandarban town and in remote areas of the CHT. According to the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) Population-Survey in 1991, 1241 Khumi live in Bangladesh; specifically 1150 (92.67%) Khumi live in Bandarban and 91 (07.33%) Khumi live in Rangamati⁴. However, during my fieldwork (from 2005 to 2007 and from 2008 to date), I could not find any Khumi

² Different scholars are of different opinions about the number of ethnic minority groups living in the CHT: for instances, 8 (Lewin 1869; Hutchinson 1909), 10 (Bessaignet 1958; Bernot 1964; Roy 1992; Dewan 1991; Brauns and Löffler 1990), 13 (Mohsin 2002; Mey 1981; Chowdhury, 2004 etc), 16 (Ahsan, 1993). According to official statistics, the number of ethnic communities is 11 (BBS 1992).

³ There are many professional groups one can find among the Chakma, the Marma, and the Tripura such as medical doctors, university professors, lawyers, engineers, politicians, civil servants, business personnel and huge number of students.

⁴ The last population census was conducted in 1991. After 18 years, it is still viewed, and widely referred to, as an authentic source of database of Bangladesh population published by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

living in Rangamati. Now, the Khumi inhabit three *upazila* (sub-district) of Bandarban namely Rowangchhari, Ruma, and Thanchi. As per known statistics as of today, the number of Khumi people living in Bangladesh is near about 2800 (Uddin, 2008a).

Though the Khumi live in the remote areas far off the administrative centers of Bandarban, recently I observed the remarkable physical mobility taking place among them. As such, increasing physical mobility is bringing the Khumi people to the urban center, markets, regional politics, and to the realm of education that help them realize their positioning within both the CHT and the state. Gaining the awareness of self-positioning stimulates them to bring about changes in their way of life. The paper intends to explore these changes what the Khumi people conceptualize as development. The paper argues how transition in everyday life generates critical awareness among the Khumi significant for gaining self-consciousness to conceptualize development in their life. The paper is based on firsthand comprehensive data collected through ethnographic fieldwork undertaken from November 2005 to April 2007 living among the Khumi of the CHT. It is supplemented by the experiences I have been gathering engaging myself on the CHT research since April 2008 to date.

This paper has been organized into two major sections. Beginning section addresses the Khumi-perception of 'better-life', and how they conceptualize 'development' through the experience of contacts with markets, urban areas and Bengalis. Finally in the second section, I will explain with ethnographic details about the factors—mainly growing connection with the market and dissemination of education—working behind the drive of bringing 'better-life' for them.

2. Paradigm of Better-life: Local Perception of Development

During my stay in the field, a Khumi village named Rongeo Para⁵, I observed a general tendency among most villagers to bring about changes in their everyday life adopting some urbanized components in order to, according to their view, lead a *nebu-heina* (a Khumi phrase meaning near about "better life" or a life better than what they currently lead but not necessarily urban life). Through a gradual connection with the urban areas, having increasing number of educated people, watching TV and movies regularly about which I will discuss later, the villagers gain a sense of urban life, what they consider a stage on the way to *nebu-heina*, which they see as contrasted to the hill-life. The villagers conceptualize *nebu-*

⁵ This is a pseudonym of the village that is located in Ruma Upazila of Bandarban District of the CHT.

heina as a local form of what we call “development”. Development in Khumi-understanding is *nebu-heina* or a better-life that involves adopting urbanized components to make their life comfortable in the hills, educate their children and create a safe future for them, bringing occupational mobility, earning cash by selling goods in the market place to purchase clothes, toiletries, entertainment devices, and essential things to facilitate their life and economic activities, *jhum-chash*, in the hills.

I noticed that most villagers tend to lead their life following *shohure* (urban) style because, according to them, they are tired of their life in the hills. This tendency is motivated by a perceived premise “*shohure* life is a *nebu-heina* but Pahari life is not” that is widely found among the villagers. *Shohor* means town or urban area and *shohure* denotes the people who live in *shohor* or town area and lead an urban life. Several times, I noticed a strong lament among most of the villagers for not having a life like *shohure*. “*Pahari life is very hard and laborious whereas the shohure life is comparatively more comfortable*”—is the common grievance the villagers frequently use in their daily conversation out of their hardship in the hills. This sort of inclination, in fact, persuades the villagers to bring about changes in their everyday life. Strikingly, I did not find such strong position among the villagers that discouraged this move of bringing *nebu-heina* to facilitate their life in the hills. Sometimes, many villagers of Rongeo Para asked me “*Why are you here in pahar (hill) living in deep-jungle like ‘wild-life’ leaving all your urban-facilities? If you need to know us and our society and culture, then take someone or two from here to shohor and write down all your required-notes. Using this opportunity, at least one Khumi or two will get chance to live in shohor for time being*”. I questioned on several occasions, “Who told you about the town life and its facilities? How did you get this idea?” What they rapidly, and frequently, responded to was something like, “*We know as we observe when we visit shohor*”. We can, now, argue how the perception of *shohure*-life vs. *pahari*-life dichotomy is established in shaping this category among the villagers and what sort of experiences they gather, and how that help them define, and redefine, ‘development’ in their life.

The villagers hardly visit town areas, Bandarban, because it involves money, time, and speaking ability in Bengali language. Most of them lack all these as they are preoccupied in revolving their lives within the *jhum* (sweden fild) and *para* (village). Only two Khumi students—Peylung Khumi (21, m⁶) and Singlung Khumi (24, m)—, who study in Bandarban Government College (BGC) visit Bandarban town frequently. I found five villagers—Peyang Khumi (55, m), Boire

⁶ Here ‘m’ indicates male. I have used ‘m’ to denote ‘male’ and ‘f’ to mean ‘female’. Subsequently, I put the age in number along with sex so that significance of actor in particular event can be clearly understood.

Khumi (33, m), Koiring Khumi (36, m), Soilo Khumi (42, m) and Now Member (62, m)—regularly visit Bandarban, and even Chittagong town⁷, for various errands and business. Besides, many other villagers of Rongeo Para occasionally visit Bandarban to buy clothes and necessary things unavailable at the local *bazar* (market place), *Paraw bazar*. Besides, a few girls from Rongeo Para are always brought to town by NGO workers and government officials of Tribal Cultural Institute (TCI) with the help of educated Khumi to display “the Khumi culture” in different annual festivals and occasions such as *adibasi mela* (indigenous festival), “world indigenous day”, *upajatio sangskriti utshab* (tribal cultural festival) etc. where they also gathered the experience of *shohure* life and urban facilities from. These frequent and occasional visitors among the Khumi bring the perception of *shohor* and *shohure*-life back to the village, which is much contrasted to their regular course of life in *pahar*. The experience they gather from *shohor*, they share with the villagers and it creates an image of *shohure*-life, which is more comfortable and convenient in comparison to the *pahari*-life. In addition to it, the villagers of Rongeo Para brought TVs and CD players run by battery in the village during the early nineties. Since then they regularly watch TV, and play the CD player to enjoy Bengali drama, news, Bengali and Hindi movies etc. which also provide a wider sense of *shohure* life. This perception among the Khumi establishes a dichotomized images between the *shohure*-life and *pahari*-life where *shohure*-life is more desirable as one way of reaching *nebu-heina*. Therefore, most villagers of Rongeo Para now tend to change their life style by adopting *shohure* components in their *Pahari* life. Two of many determining symptoms of changing daily course of life are taking tea after having meal at lunch and dinner and smoking filter cigarettes⁸. Now, many villagers buy sugar, tea leaves and milk as well as filter cigarettes as part of their daily essentials. Koiso Khumi (29, F), a woman who has passed the SSC examination explained, while talking to me about her experience of *shohure* life, the images constituting *shohure* life as follows, “*We are the Pahari people. Pahari people are like animals such as other wild lives living in the jungle. We have to struggle every moment to survive in the hills. We struggle against nature and wild animals. Is there any life in jungle? However, the shohure people enjoy the real life. They have safe residence, lots of money, electricity, vehicles, road-communication, good-food facilities, medical service, and so on. They have television and many other means of entertainment. We don't have anything yet TV has recently appeared in our lives. We eat what we get. We wear what we can afford. We cannot get what we*

⁷ Chittagong is the second largest city in Bangladesh and is also regarded as the trade city of the country. Visiting Chittagong is always meaningful to the *Pahari* people especially those *Pahari* people whom I have addressed in this article as marginalized *Pahari*.

⁸ Previously, the Khumi used to smoke using a particular kind of tobacco leaves called *churut* they use to produce in *jhum*. However, the Khumi of Rongeo Para now smokes with filter cigarette.

need. We have no means of entertainment. Our life revolves around jhum to para and para to jhum. This is our world. They have the real life. We have 'living' but not 'life'. The shohure people eat to live but we live to eat."

Having this image in mind, the villagers attempt to lead a life like *shohure* people ahead of their *nebu-heina*, by bringing changes in their everyday life though they live in *pahar*. Their desire to lead a comfortable life like *shohure* does not necessarily mean they incline to migrate to urban areas. They cannot bring *shohor*, according to them, to *pahar* but they made their *pahari*-life comfortable by taking elements of *shohure* life. They can break the boundary between *shohor* and *pahar* in terms of standard of living as well as features and facilities of their lives. In this attempt, they are now getting accustomed with taking tea after lunch and dinner, changing their sense of beautification by purchasing cosmetics available in Bandarban town. They now use wristwatch, and wall-clock, to maintain time and schedule. They use beauty soap, shampoo and conditioner regularly. They decorate their entrance room of the house by displaying the packets of soap, which manifests, according to them, their *nebu-heina*.

The villagers of Rongeo Para are bringing modern means of entertainment like the TV, and CD player primarily run by battery but now by using solar energy system provided in installment by NGO, *Grameen Shokti*. To make the fire, they use gas-lighter. They are now getting used to wearing urban clothes. Most villagers now use "jeans-shirt", usually bought from Bandarban, at the time of working in the hills especially during cleaning jungle for preparing *jhum*-field and harvesting time to protect their body from sharp angle. They wear plastic shoes to protect their feet as they walk long way everyday across mountainous areas. They use plastic bottles of Coca Cola/Sprite/Pepsi to bring, and store, water instead of using *tuhdung*⁹. Now, the villagers of Rongeo Para operate rice-mills to mill rice instead of using laborious *goda* (tools of pounding rice for paddy).

By doing all these, the Khumi are trying to bring changes in everyday life to facilitate their living in the hills. In fact, bringing transitions in everyday life is an attempt toward reaching *nebu-heina* for their life in the hills. Not necessarily, all Khumi across villages have the similar tendencies and experiences, there are notable differences among the villagers over the move of bringing *nebu-heina* and hence there are various degrees of transition observed. These differences in the degree of transition unveils the premise that increasing physical mobility and

⁹ *Tuhdung* is a kind of household article (like a pitcher) made of dried pumpkin, which is used to bring water from the valley. Making *Tuhdung* is very complicated and time consuming. Now, they use Coca-Cola/Pepsi/Sprite bottle to bring and store water.

growing contacts with the outer world indeed brings about substantial transition in the lives of those people who have been living in geographically isolated areas for decades, like the Khumi in the CHT.

3. Stimulation for 'Better-Life': The Move towards Development

"*We have also the right of leading a 'better life'. How much longer will we remain Pahari in this jungle?*"-is the motivating spirit that encourages the Khumi to change their mode of life. In fact, Now Khumi (65, m) of Rongeo Para explained to me about their perception of, and eagerness for, better life. Now Khumi is one of the leading figures among the Khumi and is working to make people understand about the paradigm of 'better life'. It is to be mentioned here that Now Khumi was the first one who served as the Khumi-representative in the formal body of local government—Bandarban District Council—during the late eighties, and was the first to become acquainted with Bandarban and *shohure*-life. 'Better-life', according to the Khumi perspective, not necessarily indicates the *shohure*-life. Nor does it imply becoming Bengali either. Nevertheless, leading life like *shohure* is one of the drives towards achieving 'better-life'. 'Better life' involves earning cash-money by selling goods to market place in order to purchase some essential articles to make their life comfortable. 'Better life', according to them, implies a disciplined life following a certain goal of reaching their aspirations and desire of leading a life in peace and prosperity. 'Better life' entails ensuring safe future for their children. "*We have spent our lives in jungle but we don't want our children to spend their lives in the same fashion*" is a common realization that encourages the Khumi to move towards reaching 'better-life'. The sense of 'better-life' influences a lot in bringing transition in the every day life of the Khumi. Broadly, there are couples of interrelated factors working behind emerging the paradigm of 'better life' among the Khumi. These factors are significantly contributing to bring the Khumi gradually, according to them, closer to their aspiration. The move of bringing 'better life' is playing pivotal role in accelerating the transition in everyday life of the Khumi. My observation reveals that two factors significantly function to bring the transition in everyday life— in search of *nebu-heina*—of the Khumi such as connecting with the market and the dissemination of education that have been discussed below.

3.1 Intervention of Market: Invention of New Livelihood Strategies

First, I arrived at the Khumi village—Rongeo Para, which was, later on, selected as my research village—in November 2005. The arrival was scheduled so that I would spend the post-harvesting season among the Khumi when I would expect

to have some free time. According to established *jhum* calendar (Bessaignet, 1958: 16-17)¹⁰, I assumed that *jhum* harvesting and collecting *jhum* goods would be completed. It was a time merely of making baskets and repairing house, and making household goods etc. However, I observed that most villagers remained preoccupied working in their *bagan* (hill-Gardening). In the following month, December, they remained active preparing their *khamar* (river bank-farming). All villagers—male and female—remained busy doing work in either *bagan* or *khamar* without enjoying some leisure times. I found that access to the *bazar* stimulates the villagers to produce surplus and hence villagers gradually invented new livelihood strategies apart from doing *jhum-chash* in an attempt to move to get close to bringing ‘better-life’.

The villagers of Rongeo Para gained access to the local *bazar* and Bandarban town areas in the early seventies when the communication by the river-way started from Bandarban District to Ruma sub-district. Soon after the beginning of river-way transportation along the *Shangu* River, the villagers of Rongeo Para prepared a hilly-path by clearing jungles to reach the river-way. Rongeo Para could create access to the river-way as it was near *Shangu* River. At the initial stage, a kind of small *dingi* (small-boat) run by oars was used for transportation but from the mid-eighties engine-run boats were introduced in the river-way communication in the CHT. Since then, the villagers of Rongeo Para were directly connected with the local *bazar* and even with Bandarban town. Besides, the villagers of Rongeo Para were connected with road-communication during the early eighties when military troops constructed hilly-roads to facilitate their operation against the JSS¹¹ and SB¹². However, the villagers of Rongeo Para hardly used this road because it was not safe and they were often harassed by the military personnel. Furthermore, it took a long time for the villagers of both villages to reach the road walking 3/4 hours across mountainous areas from the village. Now, the villagers use both the river-way and the hilly-road as both systems have introduced modern engine-run boats and vehicles though villagers prefer to use river-way. It is because Rongeo Para has easier access to both the river-way than the hilly-road. Therefore, the villagers usually use the river-way to gain access to the *bazar* as it is convenient and less costly; exactly by river-way

¹⁰ Bessaignet prepared this calendar, which has been used as an authentic reference in many other different books and article (for example, Rafi and Choudhury, 2001:12 etc). It is popularly known as *jhum* Calendar.

¹¹ Jana Samhati Samiti (JSS) or People’s Solidarity Association is a political organization, and a regional political party, of the Pahari people of CHT.

¹² Shanti-Bahini (SB) or Peace-Troop was an armed-wing of JSS which was abolished according to a clause of the CHT Peace Treaty signed in 1997.

35 BDT (0.51 USD) and by road 65 BDT (about 0.94 USD) from the village to Bandarban town. Besides, Bengali small traders also prefer to the river-way for trading and marketing.

Besides being traditional and perennial involvement in *jhum chash*, the Khumi of Rongeo Para generated the systems of *bagan*, *khamar*, livestock rearing and fish-cultivation to cope with the growing demand of essentials in their everyday life as well as for the commercial purpose. This invention, and innovation, has been particularly stimulated by the access to *bazar*. They usually plant various kinds of fruit-trees in *bagan* like mango, orange, banana, jackfruit, guava, papaya, lemon tree etc. Not only does the product of *bagan* meet their need but also it becomes a considerable source of cash, which brings some comfort to their life towards *nebu-heina*. They produce different kinds of spices and vegetables like radish, brinjal, potato, narcotic plant, watermelon, sugarcane, green peas, cabbage, chili, cauliflower etc. in their *khamar*, which cover up their requirement of everyday meals. *Khamar*-goods, to some extent, are also sold in the market place for cash. For example, by selling *bagan*-goods and *khamar*-goods Paiong Khumi (58, m) earned 60,000 BDT (about 870USD) and Pewsai Khumi (49, f) earned 70,000 BDT (1015 USD) in 2006. Other villagers also earned more or less worth 35,000 BDT (508USD) by selling *jhum*-goods, *bagan*-goods and *khamar*-goods.

The Khumi started rearing various livestock—wild-cows, pigs, hens, goats and dogs—in every household in order to maintain their various rituals as well as religious festival. Because presenting hens, slaughtering wild-cows and sacrificing pigs are common means of performing Khumi rituals and religious festival. Besides, various livestock are now sold in the local market. One small cow is sold at the market for about 14000 BDT (212 USD), one big pig is sold for 3000/4000 BDT (about 45/55 USD), one goat is sold for 3000/4000 BDT (about 45/55 USD). Therefore, it becomes a big source of earning cash for the villagers, which not only meets the need of daily commodities but also provides adequate cash to buy necessary articles in the wake of bringing *nebu-heina*. Sometimes, Bengali traders visit the village and buy the livestock. Kamneng Khumi (48, f) was rearing 25 hens in 2006 which she sold in the market. 25 hens were sold at 5000 BTD (about 85USD) which is equivalent to one-month salary of Soilo Khumi, a school teacher of a government primary school. Most importantly, the Khumi have started cultivating fish in *jhiri*¹³ to meet their need of everyday menu of diet. Previously they could not include fish, except dry fish they used to buy, in

¹³ *Jhiri* is a small lake with some storage of water falling down from the hill. In the entire hilly areas of CHT, there are numerous *jhiri* found.

their meal as it takes around two days to go to *bazar*¹⁴ to buy fish and it used to get rotten on the way back to the village. Consequently, fish was hardly included in their daily meal.

Inventing all these sorts of livelihood strategies along with traditional *jhum chash*, the Khumi are becoming economically solvent to lead their life in more comfortable manner though their customary right to land and hill is under serious crisis due to GoB's hegemonic policy and forced intrusion of Bengalis¹⁵. Apart from doing *bagan* and *khamar*, the Khumi are making handicraft, weaving clothing, and bamboo-made showpiece not only for their domestic use but also for selling in the market to earn cash money. In consequence, the Khumi are gradually becoming financially well off to facilitate their everyday life. They are gradually adopting many 'urbanized' components—household goods, clothing, means of entertainment etc—in their everyday life in an attempt to lead 'better life'. However, changes are taking place rapidly in the villages that are directly connected with the market.

In the case of Rongeo Para, in course of bringing their *bagan*-goods and *khamar*-goods to market regularly, they have gradually become connected with urban life, which plays vital role in bringing transition in everyday life of the Khumi. Connection with the market indeed plays meaningful role to generate the perception of 'better-life'. In the process of moving to bring about 'better-life', there have been remarkable changes observed in social network among the Khumi. The mobility, generated based mainly on the intervention of market in the Khumi economy, is gradually converting the subsistence economy of the Khumi into market economy albeit at minimum level and it accelerates their move towards reaching *nebu-heina*.

3.2 Pillar of Development: Dissemination of Education

Increasing awareness towards being educated is another significant symptom observed among the Khumi on the way to bringing *nebu-heina*. I observed a general perception among the Khumi that, 'education is the pillar of all development'. Development does not necessarily mean economic development. Rather, it denotes, according to the Khumi perspective, the improvement of their

¹⁴ Here, *bazar* does not mean *Paraw bazar* that does not sell fish, except some dry fish. Here, *Bazar* denotes the market place located in district and sub-district areas where it takes two days to visit from the Khumi village.

¹⁵ Forest Department of Bangladesh (FDB) Government is gradually acquiring land, which is customarily belonged to the *Pahari*. FDB already acquired a big area of land from the Khumi of Rongeo Para by force. In this way, the land-resources are gradually reducing.

standard of life, reducing their hardship in *jhum chash*, making life comfortable, connecting with the outer world, and generating sensible worldview. The Khumi believe it can only be possible if the new generations of Khumi are educated. They believe in that they, the educated Khumi, can lead their *jatee* (nation) towards bringing a developed-life. *Rholen Khumi* (65, M), who educated his four children—three boys and one girl—explained:

“Education means generating self-consciousness and making aware of own duties and responsibilities towards their own jatee, the Khumi and their samaj (society). An educated Khumi is a lighter for the society. S/he can enlighten the society and her/his jatee. I got this idea from the bitter experience of my own life when I first visited Ruma Bazar¹⁶ thirty years ago. I went there to sell some goods and, with the money, to buy some daily essentials. But, I couldn't understand a simple word of Bengali language and, I, therefore, couldn't deal with the Bengali-people because they couldn't understand me. I could speak but my sound didn't make any sense to them. Though I could sell and buy as per planning, I came back with the lesson of why my children should be educated. I realize if one is not educated—means learning to read, write, and speak Bengali in the context of Bangladesh—,s/he remains blind despite having eyes. S/he is muted despite having speech. Then, I tried to provide the eyes to my children. We, the Khumi jatee, are very poor, simple, and non-educated. We have been living in the jungle based on jhum. However, population is gradually increasing in the one hand and land for jhum is reducing on the other hand. If we can't educate our children, then, who will create the pathway for the next generation? If people will not be educated to create the new sources of livelihood, the Khumi jatee one day will be vanished. Because, I believe that education is the pillar of all advancement and development. If we can make the pillar strong, there will be development, nebu-heina, which is inevitable”.

This sense of educating children is transmitted from person to person, village to village, which has been consolidated by the experience of the Khumi while they visit *bazar* and *shohor* areas. However, percentage of education varies from village to village depending on the access to communication and physical mobility among the villagers. Practically, the process of being educated for the

¹⁶ Ruma is an *upazila* (sub-district) of Bandarban but it is located far away from Bandarban town. It takes about whole day to arrive at Ruma. There is a periodical *Bazar* on every Friday in Ruma in front to sub-district office. Since this is a regular event happened in Ruma, it gradually turned into named after Ruma *bazar*. The nearest Khumi Para is far away from this *bazar*. It takes one whole day to arrive in *bazar*. The Khumi usually, start for *bazar* day (Thursday) before the Friday and they leave *bazar* day (Saturday) after *bazar*. They stay one day and two nights in Ruma *bazar*. Finally, it takes around three days for the Khumi to attend any *bazar*.

Khumi is very tough and complicated. One reason is that GoB has not adopted any separate curriculum for the Pahari who are of quite different languages and cultural background. All Pahari, therefore, have to be educated under GoB national educational curriculum, which is completely designed in Bengali, and partly in English, language. Another reason is that the Khumi live in inaccessible areas of the CHT from where it is difficult for the Khumi students to attend classes everyday in school located near town areas. Therefore, the Khumi remained away from the light of education until the UNICEF established the residential schools in Bandarban District in 1978. The school was residential in nature and structure with the system of providing foods and residence for the students enrolled. Two residential schools—the *Ruma Abashik* and the *Mru complex*¹⁷—were located within the range of Khumi *para* but not so near to them for easy access. The Khumi began to be educated in accordance with the national educational curriculum of GoB. The teachers were mostly from the Marma and a few from Bengali. It was really difficult for the Khumi to be educated because they could neither speak Bengali nor Marma¹⁸. Finally, they started studying Bengali in Marma language. They have to attend an examination, which is taken in Bengali language. It is, therefore, almost impossible for the Khumi to pass the examination and students, therefore, remain in the same class for several years. Peyang Khumi (35, M), passed the SSC after three-times failing in the examination, stated, “*It was extremely difficult for me to learn anything in school. I was 8 when I was taken to school. The teacher was speaking in Marma language because we were the students from two ethnic groups, the Mru and the Khumi. I couldn't understand the teacher and the teacher couldn't understand me. It was more interesting that we were dealing with quite a different curriculum, which was written in Bengali. Teachers and students were from different languages but dealing with third language, which was no one's own. Even the teachers couldn't pronounce the Bengali word properly let alone students. Therefore, the lesson, which was for one year, we learnt in three years. It took around 18 years for me to pass the SSC, which was, as curriculum and syllabus, designed for 10 years. I attended three times in the SSC examination but I failed. In fact, it was difficult for me to understand even the question written in Bengali, how it could be possible for me to pass the examination. However, finally I passed with grace-*

¹⁷ UNICEF established three residential schools in Bandarban district to encourage the Pahari people who were living far away from the town areas. The third one is *Thanchi Abashik* (Thanchi Residential).

¹⁸ A few Khumi could speak in Marma language because they learned it in course of interaction in local *bazar* of Bandarban which mostly dominated by Marma along with Bengalis.

number¹⁹ in the fourth time. Obviously, I got third class²⁰ but it was more important for me to pass and the Khumi thought I became an asset for the whole jatee”.

In this process, the Khumi started to go to school but most of them dropped out after one or two years. Now, different local NGOs (Mrochet²¹ etc.) set up primary schools in different Khumi villages but mostly in those villages which are near Bandarban town. For example, the villages of Rawangchhari *upazila* have the schools, as these are comparatively near town areas. However, the different villages of Ruma *upazila* and Thanchi *upazila* do not have any school, even one school within 10 villages, because these villages are located in remote areas of the CHT. These schools are called ‘community primary school’. The teachers are usually recruited from the Khumi. The students can learn at least an elementary level of study living in their own village. They, however, learn Bengali in Khumi language. Finally, one or two Khumi started becoming educated²² and they are placed in the center of encouragement for the next generation of Khumi *jatee* to go to school and be educated. The educated Khumi became the inspiration of the Khumi-*jatee* and the Khumi marked it as ‘the pillar of their development’. The educated Khumi are getting involved in jobs of NGOs, educational program of UNICEF and even government service²³ etc. They are earning cash-money (generally 5000 BTK [73\$] per month) and there has been an occupational mobility observed among the young Khumi. They have been getting connected with the urban areas and started comprehending different connotation of life. They are bringing some modern devices of entertainment, like TV, CD player etc, in the ‘remote’ areas of the Khumi villages. Watching TV program, Bengali and Hindi Movie greatly influences the social fabric of the Khumi and way of maintaining regular course of life. Bringing solar energy system that I mentioned earlier, and electrification by using it, indeed drastically changed the meaning of their life and sense of entertainment. Watching movies, drama, and news regularly, the Khumi became aware of their own positioning and socio-political affairs of the state.

¹⁹ Grace number is an-additional number usually examiner added in special case when student comes very near to get pass marks in particular subjects while in all others subjects the student obtains pass marks.

²⁰ Third class is the lowest grade of passing any examination according to Bangladesh National Curriculum.

²¹ *Mrochet* is a local NGO located in Bandarban basically work on the Mru. However, recently, their activities have been expanded to the Khumi village.

²² ‘Educated’ means at least the SSC pass or SSC fail.

²³ Government service here means getting job in government institutions, for instance Government Primary School. There are two educated Khumi working in government primary school as assistant teachers.

The intervention of modern equipments and entertainment devices is bringing the Khumi society into a new phase with drastic changes in their everyday life. It is strongly influencing their worldview, their velocity of interpretation in social events and the meaning of their existence in their regular course of life. This transformation in their everyday, and collective life, significantly stimulates them to move towards bringing their desired *nebu-heina*, the Khumi brand of development.

4. Conclusion

Through interaction with Bengalis over the years, the Pahari people, like the Khumi, enabled to gain a clear perception of what they perceive as *nebu-heina*. It implies that Pahari life can also be comfortable by adopting necessary features of *shohure* life. They can reduce their hardship of doing *jhum-chash* by using agricultural tools and equipments sold in market places of town areas. They can bring various means of entertainment to enjoy their life in the hills. They can educate their children to make safe future for them and to bring occupational mobility. They can do all these things by producing surplus to earn cash in order to capitalize their desire what they call *nebu-heina*, their brand of development.

One can argue that the Khumi perception of development is also a sort of economic development what classical economists talk about because they, in fact in search of better-life, are producing surplus to make themselves financially well off so that they can change their life which apparently goes with the universal development model of formalist school. However, the conceptualization of development among the Khumi is quite different in its interpretation, praxis, and context. Putting plastic shoes on while they walk through mountainous hill-way to protect their feet is an indication of their development. Wearing jeans-shirt to protect their body from sharp jungle is a notion of their development. Storing water in plastic bottle instead of *tudhung* is a symptom of their brand of development. Enlisting fish in their food-menu is considered a feature of better-life. Educating their children is perceived as the pillar of their development. Reducing hardship in *jhum-chash* by using modern agricultural tools and equipments is understood as development. Using shampoo, taking tea with condensed milk and smoking with filter-cigarette are markers of their developments. Making thing smooth, comfortable, affordable, easier is the notion of development. The list can be longer which is sharply different from the popular perception of development, unlike substantivist model, established among the educated class and academia. In fact, the Khumi re-conceptualize development, what they call *nebu-heina*, from their perspective that is exclusively contextual, socially embedded in and culture specific grounded in the Khumi world.

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