

The Impact of Migration on Marma Tribe Music in Bangladesh



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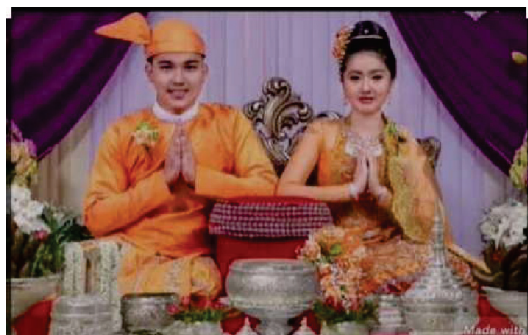
Abstract

This Research paper explores the historical migration of the Marma tribe to the Chittagong hill tracts. Those who migrated from the state of Mrema in Myanmar. King Mong Cha Pru came from Arakan state and migrated to Bangladesh. King displaced individuals began in 1599 AD with 33000 indigenous people. Since then the Marma community has been existing in Bangladesh. The migration, influenced by political shifts, adapted Indian art and culture because of sharing the border color, and continued until the 18th century and persists in modern times. The journal examines the evolution of Marma cultural practices and music following their migration. Initially, the Marma lacked a distinct cultural and musical identity, but over time, a unique folk music genre developed, influenced by neighboring traditions such as Indian and Burmese music. This includes a variety of songs, such as Jya, Pankhung, Kapaya, and Ridu, characterized by both traditional Marma instruments and rhythmic patterns, also influenced by Indian cultural musical forms, historical drama etc. The Marma music's evolution reflects a blend of indigenous creativity and external influences, including modern musical instruments, while retaining its traditional essence.

Keywords: Traditional, Marma tribe, history, Marma music, Migration,

Research Paper

Music plays a significant role in everyday life and has a profound impact on society. Its influence can be seen in various aspects of daily life, from personal experiences to border social dynamics. So far in the world, many ethnic groups have migrated, many people have migrated from one border to another country, in which case we can know at a glance in history, in the dialogue of the subsequent situation of country-partition or political, or dynastic history.



Picture of Marma traditional dress. (self collection)

“There has been a lot of migration from India and Bangladesh, although Bangladesh was then a part of India. Even the population migrating to India is not just one or two, but a large number. Of which the ethnic groups are living in large numbers, the Marma, Chakma, and Tripura are among the most immigrated groups.” (Lewin 28-39) There in this journal I have highlighted the content of migration of Marma people.

The Marma people, an indigenous ethnic group residing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, trace their roots to the Arakan (now Rakhine State in Myanmar). “The history of their migration is deeply intertwined with the socio-political and cultural developments of the region. Beginning in the 16th century, the migration was set in motion during the reign of Arakanese emperors, particularly under the rule of Emperor Mangkhamang,” (Roy 8-11) who appointed Prince Mongchapru as viceroy to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Over time, thousands of Marmas migrated, bringing with them a rich cultural heritage that blended with their new

environment. This journal delves into the multifaceted history of the Marma tribal migration, highlighting the complex interconnections between their original cultural practices and the influences they absorbed post-migration. The Marma community carried forward many traditions, particularly in music, language, dress, and Art, while also adapting to the Indian cultural elements they encountered in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.



Burmese musicians performing at the shwedagon pagoda in 1895 (source – Wikipedia)

“Through their music, we see the evolution from their native prayer, instrumental, and ceremonial music to a hybrid form influenced by Indian epic stage performances such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The journal explores how their traditional instruments, like the Bung and Peh, retained their original forms, even as their music transformed” (Halim 14-31) The Marma language, another cultural pillar, evolved yet remained distinct, shaped by both the linguistic diversity of the region and the community’s historical connections to the Arakan.

In addition to music and language, the journal examines how the migration influenced the Marma's dress, retaining traditional garments while incorporating new designs from Indian stage performances. The Marma's craftsmanship, particularly in bamboo, cane, and wood industries, also played a significant role in their social and economic development, reflecting their adaptability and resourcefulness.

This journal offers a comprehensive view of the Marma migration and the lasting impact it had on their identity, providing insights into how migration shapes the cultural, artistic, and industrial practices of a community.

History of Marma Tribal Migration

“Although the Marma migration to present-day Chittagong Hill Tracts began around the 16th century,

the main migration began during the reign of the 46th Viceroy Mongchapru (Mongchpaying) appointed to the Chittagong Hill Tracts by Arakan Emperor Mangkhamang. It is said that in 1599 AD,” (Hardy 28-39) Arakan Emperor Mangrajagri Bogoh (Pegu) after the fall of Haisawadi kingdom of Emperor Naidabrang, the king's princess Khaimahnang and his prince Mongchapru and 33 thousand defeated soldiers including residents of Pegu state were brought to the kingdom of Mrakou and resettled in a place called Kaladang. “Later Emperor Mangarajagri married Princess Khaimahnang. When Prince Manchapru reached his youth, he married his own daughter. In 1612, when the Arakan Emperor Mangrajagri died, Prince Mangkhamang was anointed.”(Mazid 103-121) Later, in 1614, Emperor Mangkhamang (relative) appointed Mangchapyang to the highlands, and on arrival in the highlands, interested soldiers with relatives resettled at Kaladang from the Haisawadi kingdom were brought to the Pawartya region. This migration process was continuous from the 16th century to the 18th century. This process of migration from one side to the other side, from Bangladesh to Myanmar (Burma) is still present.

Marma tribal migration and music

Since ancient times, ethnic groups have migrated in many different ways, and are still doing so, one thing is clear here, each migration group has migrated with the traditions of their communities, but then the traditions of that community have mixed with the new environment and bloomed separately. After the migration of the Marma tribes, the accompanying culture and some traditions from the Arakan state can be observed, which is influenced by the music of the migration. “I learned from job sources that the histories of Marma tribal music, which may have been limited to published, performed books, radio or magazines at that time, did not allow Marma music to flourish. But, as much as I have seen and heard the performance of Marma tribals, the return of culture can be observed. And it is very important to flourish this culture, for the continuity of this immigrated culture in our next generation – (Maloty Chowdhury)

1. Music 2. Musical instruments 3. The language 4. The dress

Music

Bangladesh was a part of India at the time of migration of Marma tribes. As a result, the partial culture of the Marma tribals was linked to Indian culture. At that time,



stage performances were very popular in the Indian culture in Para or Mohalla. Where "Mahabharata" and "Ramayana" epics were performed. But it is not that the Marma tribes did not have their own music, they had three types of music before their migration—Instrumental music, Prayer music, and Ceremonial music.

Some information about these, music was found before their migration, which later changed the music of Marma tribals due to the influence of Indian culture after the migration. In this basis Kya Shwe Pru Marma said "When I set out on a quest to find my identity, to know myself, I had to explore the Marma language, culture and history. And with that, I discovered Marma traditional music, where I saw the influence of Indian culture strongly. Which is the presence of performance of Ramayana and Mahabharata" (Kya Shwe Pru Marma).

"As formal music we can say the songs sung in Marma community festivals, there are total 4 festivals in Marma community among which the main festival is "Shangrai Festival" where the songs are so popular that due to its popularity it has taken a separate place as the festival identity of Marma tribals."(Rehman 89-105) "Culture, Primary Livelihood, and Social Structure of the Marma Community: Like other indigenous or ethnic communities, the Marmas celebrate various traditional festivals on occasions such as birth, death, marriage, and the New Year. Among their significant festivals and ceremonies are: Buddha Purnima (celebrating the birth, enlightenment, and death of Gautama Buddha on the same day), Kothin Chibor Dan (offering robes to monks during the three months of the rainy season), Prabarana Purnima (a festival where sky lanterns are released as offerings to the celestial deities to mark Buddha's remembrance and knowledge), Sangrai (New Year celebrations), and so on. The Marmas are a patriarchal community. In their social structure, men receive inheritance as heirs, while women inherit property only to the extent of fulfilling maternal responsibilities (Kya Bu Hre Marma).

Influenced by the Indian cultural movement, It took a unique turn in tribal music. At that time the journey of Ramayana Mahabharata was so popular in the villages, that time Marma was inspired to start writing and performing songs describing small sagas of Mahabharata and Ramayana in their own language. Here the Marma's who were initially influenced by the epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana started writing songs in their language. Then, the melody of the song connects them to the prayer music.

However, in this case, the presence of a familiar poetic melody in the Ramayan Mahabharata jatrapala was not present in the Marma language songs. They wrote the songs influenced by the Indian Jatrapalas, but the tunes were composed in Marma language, expressed in a slightly different melodious tone. While Indian classical music is not complete, its successors are not complete either. It can be said that the melody in the songs is mixed. At the time of the spread of Indian classical music, the new origin of Marma tribal music was on the one hand questionable, on the other hand a multidimensional expression of new creativity.

It is said that the song Marma tribals created under the influence of Ramayan mahabharat Yatrapala is named "Jya".

"This genre of music called "jya" consisted of singing, dancing, acting and musical instruments. Basically, it is a lyrical drama. The presence of four such arts in stage performances at that time is an example of sheer creativity. Also the Marma's have many types of songs, in which the "jya" style of song is a remarkable art form, and there are also Kapyra, Pankhung, Shanggyawaing, Lungdi, Saqkroing, and Riduq." (Serajuddin 66-71)

All these songs were composed by the Marma community after the migration, with mixed melodies, poetic meaning in the Marma language, and the theory of prayer mantras. Their music has seen melodic innovation after immigration but the emotional aspects of the music from their roots have not been lost. Such as linguistic aspects with music, and the presence of poetics.

Musical Instruments

In this case, the use of musical instruments or musical instruments from the roots of the Marma tribals has not changed, they still use the musical instruments that they used before their migration. The musical instruments are:

1. **Bung:** This small drum made by Marmaras is called Bung by Marmaras. They are about 10 inches long and 7 inches wide. Marmaras play this instrument along with other musical instruments on any occasion. Marma artisans make these bungs from wood and animal skins.
2. **Peh:** This musical instrument is bigger in shape than Bung. They are a type of drum. Usually the peh is two feet long and one foot wide. Marma players beat the drum in this peh with sticks instead of hands.

3. **Triu-choi:** Triu-choi is one of the traditional musical instruments of the Marmas. They are made of wood and bronze. 15-20 wires are attached to a round disc of wood. Two wooden sticks are used to tune such instruments.

“The role of musical instruments in music is very important, the musical instruments from traditional aspects make the evaluation of history heavier and more important. Similarly, the musical instruments of the Marma tribals have expressed their culture for ages. Musical instruments that need to be properly stored and properly performed. – (Somenjit Chakraborty)



*Marma music instruments
(source- Marma music organisations)*

4. **Khre Khrong:** These are made from bamboo strips. Usually, 4-5 inches long. The middle part of the thin bamboo leaf is cut on both sides leaving a narrow thin part. The outer layer of the thin layer is continuous. These should be played with mouth breathing. It produces extremely sweet and mellow tones.

5. **Hee:** These are a type of flute. Much like a clarinet. But the inflated area is smaller in size. The kalki-like chin of the other part hangs below the hui. They oscillate slightly when played, resulting in melodic resonance.

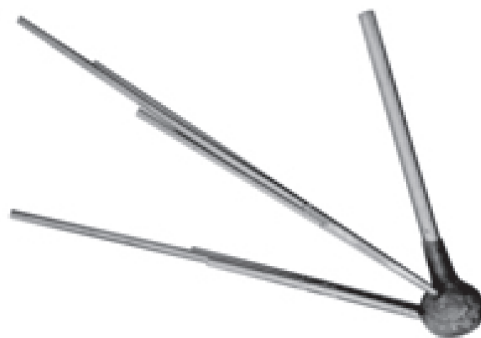
6. **Dungkhlong:** To make these, large bamboo sticks are cut from both ends and at the end of the stick, the inside of the bamboo is cut up to the shell. The tone or sound of this instrument will depend on the cutting of the blade. They are played with two sticks in both hands.

7. **Tungkhong:** These are similar to Dungkhlong, but it is made of trees. The tree is hollowed out with a bottle to make the bamboo shell part. Its sound depends on the size of the shell. And it was used in war in their early days as a signal of danger.

8. **Lak Khoo/ Walak Khowa:** These are made of large bamboo. Usually, 3-4 feet tall. The larger the part of the bamboo shell, the louder it will be. It has to be played with the lips.



Marma dholok (source- banglapedia)



Marma Flute (source- Banglapedia)

9. **Paiktalah / Vaikhraik:** This musical instrument is made of dry bamboo sticks. These folds vary in size from one to the other. The tree planks are placed in such a way that its sound is unlike any other.

10. **Saengjuwe:** These are made of brass, like the head of a cow with horns. is hung through the middle part. The horn-like parts are played with sticks.

11. **Jorrong:** These are a type of musical instrument made of brass. As big as a plate. The interior is open. They are made of two halves of a shell and two brans tied in the center with a strong thread to make it handy to hold. Two hands are played facing each other. These Instruments are not only disappearing day by day, day by day the identity of these instruments is lost. The Marma artist said about Marma traditional musical instrument.

The above mentioned names of instruments have been taken from Khuddra Nri Goshti Porichoy. (Mazid103-121)

"All these instruments are the wealth, identity, and emotion of our Marma tribals. These instruments are now almost lost, interest in instrumental music has waned as instrumentalists have also lost their education. Preserving this resource is not only a necessity, it has become a duty. This resource must not be valued or the Marma tribal culture will be threatened (Thowai ching pru marma nilu)

Language

Marma tribals have their own language and it has been rooted since the migration. Many changes have taken place in their own language after migration, but the main reason for the change is as a result of environmental influences. Not only did the Marma ethnic group migrate, but they were not the only ones who settled in the hill districts. Apart from them, many ethnic groups were and were living in the hill districts at that time.

There was no linguistic change during the migration of the Marma tribes but there was an evolution, after their migration the language was affected by the emotional aspect but the meaning of the language was not expanded. Rather, the language of the Marma tribals has come to be known in its own literal sense in the hill districts. The Marma tribes, however, have their own distinct script. Which has literally been observed with migration.

The Marma language has played an important role in Marma culture since the migration, linguistically and music. Yatra was a milestone at the time. Influenced by the jatra pala Marma's of their own language wrote songs in their own language, which was indeed a prized thought of the time. In this regard, this thinking has played an important role in spreading the cultural attitude of the society. Any nation or group will not only adopt their own cultural attitudes after immigration, but also the integration of their own culture into that environment.

In this we can say, if the linguistic aspect is analyzed in the world of music, it is not only immigration that will actually change their ethnic group, but the culture of that ethnic group itself changes through the locational environment. In this case the linguistic is very variable. Marma linguist said, the language of the Marma tribes is the most primitive, they brought it from ancient Arakan, although the written vowels or consonants follow all the rules, but with the urge of the era, there are many variations of the oral language of the Marma tribes from the written language. This means that the influence of social, cultural and immigration has spread very strongly in the Marma language." (Mong sa ching)

Dress

The dress of the Marma tribals has not undergone any change during the period of migration, even, there has been no change in the general dress. However

Earlier Marma men used to wear a type of woven cloth called 'Deyah' (Dhoti). They wear a barista robe (a garment worn over the body) along with this wall. Men wear 'khabong' and (turban). Girls wear a type of blouse called 'Bedai Angi'. The cloth with which girls cover their breasts is called 'Rangkai'. Girls wear a special 'thbing' or 'thami' in the bottom.



Marma musical performance Ramayana (source- self collection)

However, Marma dress has changed due to the stage performance, in terms of playing character parts. Those changes are influenced by the costumes of the stage performance of the Indian epic Ramayana Mahabharata. It is said that the Marma tribals made their own stage

costumes, and separate tailors for them were popular in those days.



*Marma musical performance Mahabharata
(source- self collection)*

After the migration, the change in Marma's stage performance dress is the wearing of gold Sarup Koti on a single colour cloth, along with the use of saree according to the character, which is not used in Marma dress. Basically, there is a lot of difference between the stage dress and the general dress of the Marma tribals. In this case, the difference between before and after immigration is a great example. So the influence of migration has undoubtedly spread to the Marma tribals' own dress.

Although Marma's have many roles in wood industry. The Marma's are so skilled in woodwork that they used to build their houses with wood and bamboo. All the industries are seen in China, Japan. Due to the migration of all these industries, these industries are also seen in the present time. These industries are declining a lot in the production of brick and stone buildings. But since the time of migration, the change brought about in the society by the new creativity through the art of the Marma tribals, is definitely the sign of the migration of a healthy community.

Conclusion

We know There is no border issue in any culture, but it is only right to hear, but the migration border of any community will have its impact. It is through border crossing that one culture changes or merges with the culture of another country. Any community crossing the border is impacted by their culture, their culture also changes significantly.

In this case, I can finally say Crossing the border, the Marma's not only changed their culture, but also brought innovation to their culture. However, the Marma tribals have been living in present-day Bangladesh from

Arakan state for 400 years. After the migration, their own language, culture, art, literature changed a lot due to the mixture of their culture and the influenced culture. Which has gradually occupied a separate place in popularity as the Marma tribe. In this case, we can see the mixed culture or influenced and adopted culture, which is a prime example of the culture of the immigrant tribes.

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2. Interview of Kya Bu Hre Marma conducted by Tithinu Marma on 1 May 2024. At 11:00 AM at Chittagong. - Kya Bu Hre Marma, Upazila Cooperative Officer, Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperative Ministry.
3. Interview of Thowai Ching Pru Marma Nilu conducted by Tithinu Marma on 11 April 2024. At 5:00PM. At Chittagong. - Thowai Ching Pru Marma Nilu – Marma Vocal artist.
4. Interview of Mong Sa Ching Marma conducted by Tithinu Marma on 4 December 2024. 10:00AM, Through online. - Mong Sa Ching Marma – Marma linguist.
5. Interview of Somenjit Chakraborty conducted by Tithinu Marma on 12 December 2024. 11:00AM, Through online. - Somenjit Chakraborty – Chairman of Music Department, Chittagong University, Bangladesh.
6. Interview of Malati Chaowdhury conducted by Tithinu marma on 12 December 2024. 6:00PM, Through online. - Malati Chowdhury – Program Advisor, Chittagong Betar, Bangladesh. (12/12/24 – 8.45pm, through online)