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Title :- Chittagong Hill Tracts: A Study of Gender Relation During 19th and 20th Centuries.

Chittagong Hill Tracts region is situated in the south eastern portion of Bangladesh occupying the area of 5,138 square miles (1323km). The name 'Chittagong Hill Tracts' came into existence in 1860 when the hill tracts area was separated from Chittagong District by the British. The area first came under the control of the Mughals, later by the British. In 14th August 1947, with the partition of India, Chittagong Hill Tracts was annexed with East Pakistan and with the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 it became an integral part of Bangladesh. The political control also influenced the customs, traditions and culture of many hill people.

The region is occupied by many tribes like Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tonchongya, Mro, Khumi, Kheyang , Lusai, Chak etc. They are the original inhabitants of the region who migrated from other places and settled into this area. The Tribal chiefs or kings of this region ruled independently in their respective circles such as Chakma Circle, Bomang Circle and Mong Circle. Different tribal groups have their own language, religion, food habit, traditional dress that distinguishes them from each other. Chakma, Marma and Tripura are the major tribes who mostly dwell in the valley areas, and are engaged in both *Jum* or shifting cultivation and plough cultivation. The rest of the tribal groups live in the hill top villages who are only engaged in *jum*. Women were actively engaged in various economic activities. Apart from household duties, they do cattle rearing, work in *jum*, plough field, kitchen garden etc. The significant thing is that

women make their traditional dresses in indigenous handloom. Education, health and social institutions like family and marriage of the hill people throws light on the entire society. Kinship ties are followed according to father's lineage. Education played a vital role which brought many changes in the society. The old method of performing *puja* through animal sacrifice has disappeared among the educated hill people. Earlier, society was averse to female education. Widow marriage is permissible in the society. Evil practices like child marriage, dowry (from girl), caste system, female infanticide and foeticide etc. was not found in the society. Though male and female child both are welcomed in the family, daughters do not have inheritance right of property among the hill people of Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Generally, the health of the hill people was good. To get remedy from sickness, they used their indigenous method of treatment done by the indigenous healer by applying medicine made by them or through animal sacrifice (pig, goat, hen etc.), charms and spells, black magic etc. During the time of pregnancy and childbirth women were dependent on midwife. Be it birth ceremony or death rite, every tribal group has different belief system. Tantricism and superstition have taken important place in the society. In the family, every *puja* is performed according to the belief of the husband's lineage. Gender inequality is also visible in regard of the birth and death rites of many tribal groups. The study shows that men exercise power over the family as well as over the society. Women are always pushed into the private world and household duties are assigned to them according to traditional norms and values. Though women are actively engaged in various economic activities, discrimination was very much prevalent in the society in one form or the other. Like any other society, women of Chittagong Hill Tracts are also treated as subordinates.