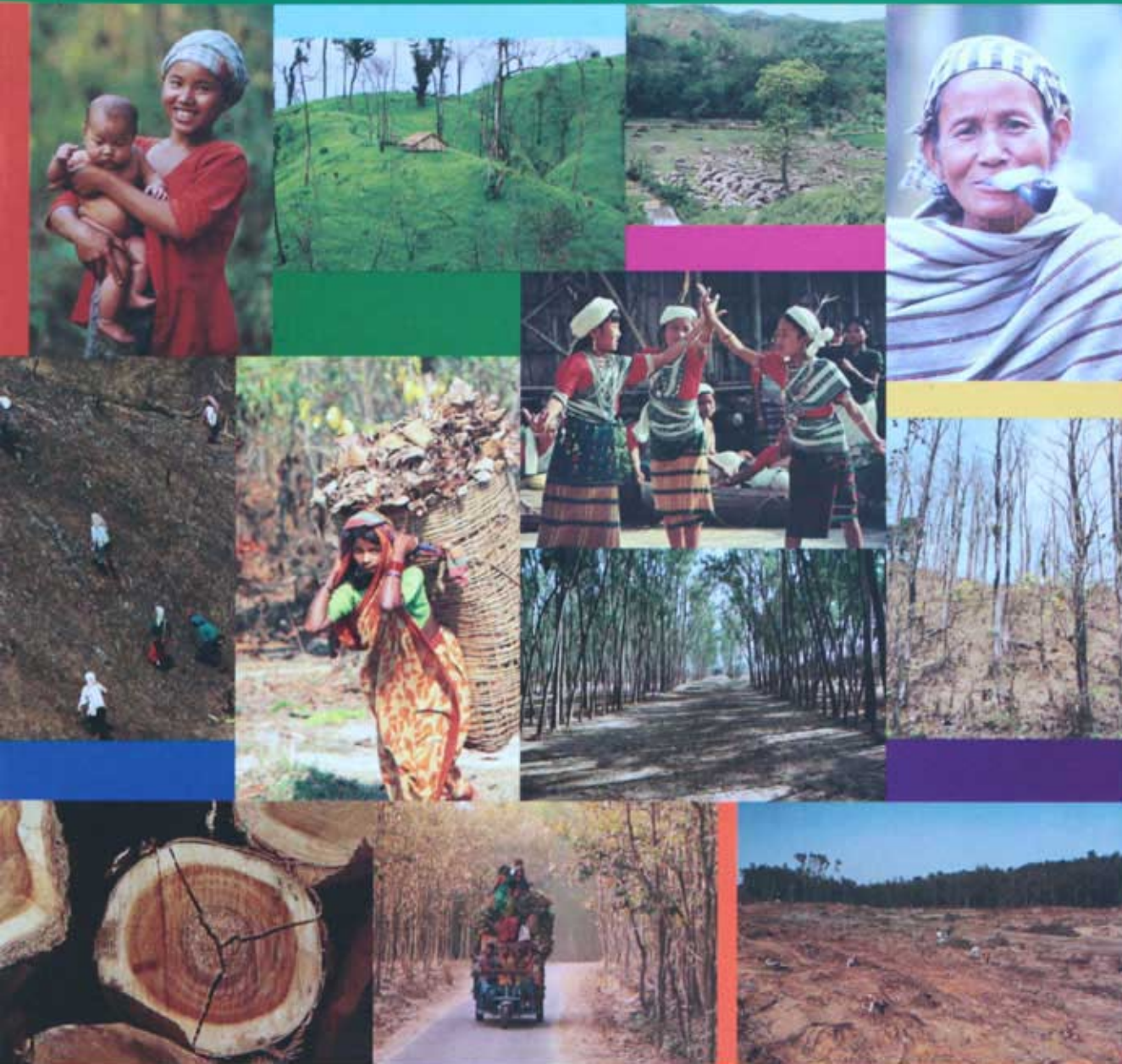


অরণ্যের ক্রন্দন Cry of the Forest



Photography Exhibition by Philip Gain

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Cry of the Forest

The forest and her children—images of pain

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Cry of the Forest

The forest and her children—images of pain

The story of our Natural heritage, the forest, is a pain-filled one. Officially, 18% of the country is public forest land. But actually only approximately 6% is said to be covered with forests. However, if the mangrove forest, unique for its size and features, is excluded only tiny patches of the natural forests are left today. "Given current trends, these will all be gone in 10-15 years", says a report!

In the true sense the forest is mother to hundreds of species of trees, fauna, and people who consider themselves the children of forest, their traditions, knowledge and lots more. The forest grows and sustains itself in its own way, not by the mercy of humans. But since colonial times these features of the forests have begun to change. With the end of the colonial rule, the State apparatus have taken control of the forests, once commons of the forest-dwelling people. Not surprisingly, the supranationals, that serve the interests of the former colonial rulers, are very much behind our state apparatus.

Consequently, the public forests have become sources of revenue for outsiders—local and international. This has led to practices of commercial plantations, which are not forests at all, although these are often called "social", "participatory" or "community forestry".

In Bangladesh, the plantation of exotic or invasive species dates back to 1873, but these have rapidly expanded in the recent times. This has happened in the backdrop of rapid expansion of simple and complex plantations around the world. "The majority of the world's plantation forests have been established in the past half-century, and the rate of plantation afforestation has been increasing progressively."

While tree plantation in rural Bangladesh has yielded much of the desired results, plantations, especially with invasive or exotic species, on public forest land have caused environmental disasters and human misery. Plantations of teak, rubber, eucalyptus, acacia, pine and other exotics that we see

on public forest land in Bangladesh are "simple plantation forestry" which require clear felling of our native forests. Governments, companies, pulp/paper industries, international financial institutions, etc. strongly support and finance these plantations. At the global and local level "simple plantation forestry" for a range of wood products is said to "return wood yields many times greater than most natural forest systems". In many countries including Bangladesh "degraded", "denuded", "encroached" and "less productive" forest lands are targeted for plantations. However, what is often branded as "less productive" or "degraded" is actually native forest that has immense social, cultural, traditional, and environmental values.

The government has taken necessary administrative and legal measures for reorientation of its future forest management with the clear objective of promoting plantation. For example, one of the many objectives of forest

management as seen in the "Revised Working Plan for the Forests of Chittagong Division (For the years 1978-79 to 1987-88)" is "To re-place the existing irregular, depleted and less productive forests by a man-made plantation forest with more valuable and productive species suited to the soil and country's requirements". This objective has had devastating effects for Bangladesh. In the Chittagong Forest Division most of the natural forests have disappeared. Local forests have been replaced by the so-called "planted forests". Except for the Sundarbans, in the southwest of Bangladesh, the situation in public forest lands in other parts is almost the same. In the CHT, Chittagong, Sylhet and sal forest areas a few exotics such as acacia, eucalyptus, pine and rubber have replaced the historical natural forests. The plantation practices have also provided ample grounds to the opportunists—generally rich and influential people—to take illegal possession of the public forest land and convert the Natural heritage into pineapple, banana and other crop plantations.

Plantations of different kinds

have strong research, policy and legal backing. The government agencies, government research institutions and international interest groups such as the ADB and the World Bank have widely circulated their argument that the invasive conifers and eucalyptus are much more productive than the native species and harmless to the local environment. They have also put a legal framework in place. So if a particular type of plantation turns out to be mistaken in the long run, the authorities responsible and their supranational allies are immune to any legal action. This has given the FD necessary leverage for clear felling of the natural forests and establishing plantations in their place resulting in ecocide and human misery.

The images in the exhibition, "Cry of the Forest" tell this story of drastic depletion of our forest traditions.

One particular focus of the exhibition is the forest people, especially the indigenous communities, who have traditionally sourced the forest for their livelihood and have lived in harmony with Nature. But plantations and legal reforms have

rendered the children of the forest illegal residents on their traditional homeland as well.

The Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), out of concern for the current state of environment, has given Philip Gain an unique opportunity to study the fate of our forests. His journey through the Natural heritage for more than a decade has made this exhibition possible. Although his primary assignment is intended for the print media, in the forest, his camera is always by his side. He is an odd man in photography, but his predilection for images and the issues concerning forests and forest dependent people have brought him in close proximity with the complexities of the forest. The images in this exhibition are simple and the obvious focus has been laid on the people, who are wrongly blamed for the destruction of the forest. Philip Gain has tried to capture in images the silent yet profound pain of the forest and her children.



Fishing in Hill River

A Marma girl in joy after a catch of a finger size fish in Kaptai River in Rajasthali, Rangamati Hill District. Unlike the rest of Bangladesh, fish is scanty in the hills of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. In summer Marma girls fish with bare hands in knee-deep or shallow river beds. On a hot summer day small fish take shelter in the sand under the hot water flowing above. Local people recollect, how decades before, the volume of water in this river used to be more at this season. Severe deforestation and changes in the catchment areas may have contributed to this change.

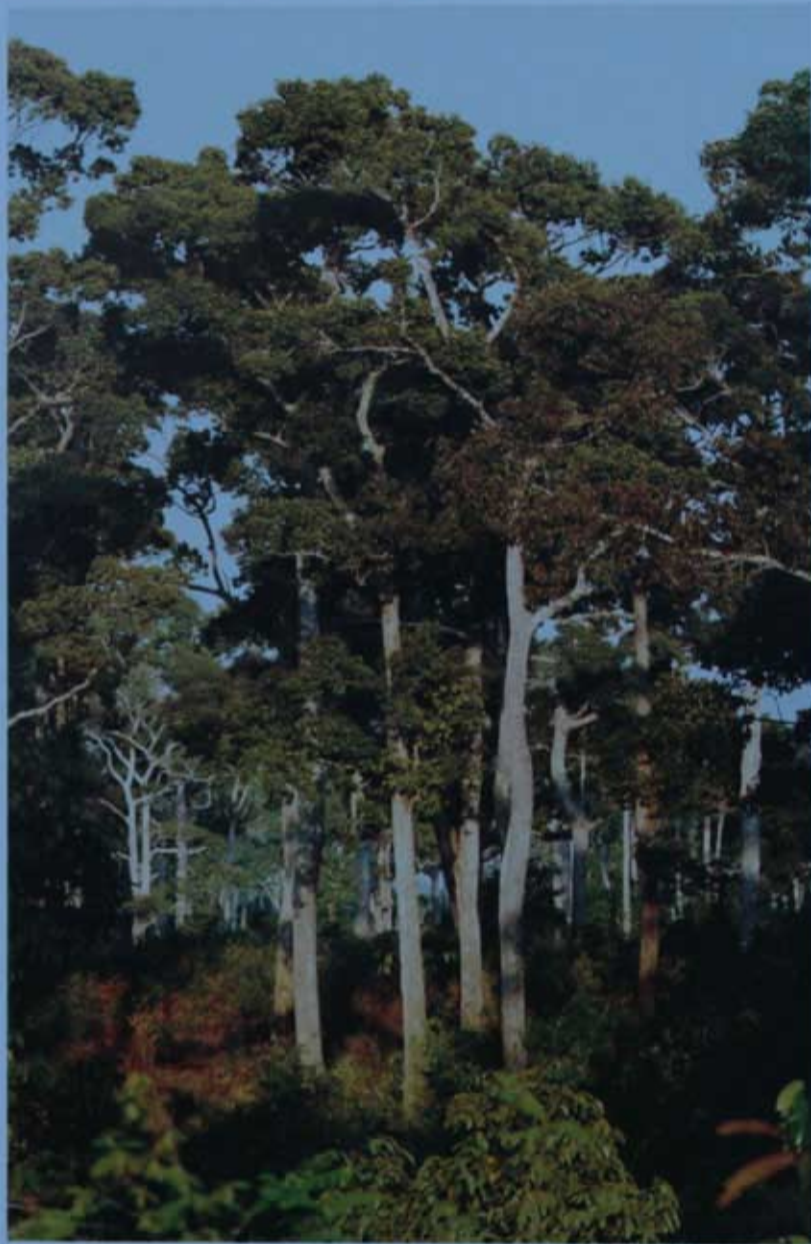
April 19, 2003/ Rajasthali/Rangamati Hill District



The Last *Garjans* in Chokoria

The last few *Garjan* (*Dipterocarpus*) trees in Chokoria Upazila of Cox's Bazar District. This local tree of great height that once thrived with other local species in the natural forests of Chittagong and the Chittagong Hill Tracts has disappeared fast. Exotic species such as teak, acacia, eucalyptus and pine have replaced the local species throughout this region. As we lose natural forests we also lose our forest traditions.

March 1998.



The Khyang in A Remote Village in the CHT

The Khyang is a small indigenous community in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), concentrated in the Rajasthali Upazila in Rangamati Hill District. Counted at 2,343 in the 1991 census, they are among the least known peoples to the world. The land that they have lived on for centuries is now ravaged by the so-called development activities. One particular concern for them is the expansion of reserved forest and pulpwood plantation. Theirs is a story of dispossession and exploitation in the literary sense. Their traditional agriculture, *jum* is restricted and their movement is severely restricted in the plantations.

October 1998 Aruchbari/Rajasthali/Rangamati Hill District.



Khyang Mother and Child

A Khyang mother with her child in a delightful moment. Behind this heavenly smile she is still in a fearful state. She and her community, children of the forest in the true sense, have been rendered illegal residents in their traditional homeland, which now produces pulpwood for the Karnaphuli Paper Mill (KPM).

*January 2002: Kuknacbari/Rajasthali/
Rangamati Hill District.*



Return after First Sowing of the Season

Mru women in Bandarban return from *jum* after the first sowing of the season. *Jum* field cut and burnt in advance is now ready for sowing after the first rain. Today Mru women have sown papaya seed. After more rains they will sow other seeds. Beginning in January/February activities in *jum* fields continue until November/December with paddy, cotton, etc. harvested in the end. Some indigenous communities such as the Mru are almost entirely dependent on *jum* (swidden agriculture) for their subsistence. However, *jum* is still a major agricultural activity of the hill people throughout the CHT.

April 21, 2003: Bandarban.



Nappi/Sidol, an Essential in the Hill Kitchen

Made from raw fish, Nappi or Sidol, is an essential curry paste in the hill woman's kitchen in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Nappi makes the vegetable dishes tasty for the hill people. It also has protein value. Raw fish is blended, sealed in a clay pot and buried under the earth for some days in the preparation process. Nappi made from prawn is expensive. After preparation it can be preserved for quite sometime. The Marmas are particularly skilled in making Nappi.

September 1997: Khagrachhari.



Mandi Girls in Dance

Known to the world as Garos, the earliest inhabitants of Modhupur call themselves 'Mandi' meaning 'human being'. The matrilineal society of the Garos is unique. The daughters inherit the property, children take their mother's name and lineage and husbands move into the wives' homes. The forest and land are their main sources of livelihood. But the Mandis are progressively losing their lands and denied their customary rights over forest lands. This makes many Mandi men and women move to the cities and lead a life that erodes their values and culture.

May 1993/ Chunta/Modhupur



Where Rice Beer Freely Flows

Stored in half a dozen of Dikkhas (pots) huge quantities of *Chu* (rice beer) in a festival in Pirgachha/Modhupur, ready to flow freely soon. Locally brewed rice beer is an essential part in any festival in a Garo village, particularly at *Wangala* (held at the beginning of the cold season when the harvest is complete), and during marriage or funeral feasts.

January 2003: Pirgachha/Modhupur/Jangail.



The Unique Sundarbans

The Sundarbans, the world's single largest (6,000 sq. km) mangrove in the southwest of Bangladesh, is unique. The habitat of the man-eating Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*), the Sundarbans protect the region from cyclone and tidal surge. Crisscrossed with hundreds of rivers, the forest is flushed twice a day with the rising tide. This unique world heritage as declared by UNESCO in 1999, is in deep trouble. Shrimp fry collection that sustains the prawn industry to a large extent, the industry itself, the threat of oil and gas exploration and the indiscriminate exploitation of its resources are causes of particular concern.

May 25, 2002 - Katka/Sundarbans



Forest without Trees

The Chokoria Sundarban, a 21,000 acre mangrove forest in the coastal district of Cox's Bazar, has lost all but its name. Today shrimp farms replace what used to be lush green vegetation with diverse life that its environment sustained. Prominent supranationals assisting Bangladesh the ADB, World Bank and UNDP have promoted the 100% export-oriented shrimp cultivation, which is undoubtedly the single major factor for the destruction of this unique mangrove. These institutions now play the role of "Pontius Pilate".

March 1998.



Concrete Walls to Protect the Last *sal* Trees

Strangely enough, the Forest Department (FD) is constructing concrete walls with barbed wire on top to protect the last *sal* trees in Modhupur. The FD claims concrete fence is its last resort to protect the last stands in the Modhupur National Park. The local people do not agree with the FD. While the FD tries to protect the forests with fence, a big portion of the *sal* forest is under pineapple, banana, cassava, and commercial plantation of invasive species, in violation of laws and environmental ethics. There are allegations that the corrupt FD employees and officials allow this to happen for easy cash.

January 10, 2003. Rasulpur/Modhupur National Park



Sal Cleared and Burnt for Plantation

In many places in Modhupur the *sal* coppices have been cut and burnt at the time of establishing plantation. Many are shocked at this act of cutting and burning when with a little bit of investment the *sal* coppices could have been well protected and regenerated into full-grown natural forest. To the project mongers these are denuded, degraded and less productive forest and should be replaced by the high yielding species.

September 21, 2001: Modhupur/Tangail.



Plantation in Dinajpur

The ADB-funded plantation of exotic species in Dinajpur. This is the 'social forestry' the critics point their fingers at, and say it is not beneficial for the local communities and ecology. This is also a practice in explicit violation of the Convention on Biological Diversity, to which Bangladesh is a signatory.

March 2000



Acacia Mangium Replaces Native Sal

Acacia Mangium, an invasive species in the traditional *sal* forest of Modhupur. Most of the forest was covered with luxuriant *sal* even a few decades ago, but is now barren or replaced by commercial plantations. Acacia is one of a number of exotic species that has replaced the *sal* forest, which the officials term "slow growing", "depleted", "irregular" or "less productive". However, Acacia Mangium as a monoculture is highly questionable. A big percentage of the tree may break when a strong wind blows.

May 18, 2001/ Kamarchala/Modhupur



Harvest Time of Plantation

Clear felling is one feature of plantation at the harvest time as seen in this area of Gazipur district. Ten years back the plantation of exotic species was established here with the aid of the ADB in place of our natural heritage, the *sal* forest. The local people have many complaints about this forestry practice of monoculture and clear felling. At the time of planting and harvesting, the area remains open for a period of time, which among other factors, causes serious soil erosion.

February 2003 - Chandra, Gazipur



Return from the Forest

A group of women return home with their collection, the *sal* leaves. The moist or deciduous forest also known as the "forest of fallen leaves" is special to north-central plains and the freshwater areas in the northeast region of Bangladesh. Most of the *sal* forest land has been denuded, degraded, encroached upon or replaced with commercial or industrial plantations of exotic species. Vanishing *sal* forest has an impact on livelihood—forest produces which are essential for the forest-dwelling communities have become scanty.

February 2003; Chandra/Gazipur



Eucalyptus Lumber Goes out of Plantation Site

Eucalyptus lumber is being moved out of the Modhupur forest after harvest. Modhupur sal forest is one of many places where this invasive species has been planted mainly since the early nineties under a project funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). A perfect raw material for the pulp and paper industry, eucalyptus is seen as a threat to the local environment. The Bangladesh Government also agrees that the tree is harmful and has put a ban on it. But the exotic has already invaded Nature; it is seen in good numbers on our land.

May 2001: Kamarchala/Modhupur



Acacia (hybrid) How Good is the Tree?

After harvest the ten-year-old Acacia Mangium (hybrid) looks blighted in the center from the bottom. Although Acacia is applauded as a substitute for teak, this hybrid type, now being planted in abundance on the public forest land, raises concern.

March 2003.



Banana Sprayed with Chemical Pesticide

One concern in the fast expanding banana plantations in the Modhupur forest is the use of pesticides, and the imported (from India) plant hormone AXIFIX. Farmers report that they spray chemical pesticides and hormone in their banana plantations many times a year to protect the fruit from insect attack. The distributors of toxic materials and hormones tell them that these are medicines that make bananas big. Banana, which brings quick return has replaced much of the Modhupur *sal* forest in the recent years.

February 2003. Gaira/Garo village in Modhupur



Exotics Change the Look of Lumber Trade

A new scene indeed! For the last two/three years trade in eucalyptus and acacia lumber in Hatubhanga Bazar on the bank of Bangshai River has thrived. The lumber comes from nearby plantations that used to be *sal* (locally known as Gazari) forest. The foreign species, new to the area, is competing with the local species. This is a change many fear. Most locals do not know what leads to such drastic change in Nature around them.

May 16, 2003 Hatubhanga Bazar/Mirjapur/Tangail.





Philip Gain

study the fate of our forests. His journey through our Natural heritage for more than a decade has made this exhibition possible.

Philip Gain received his M.A. in Mass Communication and Journalism from Dhaka University in 1987; awarded Ashoka fellowship in 1989; awarded Alfred Friendly Press Fellow (USA) in 1993; and elected World Fellow of the Yale University (USA) in 2002.

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